

THE DEVELOPMENT OF SUBURBAN COUNCIL HOUSING
ESTATES IN LIVERPOOL BETWEEN THE WARS (2 VOLUMES).
VOLUME I (MAIN TEXT)

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements
of the University of Liverpool for the degree
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ABSTRACT

Acting on the observation that the inter-war period witnessed the creation of a new social phenomenon, the low-density, suburban council housing estate we trace its conception and development in Chapter I. We find that initially the state intervened in the housing market in 1919 because of the dislocation of Britain's economic life caused by the Great War and chose as its model garden city housing. Unfortunately high standards laid down in 1919 were not maintained as political, ideological and economic factors constantly re-defined the role of council housing. In Chapter II we examine how national housing policies were implemented in Liverpool in the 1920's. We find that Liverpool had a formidable housing problem in 1918 compounded by the low-wage earning capacity of its largely casually-employed labour force. We see that the Housing Committee energetically implemented housing legislation but that local influences and conditions profoundly effected the quantity and quality of housing provision. In Chapter III we seek to establish how changes in national policy in the 1930's effected Liverpool's suburban housing programme. We find that the Housing Committee once again enthusiastically attacked the problem in hand, drawing up a large-scale slum clearance programme. The remainder of this work looks at just how housing legislation effected Liverpool working-class life. In Chapter IV we look at pre- and post-war housing standards and find that the majority of new council house tenants had previously occupied very sub-standard accommodation and acquiring a council house meant a dramatic improvement in housing conditions. Chapter V is concerned with who benefited from Liverpool's suburban development. We see that as housing standards declined so did the social and economic status

of tenants and that many found the burden of council house occupancy very heavy. Chapter VI looks at how the new suburbanites adjusted to life on outlying estates. We see that the estates lacked the warmth and friendliness of old working-class districts and also many essential amenities for a number of years.

In the final chapter we conclude that Liverpool's progress during this period had been considerable but that mistakes had been made. A comprehensive rent policy based on need was never introduced and too little attention was given to the provision of essential amenities and the development of a community spirit. However mistakes were bound to be made as this local authority, like others between the wars, became a major supplier of new housing for the first time in its history.

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Introduction.

The means by which Britain's housing stock was owned, managed, rented and distributed underwent a fundamental change between the wars. In 1914 local authorities provided less than 1% of the housing stock, owner-occupation was still a restrictive form of tenure and the vast majority of houses, about 90%, were owned by private landlords. During the inter-war years however 60% of all new houses were built on a speculative basis by private enterprise mainly for owner-occupation, whilst 31.5% were provided by local authorities with the aid of government subsidies. Over 1 million houses were built by local authorities during this period and by 1939 10% of the national housing stock was publically owned. This unprecedented growth in council housing led to a new way of life for many working class families due to the fact that the local authorities, in accepting their new role as major suppliers of new housing, generally took as their model the garden city movement. The standard of working class housing rose and the urban landscape was transformed as millions of working class people moved away from crowded inner-city areas to new low-density residential districts on the urban fringe. The working classes of Britain had become suburbanites. The aim of this dissertation is to investigate the origin and development of suburban council housing in Britain and to assess its impact on working class life by examining the housing policies of Liverpool City Council during the inter-war period.

Essentially a two-dimensional approach is adopted in this study. A classical historical approach is used in the first three chapters of

the work in order to examine the development of housing policies at the central and local level and its effects on housing provision. Chapter I is based on contemporary published official reports but primarily on published secondary source material and is concerned with the formulation of national policies. Following the introduction of housing subsidies in 1919 the importance attached to council housing varied considerably under each successive government with the result that this period witnessed many variations in policy. Policy decisions were taken to house different sections of the community, housing standards were reduced, housing subsidies cut and, finally in 1933 council housing was downgraded from "general needs" provision to a residual slum clearance role. In order to understand such policy changes this chapter begins with an outline of the role of the state in the housing market before 1914. An explanation is then sought as to why local authorities entered the housing market on such a large scale after 1919 and why the type of housing provided with the aid of government subsidies differed so markedly from traditional forms of working class housing. The six major Housing Acts passed during this period will then be examined in order to determine to what extent political, ideological and economic factors shaped housing policy and affected the standard of suburban house design and layout.

Chapter II is based on a wide range of archival material and deals with the implementation of national housing policy by Liverpool City Council in the 1920's. During this decade Liverpool City Council built 18,824 dwellings, about 96% of which was provided on low-density suburban estates. The source material used was provided by Liverpool City Record Office and includes the Minutes of Liverpool City Council

and its various Housing Committees, documents from the Housing Department, Medical Officers annual reports and local newspaper cuttings. Initially a description of Liverpool's history, economy and social structure is provided in order to establish the extent and nature of Liverpool's housing problem in 1918 and to provide a background against which housing developments in the inter-war period can be set. During the nineteenth century, partly out of necessity, Liverpool had become a pioneer in housing reform and by 1914 no other provincial city had built more council dwellings. The activities of the Council before the war were confined to slum clearance and the rehousing of slum families in inner-city tenements. The remaining sections of this chapter seek to determine how and why Liverpool's housing policy was reversed in 1919, and how effectively, after accepting the principle of garden city housing, the Council coped with its new role as builder and manager of a growing suburban housing stock. This will be done by examining how the Council confronted the task of obtaining adequate supplies of land, finance, labour and materials as it embarked on large scale council house building for the first time and the effectiveness of any methods adopted to speed up housing provision. Did the rate of production achieved by the Housing Committee satisfy other council members, housing reform pressure groups and the working class population of the city? The council houses built during this decade were erected under the 1919 Housing Act, the 1923 Housing Act and the 1924 Housing Act, and since each act differed in its subsidy provision and was designed to cater for different sections of the community an examination will be made of the effects of policy change on the quantity and quality of houses

provided. An analysis will also be made of how subsidy cuts in the late 1920's effected the rate of production of houses and housing standards and the role of local conditions and influences in shaping housing provision. An explanation will also be sought as to how the Council fixed the rents of their new suburban properties and what attempts were made to ensure that tenants needs and incomes were successfully matched. Did the new suburban tenants think that their rents were appropriate and if not what pressure did they exert on the Council to bring about rent reductions? The Council allocation policy will also be examined in order to determine for whom the new suburban houses were designed and whether such housing was intended for those in greatest housing need.

The creation of new residential districts required far more than just houses. Many of the new estates lay several miles from the city centre and schools, shops, churches, transport services, and pubs were all required by the new suburbanites but did the Council devote sufficient attention and resources to the provision of such essential amenities on these new artificially created communities? Hopefully this chapter will demonstrate how Liverpool City Council came to terms with large scale council house building in the suburbs and the effect such developments had on the overall housing situation.

Chapter III, using the above archival materials deals with the continued growth of suburban council housing in Liverpool during the 1930's and the factors which determined the nature of the Council's response to changes in national housing policy. A total of 16,414 suburban dwellings were built during this decade under three very different Housing Acts. Successive governments throughout the 1920's

had concentrated on relieving the housing shortage and very little slum clearance work had been undertaken by local authorities. The Housing Act of 1930 however was designed to augment "general needs" house building with a programme of housing renewal based on slum clearance and rehousing by local authorities. The attack on the slums had begun. The first two sections of this chapter examine the 5-year programme submitted by the Council to the government in 1930, designed to alleviate the city's housing shortage and slum problem and its execution before "general needs" subsidies were withdrawn in 1933. An explanation will also be sought as to how the Council responded to the economic crisis of this period and to what extent economic stringency on the part of the government affected the number of houses provided and their quality. This was also a period of mass unemployment and an examination will be made of the problems this created for housing management and the effectiveness of methods adopted to relieve economic distress among unemployed tenants.

The remaining sections of this chapter deal with the Council's response to the withdrawal of "general needs" subsidies. After council housing was downgraded to a residual slum clearance role in 1933 it was anticipated that private enterprise would once again become the major suppliers of cheap rented property for ordinary working class families. Did this in fact happen in Liverpool, and why did the Council enter the field of unsubsidized council housebuilding in the mid 1930's? An assessment will be made of the contribution of the unsubsidized houses to the housing situation in Liverpool and whether or not these houses were treated differently by the Council with regards to rent and allocation to subsidized council dwellings.

From 1934 onwards suburban dwellings were also provided under slum clearance legislation, the 1930 Housing Act. An analysis will be made of the Council's slum clearance programme which includes an examination of the factors which determined the nature of the dwellings provided, the effect the low wage earning capacity of the majority of ex-slum dwellers had on the Council's rent policy and what additional housing management and maintenance problems were created following the rehousing of this section of the community. In the light of the overcrowding survey of 1936 this chapter concludes by assessing the impact of large scale municipal building on the physical environment and the housing problems of the city during the inter-war years.

Liverpool City Council built 33,335 suburban dwellings between the wars and by the end of Chapter III a great deal will be known about how and why these houses came into existence but very little will be known about the families who benefited from such municipal activity or how they coped with the task of adjusting to a strange, new environment. The state intervened in the housing market in order to provide homes for the working classes but were all houses inhabited by the class for whom they were intended and to what extent did the characteristics of council tenants vary under the different Housing Acts which were designed to cater for different sections of the working class population? What type of accommodation had the new suburbanites previously occupied and did the acquisition of a council house constitute a marked improvement in housing and living standards for the majority of families? How did the families cope physically and mentally with a move away from highly urbanised areas to the new

outlying districts? In order to answer these questions and many others relating to the process of suburbanization the second half of this study is based on survey material collected from tenants confidential housing record cards and from interviews with elderly people who had been original tenants in the new suburban houses of the inter-war period.

Housing Cards.

The Director of Housing of Liverpool City Council, Mr. J. T. Burns and the Director of Housing of Knowsley Borough Council kindly gave permission for the confidential housing record cards of inter-war tenants to be utilised in this study thereby providing valuable information which would have been impossible to acquire from any other source. Every time a new council house is allocated details about the tenant and his family are recorded on a house card which is kept at the appropriate District Housing Office. The house cards are not updated and therefore do not record any changes in the family's economic position or size. They merely provide information about the social, economic and familial characteristics of the initial tenant at the time of allocation and the corresponding details of successive tenants. Information is also given about the type of house which has been allocated, the Housing Act under which it was built, its location, the dates of occupancy and termination of tenancy, the house rent, the reason why the house has been allocated, details about the tenant's previous accommodation and the condition of the house when it was checked for vermin. The house cards consequently contain a wealth

of information about the families who were allocated suburban houses under the various Housing Acts between the wars.

i) Sampling Procedure.

In view of the number of houses included in this study the decision was taken to sample 1 in 5 house cards. To ensure that the sample obtained matched the characteristics of the total housing stock, the stock was stratified according to origin (Housing Act under which construction), house type (Parlour/ Non-Parlour/ Flat) and location (name of council estate) and then from each strata a systematic 20% was taken to produce a total of 6,792 dwellings. Every data source has its flaws and limitations and the house cards proved to be no exception. The current system of indexing the cards began in 1935 and any tenancy which had been terminated before this date unfortunatly was not recorded on the cards. Consequently a number of house cards referring to houses built in the 1920's contained no information about initial tenants. One of the chief aims of this half of the study is to determine to what extent changes in policy at the central and local level effected the composition of the suburban population. In order therefore to assess the full effect of policy decisions taken to house different sections of the community it is important to obtain information about the initial tenants who were housed under the various Housing Acts. Consequently when the earlier estates were sampled a systematic procedure was not rigidly adhered to in an attempt to acquire information about initial tenants but despite such a measure some of these estates are still slightly under-represented.

Another problem which arose was that in two District Housing Offices, Cantril Farm and Norris Green, the house cards for several roads had been renewed because of wear and tear and unfortunately the replacement cards only provided information about tenancies in existence at the renewal time. In an attempt to overcome this problem other roads which displayed the same characteristics were over-sampled.

The house cards also failed to provide information about the stability of estate populations before 1935. The house cards used in this study refer to initial tenants who were still in occupation in 1935 and we can therefore find out about the duration of these tenancies and any subsequent family tenancies but discover nothing about the rate of migration away from the estates in their earlier years. Consequently in order to assess stability street directories were used instead to calculate the number of tenants who removed within 2 years, 5 years and 10 years from each new suburban estate. In view of the magnitude of such a task instead of systematically sampling 1 in 5 houses from the street directories roads were chosen which matched the characteristics of the total housing stock and every house in these roads were sampled in an attempt to obtain a 20% sample. The street directories however contained many inaccuracies and omissions and as a result frequently only about a 15% sample was achieved for many estates. Information about the stability of estate populations could of course be obtained directly from the cards of tenants allocated houses built after 1935.

ii) Analysis of Data.

Dr. E. Edmunds of the Statistics Department of Liverpool University kindly wrote a computer programme to extract the relevant information from the 1,000's of house cards by the use of a Sirius Computer and D. Base II Software. Before the data was fed into the computer the tenants occupations were coded and graded for social class using a modified version of the Registrar General's five-point social scale.

- Class I Professional, Managerial, Scientists etc.
- Class II Lower Professionals, Farmers, Shopkeepers etc.
- Class III Skilled Non-Manual occupations.
- Class IV Skilled manual occupations.
- Class V Semi-skilled occupations.
- Class VI Unskilled occupations.

In the Registrar-General's social scale all skilled occupations were classified as belonging to Class III but the decision was taken to split this group into manual and non-manual classes III and IV in order to achieve maximum differentiation of the suburban population.

Interviews with Initial Tenants.

In recent years it has been increasingly accepted that oral evidence is an invaluable source and that a great deal of very enlightening information can be obtained by tapping the memories of individuals who lived through an event or period in history. In order therefore to acquire first hand knowledge of early suburban life intensive taped interviews were conducted with 58 people who had been the tenant or the teenage child of a tenant of a new suburban house

between the wars. The people were contacted through the Housing department's own newsheet, Liverpool Home and through old-age pensioners' church clubs. Finding people to take part in this study was not an easy task mainly because today, and rightly so, elderly people are extremely reluctant to invite strangers into their homes. However the information obtained from the sample group and the valuable insight it provided into the life-style of the new suburbanites more than compensated for the many hours spent trying to persuade people to take part in the study.

The interviews were recorded on a Sanyo mini cassette recorder and were later transcribed. An attempt was made to follow a set interview pattern, asking the same questions of each person but this proved to be very difficult in reality. There are many problems associated with interviewing elderly people. Several of the more elderly tenants were extremely frail and tired very easily, losing concentration while others, usually those who had been recently widowed became distressed talking about the past and asked for their interview to be terminated. The ability to recall facts and details also varied markedly with some tenants being able to answer all the questions asked of them, while others could remember certain things but have no recollection of others, even important_s details, for example where their children had gone to school. Consequently some of the interviews are not as detailed as others but overall they proved to be very interesting, bringing to life the experiences and life styles of the new suburbanites.

The oral evidence is used in Chapter IV in an attempt to measure the impact of suburban council house building on working class housing

standards. The first two sections of this chapter in fact link together the two distinct halves of this work, the classical with the non-classical historical approach to the subject. By using, published secondary source material and contemporary published governmental reports traditional forms of working class housing are examined and the growth of the garden city movement in the early twentieth century monitored. The remaining sections of the chapter are based on reports from Liverpool Housing Department, house-plans from Liverpool City Architects Department, information from the tenants house-cards but mainly on the oral evidence collected from tenants. The extent to which the design and lay-out of suburban council houses varied under the different Housing Acts will be examined and an assessment made of how such housing compared with the type of accommodation previously occupied by the new suburbanites. What level of satisfaction did the tenants express about their houses, was consumer satisfaction high? How many tenants had previously enjoyed the level of services and amenities incorporated in their new homes? What type of accommodation had they previously occupied, what rent had they paid, why had they decided to apply for a council house and how long did they have to wait before they were allocated a house? The tenants housed under the 1930 Act had come from some of the worse slums in Liverpool, but what did slum dwelling really entitle, how bad had slum conditions been? Ex-slum dwellers were the most likely group of tenants to experience the greatest improvement in housing standards on their transferrances to the suburbs but had other tenants, housed under "general needs" provision also been badly housed? Hopefully this chapter will provide an interesting insight into the traditional forms of working class

housing in Liverpool and the degree to which housing standards improved as a result of housing policies carried out by Liverpool City Council.

By the end of Chapter IV however the identity of the new suburbanites will still be a mystery and little will be known about living standards on the new estates. The 31 council estates developed by Liverpool City Council were built under a series of Housing Acts designed to house different sections of the community. Chapter V using data from the house cards and oral evidence seeks to establish who benefited from the inter-war housing legislation and how the new suburbanites coped with the financial burden of suburban living. The first three sections of this chapter aim at establishing the social, economic and familial characteristics of the new tenants and the extent to which these characteristics reflect changes in housing policy at the central and local level. The following section seeks to determine whether or not the new suburbanites could afford their new superior dwellings and the extent to which factors such as family size irregular and low earnings and unemployment effected living standards. This chapter concludes with an analysis of the composition of the various estates in 1939 in order to establish how the removal of older residents had effected the estate populations.

The council houses were laid out in estates situated 2½ to 7 miles from the city centre and these new residential areas must have appeared very alien to families brought up in the old, crowded residential districts of Liverpool with their distinctive sense of community and neighbourliness. Chapter VI using oral evidence, published secondary source material and local newspapers investigates

how such highly urbanised families perceived their new environment and how they adjusted to life on the new suburban estates. The movement to the suburbs by the middle classes from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards is traced in the first section of this chapter in order to explain why "suburbanism" had acquired such favourable connotations by the beginning of the twentieth century. The following section deals with the size and location of the various council estates and assesses how the new suburbanites perceived and responded to their greatly changed environment and what effects it had on the traditional working class sense of community. The remaining sections examine the rate at which essential services and amenities were provided on the new estates and whether any delays in provision hindered the development of a sense of community on the new estates and added to the new suburbanites problems of social adjustment.

It is hoped that the two halves of this study with their different approaches, will complement one another and interact to provide a detailed and interesting discussion of the subject under review.

CHAPTER I

The National Scene

Despite decades of state involvement in the housing question by 1914 the public sector only accounted for 1% of Britain's housing stock. Between the wars, however, local authorities in this country built over one million dwellings with the aid of government subsidies, thereby becoming major suppliers of new housing. By 1939 10% of households in Britain lived in state-owned housing, the majority of which differed markedly in terms of both design and lay-out from traditional forms of working class housing.¹ The aim of this chapter is to determine how and why the scale of housing provision by the state altered so dramatically in the inter-war period and to what extent political, ideological and economic factors effected the quality and quantity of such provision.

The Role of the State before 1914.

The rapid growth of the urban population in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century led to the uncontrolled building of thousands of houses which from the start were little better than slums. Until 1875 there was no general Act empowering local authorities to make effective building bye-laws and speculative builders, when catering for the working class market, built as many houses as they could on the smallest possible space. Such houses were ill-lit, poorly ventilated, often without means of heating, an

adequate water supply or sanitation. The problem of too many people living too closely together without adequate supplies of the basic necessities of life, resulted in death rates as high as 49 per thousand in severely overcrowded areas in the early nineteenth century. There came a limit, however, to how far local authorities could ignore social amenities if they were to retain an economically productive workforce and the 1840's consequently witnessed the emergence of a powerful public health movement after outbreaks of cholera had undermined the confidence of Victorian Britain.² State involvement in housing in fact began with the passing of the 1848 Public Health Act which was designed to improve sanitation and drainage. Under the Torrens Act of 1868 and the Cross Act of 1875, the role of the state was extended when local authorities were empowered to demolish unhealthy slum property. At this time, the building of main rail termini and commercial undertakings was eating into inner city housing stocks and as a result such slum clearance legislation was negative and merely served to reduce cheap housing for the working classes. Under the Cross Act, provision had been made for a number of replacement houses but in the absence of subsidies the dispossessed could not afford the rents of the new houses which replaced their homes. Building costs had also increased with the Public health Act of 1875 which raised housing standards and consequently only the better-paid workers could afford new housing and the poor were confined to a shrinking and physically decaying stock of pre-legislation housing.

The state had adopted an increasingly interventionist position in society during this period but a strong belief in laissez-faire

principles lingered on and there remained a reluctance to extend too far the scope of government. A compromise was reached by placing greater powers in the hands of local authorities but the legislation enacted was permissive and most authorities simply chose to ignore it with the result that the working class population of late nineteenth century Britain was extremely ill-housed.³ Despite the fact that the Royal Commission set up in 1883 to investigate the housing crisis acknowledged municipal apathy as a major obstacle to reform the 1890 Housing Act, which empowered local authorities to build and subsidize houses out of the rates, still contained no element of compulsion. Procedures under the Act were protracted and costly and most authorities simply chose to retain a totally apathetic approach to their housing problems. A few local authorities, Liverpool, Glasgow, Sheffield but most notably the London County Council however proved that when people really wanted to effect reform such procedural problems could be overcome.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, despite the reluctance of many local authorities to make full use of the powers given to them under the 1890 Housing Act, housing conditions had improved slightly. The growth of public transport had reduced overcrowding in the inner-city areas by enabling the better-off members of the working classes to live a few miles from their place of work. The 1875 Public Health Act had also improved conditions for, despite the fact that some local authorities were slow to frame and enforce building bye-laws, by 1900 standards of construction had improved.⁴ Equally important attitudes towards the poor and their problems had also changed following the shocks administered by the social surveys

carried out by Charles Booth in London (1889-1903) and Seebohm Rowntree in York (1901) which revealed that nearly one third of the working classes were living in the most dire poverty through no fault of their own. The middle class conscience was further stirred by the poor quality of Boer War recruits and fears were aroused that unless something was done to improve the health of the working classes national efficiency would suffer and Britain would no longer be able to compete successfully in world matters.⁵

The Liberal government elected in 1906, reflecting the change in social attitudes, introduced a series of welfare measures which ran counter to the laissez-faire ideology of the nineteenth century. According to Liberal ideology the housing problem was an aspect of the land question since the high cost of urban land placed decent housing beyond the means of many workers. The Liberals acknowledged that cheaper houses were required to meet the needs of the working class population. This however was not to be achieved by government subsidies to housing which protected the interests of land owners since it would not just be this group but tax payers in general who would be asked to contribute to the amelioration of housing conditions. The land therefore had to be taxed. Lloyd George's 1909 budget consequently placed a tax on the increment value of land at a rate of one pound for every five pounds accrued value.⁶

The utilisation of cheaper suburban land was also advocated by the Liberals as a means of bringing down development costs and this idea found expression in the 1909 Housing and Town Planning Act. This Act urged local authorities, following the example of Hampstead Garden Suburb, to plan new suburban developments with airy and generously

spaced accommodation. Housing reformers, whilst welcoming the government's acknowledgement of the need for town planning, were disappointed that state-aid, the pre-requisite to local authority activity, was still refused. The Act failed to produce the required increase in house building due to the continuing reluctance of local authorities to provide working class housing out of the rates, the absence of strong and effective opinion in favour of action and last, but by no means least, the lack of an adequate driving force from the centre.

The 1909 Act did, however, result in an increase in the demolition of slum property but since it did not produce a corresponding increase in house building the country's housing stock was reduced just at a time when there was an almost complete stoppage of low-cost housing by private enterprise. Speculative builders always carefully selected their sphere of operation, only launching out when trade was good and rents high, when they were guaranteed a good profit and a ready market for their goods. During the closing years of the nineteenth century there had been a surge of activity in the building trade but around 1905 the pace had slackened and by 1914 there had been a national housing shortage.⁷ A number of factors contributed to the falling off in building activity. Investors apparently decided to divert their capital to the higher yielding, if not so secure, government projects. Lloyd George's land taxes also introduced an element of uncertainty into the housing market whilst a further discentive to builders was the fact that extensive provision before 1905 caused rents to remain fairly steady through to 1914. Between 1910 and 1914, as the housing situation worsened, in an atmosphere of great political rivalry, both

major political parties spent a great deal of time preparing legislative proposals on housing. In 1912 Sir Arthur Boscawen, a Conservative member, introduced the first Bill in Parliament to propose government subsidies for housing.⁸ The Bill however never got passed the committee stage and similar Conservative Bills in 1913 and 1914 were defeated due to the Liberal's opposition to government subsidies.

In reply to the Opposition's proposals the Liberals appointed a Land Enquiry Committee with Seebohm Rowntree as the nominal head. The Committee reported that there was a desperate shortage of houses throughout the country but it ruled against the granting of subsidies out of central taxation since such a solution would deprive the builders of their profits and only delay the removal of the problem by ordinary market forces. Instead the solution was to be found in improving wages to ensure that workers could afford to pay an economic rent whilst the cost of development would be reduced by the use of cheap suburban land on garden city lines. In a speech in 1913 Lloyd George outlined the Liberal's proposals.⁹ The Insurance Reserve Fund was to be used to finance the building of agricultural workers' cottages for which an economic rent was to be charged. A public health grant of 4 million pounds was also proposed, part of which was to be used to improve housing in urban areas.

All this activity immediately before the outbreak of the first world war had led to the suggestion that the Housing and Town Planning Act of 1919 did not mark a radical change in housing policy.¹⁰ Was the 1919 Act in fact pre-ordained before the war? The evidence suggests that the government had accepted, through the work of such

men as Seebohm Rowntree, Raymond Unwin and Cecil Harmsworth, the desirability of garden city housing since the plans for rural cottages contained in a Report published by the Board of Agriculture in 1913 did not differ markedly from the minimum standards laid down in the Tudor Walters Report of 1918. However, there is little sign that by 1914 the government had accepted the idea of state subsidized housing in view of the fact that an economic rent was to be charged for such cottages. Furthermore when the government had been faced with the problem of finding houses for its employees at the new naval bases at Rosyth and Crombie the decision was taken to give financial aid to public utility societies. The money expended by the Treasury however was to be regarded strictly as an investment with economic rents being charged for the houses.¹¹

The granting of limited resources to public utility societies hardly meant that the government had decided to accept housing as a social service. Housing reform, like all other Liberal reforms introduced between 1906 and 1914, was of an extremely limited nature. The fact that the government continued to rely on permissive legislation and local action illustrates the reluctance to extend too far the scope of government activity, while the restrictive nature of the intervention suggests that post-war developments were perhaps far from inevitable. Without the stimulus of the war the government would probably have remained content with palliatives, rather than accept once and for all its responsibility in the field of housing.

The War Years 1914-1918.

The origins of British council housing probably lie more in the political action of the working classes in 1915 than in pre-war Liberal reforms.¹² In that year the war time government was forced to introduce rent control, following rent strikes and threatened stoppage of armaments production in Glasgow in protest over exorbitant increases in house rents. Housing had finally become a political issue and free market forces could no longer be allowed unfettered operation. At the time men in the forces were still volunteers and the government had been forced to place a legal limit on the level of rents in order to ensure their continued support in the war effort. If rent control had not been introduced under the Rent and Mortgage Restriction Act of 1915 the private sector, which had been so depressed since 1905, may well have staged a recovery, making large scale council housing building after 1918 unlikely. As one writer suggests it could have been argued that the Edwardian housing market faced less a permanent structural crisis than a cycle whose upturn was prevented by the war.¹³

The war however changed the conditions under which the speculative builder and the small landlord flourished and marked the beginning of the end of this particular variety of small-scale capitalism. Rent control did not apply to new houses but it did affect the general level of rents and, in an atmosphere that further controls could be introduced which would further reduce the profitability of investment in housing there was little incentive to build low-cost housing. The housing market was further depressed by the shortage of labour, materials and capital and by 1916 house building had virtually ceased. In order to start planning for peace Asquith in March 1916 established

a Reconstruction Committee and, although the slogan "Houses Fit For Heroes" was still to be invented, the dislocation in the housing market meant that housing soon became the most important item on the agenda.¹⁴

In July 1916 the Local Government Board produced a memorandum for the new Reconstruction Committee which contained the first formal proposal from the government for subsidized municipal housing.¹⁵ Owing to inflated prices brought about by shortages it reported that in the immediate post-war period private enterprise could not be relied upon to meet the housing shortage which would have accumulated. Public utility societies, which the government had placed so much faith in on the eve of the war, were far too limited to provide houses on the scale required. Local authorities therefore were the only solution and between 1916 and 1919 the government struggled with the problem of deciding what level of subsidy would be necessary to stimulate local authorities into action.

In a circular to local authorities in March 1918 the LGB set out its proposals for state assistance for housing.¹⁶ The local authorities were to be asked to raise the money for building by borrowing on the open market and the Treasury assistance would be in the form of a grant of a percentage of the loan charges to relieve them of 75% of the estimated abnormally high post-war building costs, reducing local authority burdens to 25%. In the same month Dr. Christopher Addison, chairman of the newly formed Ministry of Reconstruction which had grown out of the 1916 Reconstruction Committee, put forward a set of proposals far more radical than those of the LGB. The Ministry of Reconstruction was a far more enlightened

body than the LGB realizing as it did that the state would have to assume the full financial burden for housing and that local authorities would have to be compelled to act. Under the LGB scheme initial responsibility was to be placed on local authorities yet there was to be no definite duty laid on them to provide or see there was provision of sufficient houses in their areas. The discretionary nature of the LGB proposals led one member of the Ministry of Reconstruction to conclude,

"I do not feel sure that the LGB have fully grasped the magnitude and the nature of the task that confronts them."¹⁷

Against the advice of the Ministry of Reconstruction the Cabinet in March 1918 decided to opt for the LGB scheme, illustrating the government's reluctance even at this late stage to finance working class housing or interfere too strongly in local affairs. By the autumn of 1918 it was clear that local authorities found the LGB proposals totally unacceptable and they pronounced that they were only prepared to build houses if their financial liability was limited to the product of a one penny rate, a proposal first made by the Royal Commission of Housing in Scotland in 1917.¹⁸ Despite growing opposition in Parliament to the LGB scheme the Cabinet refused to improve the financial terms offered to local authorities and this was the state of affairs which existed when the war finally ended in November 1918 i.e. total deadlock.

Policy Decision Autumn 1918-July 1919.

After the signing of the Armistice a definite decision on housing

policy could be delayed no longer and Lloyd George in his election campaign of December 1918 committed himself to establishing a country "fit for heroes to live in". The failure of local authorities to accept the LGB terms meant that an alternative approach had to be sought. Houses were needed and they were needed quickly and by the beginning of 1919 even the LGB had accepted that to spur local authorities into action the whole of the financial burden of post-war housing in excess of the product of a one penny rate should be borne by the Exchequer. Finally on March 1st 1919 a draft Housing Bill containing these proposals was submitted to the Cabinet and it passed easily through Parliament and was duly adopted in July as the Housing and Town Planning Act of 1919. The Act compelled local authorities to supply housing deficiencies in their areas and provided state subsidies for this purpose. England and Wales were divided into eleven regions under the control of Housing Commissioners, who were equipped with clerical and technical staff for advising and controlling local authorities. The Act firmly committed the state to housing as a social policy based on local initiatives and central supervision, compulsion and subsidy.

A number of writers including Stephen Merret, Mark Swenarton and the group of historians and social scientists associated with Joseph Melling, argue that the definite shift in policy which occurred between 1918 and July 1919 was the direct result of the strikes and general unrest that swept the country in the immediate post-war period.¹⁹ It is claimed that the threat of revolution was so strong that Lloyd George was persuaded that money spent on housing would serve as an insurance against Bolshevism. Interest in housing during

the war, these writers claim, was merely a device used by the government to placate the masses. There is little doubt that during the war the government did use promises of social reform to buy continued working class support for the war effort but from the establishment of the Reconstruction Committee in 1916 there also emerged a genuine desire to create a better post-war world for everybody. Lloyd George was obviously aware that a radical programme of social reform would be electorally popular but he was also a genuine reformer. When he spoke of "building homes fit for heroes, thus paying our debt to those men who had poured out from our towns and villages to serve",²⁰ he was not just speaking as a politician trying to capture votes, he was expressing the feelings of a whole nation. In the euphoric post-war atmosphere people both inside and outside of Parliament were ready to promise great things for the future and those writers who see the 1919 Act mainly as the product of the extra-parliamentary class struggle, perhaps fail to take into account the desire for social reform the war had engendered.

It is true that the beginning of 1919 was an extremely unsettled period in this country's history but probably the massive public support for housing reform and the fact that the Tudor Walter's Report, published in September 1918, had demonstrated so clearly the extent of the housing shortage was far more influential in changing housing policy.²¹ The Tudor Walter's Committee, appointed to investigate the technical aspects of the housing question, had reported that 500,000 houses would be a modest estimate of post-war needs. In order to meet this target the Report stated that some "dynamic force" would be needed. The LGB had to be given powers to

compel local authorities to act.

The radical views on housing policy expressed in the Tudor Walter's Report were continued in the treatment of housing standards. The Report set a new standard for working class housing, reflecting as it did the views of one of its Committee members, Raymond Unwin, the leading architect of the garden city movement. Unwin wished to see the quality of working class life improved by transferring families from the unhealthy environment of overcrowded cities to a new salubrious alternative based on the countryside and the English village. The Tudor Walter's Report consequently recommended suburban development with a maximum of twelve houses to the acre in towns and eight to the acre in rural areas, a type of lay-out which represented a marked departure from traditional working class housing. The houses themselves, illustrated in the Report, were also of a kind only previously built for the middle class market. Speculative builders before 1914 had provided deep, dark, narrow-fronted houses with back projections which eliminated a great deal of light from the rear of the house. Instead it was recommended that frontages should be increased to enable the scullery and the third bedroom to be brought into the body of the house, thereby providing more light and air. Each house was to have an internal W.C., a garden and a bathroom i.e. amenities previously unknown in working class housing. There can be little doubt that this Report played a major part in the raising of housing standards which accompanied council house building between the wars, since its recommendations were incorporated into the LGB Housing Manual issued to local authorities in 1919 to guide them in the development of housing schemes.²²

Swenarton argues that in the immediate post-war period houses had to be provided not only in large numbers but equally important they had to be of such high quality "to provide visible proof of the irrelevance of revolution".²³ The building of houses for the working classes on middle class lines, he claims, had an ideological purpose. However it is far more likely that housing standards were upgraded purely on economic grounds. The Tudor Walter's Report had persuasively argued that since there was a tendency for housing standards demanded by the working classes to rise it would be false economy to provide houses other than that of the highest standard.²⁴ Low-density development itself was also justified on economic grounds since it had been demonstrated that by reducing the number of houses per acre, road and road work costs were greatly reduced.²⁵ It would appear therefore that, although the government was obviously aware of the ideological purpose of design, working class housing standards rose more as a result of economic than political considerations.

The 1919 Housing Act Scheme.

Due to the cessation of building during the war, continued population growth, and an increasing rate of household formation there was an estimated shortage of approximately 610,000 houses in the country in 1919.²⁶ An additional 100,000 houses were also required annually to cope with the steady increase in families and this figure made no allowance for any possible slum clearance programmes. Attempting to deal with this shortage the Coalition government accepted a target of 500,000 houses in three years. The 1919 Housing

Act called upon local authorities to carry out surveys of the housing needs in their areas and to submit plans for dealing with these needs to the newly formed Ministry of Health within three months for approval. Before examining the achievements of this important Act it needs to be stressed that the government of the day did not expect that such large-scale intervention by the state would be a permanent measure. The state was to remain in the housing field only until private enterprise could resume its normal role in the provision of working class houses.²⁷ Council housing therefore was "a temporary ad-hoc response to post-war price distortions and not an ad-hoc response to an immediate political crisis",²⁸ the view put forward by the British Left. Unfortunately for the government a return to "normality" was hindered by the need to extend rent control. If the 1915 Rent Restriction Act had been allowed to expire building would have become profitable once again because in a situation of acute housing deficiency rents would have soared. This however was politically unacceptable for "heroes" simply could not be expected to pay exorbitant rents. Rent control was therefore extended by the Increase of Rents and Mortgage (Restriction) Act of 1919 and a further Act in 1920 which trebled the original rental limits of houses upon which control was imposed to £105, £90 and £78 in London, Scotland and elsewhere respectively, although rents were allowed to increase by up to 40% of their 1914 value.²⁹

The 1919 Housing Act produced houses of a very high standard; in terms of space they were the best inter-war council houses, but unfortunately they were not built in very great numbers. The government had promised half a million houses by 1922 but in July 1921

the housing programme was brought abruptly to a halt when only 170,000 houses had been contracted for by the local authorities.³⁰ Writers who use a class conflict model of society claim that the housing programme was abandoned because the working class offensive had subsided and consequently there was no longer any need for an "insurance against revolution".³¹ However once again it is more likely that economic and not political considerations were more influential in changing housing policy. In 1919 it had been estimated that each new council house would cost £600, but by 1920 houses were costing over £1,000 each, a level unacceptable to a government pursuing deflationary policies.

The First World War had brought about a serious dislocation of economic life. Financing the war effort had required heavy government borrowing, both at home and abroad which resulted in a massive national debt. Increased monetary supply, stimulated by government borrowing led to inflation which was also fuelled by shortages of raw materials and consumer goods and by the pressure of raising wages. Conditions after the war consequently were tailor-made for a boom since there was a strong demand for goods and money was cheap and plentiful. War-time economic controls, introduced in 1917-1918 when attempts to mobilize resources by free market methods had failed, were swept aside in 1919 during the brief post-war boom. The boom soon collapsed in early 1920 when consumer demand began to tail off and in April in the face of galloping inflation the decision was taken to deflate. A deflationary budget was introduced and the bank rate raised to 7%. The effect was immediate. Prices fell sharply and in the space of one year unemployment rose from 2% to 18% as Britain

experienced one of the most precipitous declines in its industrial history.³²

The severe deflation induced from April 1920 was directed on one goal, the restoration of the gold standard in order to return the City of London to the lucrative position it had held before 1914, as the capital of the world's financial system. A return to gold could only be possible if a sound monetary position was established and the measures necessary to achieve this included a balanced budget, strict control over public borrowing, reduction of the national debt and high interest rates.³³ All talk of "reconstruction" ceased as expenditure cuts of 20% were called for to balance the budget and housing, being particularly vulnerable because of the high borrowing it entailed and inflated building costs, was an obvious target for a government bent on economy. Addison had represented the spirit of euphoria engendered by the war but "as the forces of financial orthodoxy and the realities of peace reasserted themselves, Addison departed from the political scene and so did his Housing Act".³⁴

If building costs had not risen so dramatically the housing programme may have been allowed to continue. Unfortunately the Coalition government had embarked on its massive house building programme at a time of galloping inflation and as a result providing "homes for heroes" had proved to be a very costly business. In 1921 the annual loss per house was estimated at £50 to £55 compared with an initial forecast of £10 to £15.³⁵ The open-ended nature of the subsidy was blamed for the increased losses and the subsequent failure of the Act. Opponents of the Act claimed that as local authority liability was finite, limited to the product of a one penny rate,

there had been no incentive to economise and cost inflation had resulted from the acceptance of extravagant tenders. However it is more likely that the increase in building costs was not due to diseconomies of the open-ended subsidy but to the abolition of building controls. In 1917 Addison had appointed a Committee, under the chairmanship of Sir James Carmichael, to report on the likely state of the building industry after the war.³⁶ At this time with its labour force depleted and the production of building materials down to a fraction of its normal level the building industry was in serious disarray. The Carmichael Committee consequently warned that for up to two years after the war ended building materials would be in short supply and without state control prices would soar as demand outstripped supply. Unfortunately this warning went unheeded and in December 1918 all building controls were removed in the rush to return to a free market situation. Within months the price of some building materials had doubled and by 1920 the average price of all building materials was roughly three times the pre-war level.³⁷ Spectacular though these increases were it must be remembered that this period witnessed a general increase in prices: food was 270% above the 1913 level, clothing 417%, fuel 237% and rent 133%. Wages, which accounted for two fifths of the cost of a workmen's house, also rose dramatically further inflating building costs. By the autumn of 1920 they were 203% above the pre-war level for a shorter working week. Labour was not only expensive, it was also in short supply since the skilled labour force was only 55% of its pre-war level, the unskilled 66%.³⁸ In the post-war building boom council house building came last in the queue as labour and materials were channelled, by market

forces, to more remunerative building and repair work. In June 1920 out of a total of 50,000 bricklayers in the country only 5,290 were employed on local authority schemes.³⁹ The government's decision not to control the building industry consequently meant that labour and materials were not directed into an activity which was supposedly a social priority. Local authorities had tried to buy a share in a free market where demand far outstripped the capacity of the building industry with the result that by 1920 a house which would have cost £250 to build in 1914 cost £1,000.

In the post-war boom industrial building and repair work, the backlog of four years, thrived and local authorities experienced difficulties in getting builders to tender for less profitable council house building and by March 1920 only 1,250 houses had been completed. Progress was further impeded by central government restrictions since local authorities had to gain ministerial approval for each stage in the preparation of a housing scheme. It was estimated that twenty weeks was the minimum time in which a scheme could be approved.⁴⁰ Under pressure from the public and press the Ministry of Health had been confronted with the task of increasing house production while at the same time trying to ensure economic construction during a highly inflationary period.

The Housing (Additional Powers) Act passed in December 1919 contained several clauses aimed at speeding up house production. It gave local authorities powers to restrict luxury building in their areas which interfered with the supply of labour and materials to their housing schemes.⁴¹ However few local authorities used these powers granted to them since they, like central government, were still

prisoners of the same vested interests. In an attempt of find a substitute for local authorities as building agents a capital grant of £260 was provided for any house within certain dimensions built by private enterprise, whether for sale or rent.⁴² Private enterprise built 39,186 houses under this Act before it was repealed. The (Additional Powers) Act also gave local authorities permission to raise loan capital by the issue of housing bonds.⁴³ When the Addison Act had been passed the Exchequer, not wishing to incur any fresh capital expenditure, had persuaded the Cabinet that local authorities should raise the necessary capital for building operations themselves on the open market. Smaller authorities with rateable values below £200,000 could borrow freely from the Public Works Loan Board but larger authorities had to rely on their own efforts. Money however was scarce and many local authorities had to postpone housing schemes because of lack of capital. The housing bonds were designed to overcome this problem.

The main object of the 1919 Housing Act had been to provide houses for the working classes at rents within their capacity to pay. Unfortunately cost inflation placed the new subsidized houses beyond the means of all but the most affluent of the working classes. The level of the controlled rents of working class houses in a local authority's area was taken as a rough guide for the rents to be charged for the new houses. The open-ended nature of the subsidy however meant that rents were of a direct concern to central government who sought to minimise its contribution to housing by demanding that local authorities charge the maximum rent consistent with local conditions. Generally the Housing Commissioners sought to

establish the following net rents; for non-parlour three-bedroomed houses 10s. 0d. a week (50p) and for parlour three-bedroomed houses 12s. 6d. (62.5p). Consequently only the better-off members of the working classes those in white-collar jobs or skilled trades, earning more than £3 a week could afford Addison houses.⁴⁴

Despite all the difficulties of delays, shortages and cost inflation the Addison Act produced 80,000 houses in 1922, a figure only exceeded in 1928 and 1932. Bearing in mind the capacity of the building industry at this time, this was a remarkable achievement. The Act had brought the government finally into the business of housing and later Acts were to carry it further. It had also led to the creation of a new social phenomenon, the lower density suburban council housing estate which altered so dramatically the physical and social environment of British cities between the wars.

The Housing Act of 1923.

The retreat of central government from the housing scene following the closure of the 1919 scheme was only temporary for it could not ignore for very long the chronic housing shortage which the previous programme had barely touched. After the withdrawal of the Addison subsidy the government hoped that as building costs had begun to fall the time was right for the re-entry of private enterprise building. Due to the economic slump average costs in approved contracts had fallen from £838 for a parlour house, £700 for a non-parlour in March 1921 to £530 and £471, respectively in March 1922.⁴⁵ Between 1918 and March 1921 private builders had erected only 40,000 houses but of

these 14,763 had been occupied during the preceding six months, whilst a further 41,086 were in approved plans or in the the course of erection.⁴⁶ There were vague signs therefore that private enterprise building was reviving after the war and the Conservative government, elected in October 1922 following the collapse of the Coalition government, looked forward to unassisted private enterprise resuming its "normal" role of supplying working class housing for rent.

A Cabinet Committee set up to investigate the continuing housing problem soon shattered the new government's dreams for it reported that there was no prospect in the near future of unassisted private enterprise providing sufficient working class houses. Neville Chamberlain's Housing Act passed in July 1923 therefore provided private builders with a lump sum subsidy of £75 per house, whether for sale or rent, to be administered by local authorities who could add a rate fund if they so wished. The subsidy was restricted to houses conforming to certain standards of size, viz. 620 to 950 superficial feet for a two-storied cottage and 550 to 880 superficial feet for a one-storied cottage or flat.⁴⁷ The role of the local authorities however was reduced to a subordinate one for although a subsidy of £6 a year for 20 years was available for every dwelling they erected they were only allowed to build

"if they succeeded in convincing the Minister of Health that it would be better if they did so than if they left it to private enterprise."⁴⁸

Chamberlain and his supporters had no wish to see the provision of working class housing becoming a social service and the main aim of the Act was to encourage private enterprise to build small houses for sale or rent.⁴⁹ It was an attempt to return to a private market

solution to Britain's housing problems.

Under this new Act central government knew the extent of its liability while local authorities bore the risk of losses in excess of the state subsidy: a complete reversal of the financial relationships established under the 1919 Act. This new arrangement meant a much smaller role for the Ministry of Health due to the fact that since its interests were already protected it was released from the traumatic detailed supervision which the open-ended subsidy had entailed. The system of Regional Commissioners abandoned in 1921 therefore was not restarted with the result that local authorities gained independence under the 1923 Act.

The terms of the 1923 Act were based on the erroneous assumption that the housing shortage would be over in two years. It is interesting to note that Part 1 of the Act is headed "Temporary Provisions for encouraging the provision of Housing Accommodation", which explains why the subsidy was only originally available for houses built before October 1925. The Act completely failed to tackle the fundamental problem that the building industry was far too small to cope with the country's needs and consequently, in the absence of controls, available resources would always be channelled into the most lucrative enterprises. The Conservatives failed to grasp the size, nature and complexity of the housing problem and saw no need to increase the capacity of the building industry merely to cope with a "temporary" problem. The persistence of the "temporary" problem resulted in the Chamberlain subsidy being extended until 1929

The temporary extension, of rent control until 1925 only also illustrates the Conservatives' optimism that the housing shortage

would soon be over. The Rent and Mortgage Restriction Act of 1923 re-affirmed the control contained in the 1920 legislation but control, unfortunately for tenants, shifted from the house to the tenancy with the result that rents became decontrolled whenever a tenancy was vacated. Working class rents consequently rose and by 1931 about 12% of working class houses had been decontrolled and their inclusive rents were 85-90% above pre-war rents as compared with the 50% increase of controlled houses.⁵⁰

The Chamberlain Act did stimulate private house-building and between 1924 and 1930 of the 844,800 houses built by private enterprise 43% were constructed with the aid of subsidy.⁵¹ However the majority of subsidized houses were built for sale and as they were beyond the means of the working classes they were mainly for middle-class purchasers. Despite the fact that the Minister for Health informed local authorities that the lump sum subsidy was intended for working class housing and consequently only available for houses not exceeding £550 the Act certainly did not benefit working class families.⁵² It was the middle classes who gained most and the second half of the 1920's witnessed an important expansion of owner-occupation. The Conservatives enthusiastically supported owner-occupation for political as well as economic reasons since it was believed to represent the best and surest safeguard against the "follies" of Socialism. Chamberlain himself was to declare that,

"every spadeful of manure dug in, every fruit tree planted converted a political revolutionary into a citizen."⁵³

To further assist owner-occupation the Chamberlain Act also gave local authorities powers to guarantee building society loans which exceeded

the normal 70% mortgage on a house costing £1,500 or less to buy.

The Chamberlain Act however still failed to provide cheap rented houses for the working classes. Despite the fact that in 1922 building costs fell by over 30% the price of houses was still double that of 1914 but rents were only 40% higher. This discrepancy continued to deter private enterprise activity in this section of the housing market. The Act also failed to provide council houses in large numbers and of the 438,047 houses erected under it only 75,309 were built by local authorities for letting.⁵⁴ The council houses that were provided were still beyond the means of all but the wealthier sections of the working class since most local authorities tended to charge the same rent as for 1919 Act houses in order to minimise the rate contribution. The Act did focus attention on those in greatest housing need, the slum dwellers, by providing a grant for slum clearance equivalent to 50% of the annual loss incurred by local authorities but given the housing shortages and degree of overcrowding in the slums this part of the Act was premature and a negligible amount of work was performed under it. Where accommodation was provided however, the need for cheaper rents seems to have been recognised.

The Wheatley's Housing Act of 1924.

Before "normal" conditions resumed the first Labour government came into office in January 1924. The post of Minister of Health went to John Wheatley, the most brilliant of the Clydeside I.L.P. figures who led the Glasgow rent strike.⁵⁵ The enlightened Wheatley profoundly distrusting private enterprise's willingness or ability to

provide decent, cheap rented accommodation wished to see subsidized council housing as the primary form of working class housing. Chamberlain's inadequate scheme had been essentially indirect in its approach. It relied on the hope that the building industry would re-organize itself and that if a beginning was made with more expensive houses, mainly for sale, a process of filtering up would occur thereby overcoming the housing shortage. Such a belief totally ignored the fact that the Rent Restriction Act of 1923 mitigated against mobility among the poorer sections of the working classes. Wheatley instead proposed a direct attack on the housing problem by expanding the building industry and by improving subsidies to bring council housing within the reach of even the poorest members of the working classes.

By February 1924 Wheatley had set up a joint meeting between trade unions and representatives of the Building Trades Employers Federation. Both sides of the building industry agreed that there was a serious shortage of labour and that there was a need for dilution of some kind. The outcome of this meeting, the first peace-time co-operation between government and industry, was the setting up of the National House Building Committee, consisting of 19 employers and 15 workers.⁵⁶ Its task was "to assist the government by advice as to what the industry itself considers can be done in the way of producing working class houses".⁵⁷ In April the NHBC reported that it would contemplate substantial additions to the skilled labour force if the Ministry of Health could ensure a long-term building programme which would guard against unemployment. The increase in the skilled labour force was consequently based on a 15 year building programme. The

NHBC also declared its readiness to adopt proposals for revising its apprenticeship system and for necessary increases in the supplies of materials. By such means it was hoped that the annual output of working class houses could gradually be increased from 90,000 in 1925 to 225,000 in 1934.⁵⁸ After many hours of negotiation with both sides of the industry Wheatley had achieved the necessary augmentation of labour, an achievement which has been described as, "the first peacetime demonstration of the virtues of planning".⁵⁹

Wheatley's declared intention had been to provide houses at rents which were reasonable in the light of working class incomes and consequently when his Act was enacted in August 1924 the annual subsidy from the Exchequer was increased from £6 per house for 20 years to £9 per house for 40 years in urban areas and £12 10s. 0d. (£12.50p) in rural parishes. A contribution from the rates was fixed at a maximum of £4 10s. 0d. (£4.50p) for each house built. It was hoped that a house costing £500 to build, being let at 15s. 0d. a week (75p) inclusive to the clerk-artisan class could in the future be let as a Wheatley house for 9s. 0d. a week (45p) to the lower paid worker. These subsidies were also available to private enterprise provided they built houses to let at rents similar to local authority houses. Under the 1923 Act the non-working classes had benefited as municipal aid was used to stimulate owner-occupation. The 1924 Act on the other hand was designed exclusively for the working classes.

Under the 1924 Act an attempt was made to lay down rules for fixing rents of council housing. Local authorities had to ensure that council rents did not exceed "the appropriate normal rent" i.e. the rent of working class houses erected before the war in their areas,

unless the annual loss falling on the rates would have amounted to more than £4 10s. 0d. (£4.50p).⁶⁰ The intention was to provide new council houses at the same rent as controlled working class houses in local areas. The basis of rent policy however was extremely vague. There was no indication as to whether the average rent of new houses should be compatible with the highest controlled rent or the lowest. Also no mention was made of the policy to be adopted if building costs and interest rates were to fall. In the end local authorities were left to decide their own rent policies and although council house rents remained well above controlled rents they were lower than those charged for Addison and Chamberlain houses.⁶¹ It is estimated that the average rent of an Addison house had been 9-10s. a week (45-50p) while by 1929 the average net rent of a Wheatley house had been 6s. 8d. (34p).⁶² This decrease however was not due to the level of subsidy but to the fall in building costs which occurred that enabled local authorities to achieve their aim of charging lower rents without placing an intolerable burden on the rates.

When drawing up his Act Wheatley had envisaged 2½ million council houses being produced over a 15 year period. However, despite the fact that this Act is generally regarded as the most successful piece of inter-war housing legislation; it only produced 504,000 houses. This was partly due to the fact that 1 in 20 local authorities preferred to use the Chamberlain subsidy instead because it did not entail a rate contribution.⁶³ Generally these authorities were not concerned with providing low-rented accommodation and they did not like the renting only clause in the 1924 Act. More importantly however, the Wheatley Act failed to produce the required number of

houses because just when local authority output was accelerating subsidy cuts were introduced. The Conservative government returning to office in November 1924 had been anxious to discontinue subsidies at the earliest possible date and when building costs began to fall in 1926 the decision had been taken to reduce the Chamberlain subsidy to £4 per house and the Wheatley subsidy to £7 10s. 0d. (£7.50p) in respect of all houses completed after September 1927. The local authorities contributions were reduced proportionately. Furthermore in order to ensure that council housing did not compete with the private sector local authorities were urged to concentrate on that section of the market that did not interest private builders i.e. the cheaper houses for the poorly paid.⁶⁴ The subsidy cut of 1927 therefore was accompanied by a lowering of housing standards as local authorities were encouraged to build small non-parlour houses.

Following the cut in the Wheatley subsidy the output of houses fell from 90,100 in 1928 to 50,000 in 1929, during which time Chamberlain announced that the 1923 subsidy was to be abolished after September 1929 and the 1924 subsidy was to be further cut to £5 per house. Despite the fact that the decision to further reduce the Wheatley subsidy was reversed by the incoming Labour government of 1929 local authority building remained at a relatively low level during the early 1930's despite falling costs and interest rates. It is perhaps not surprising that local authorities failed to respond in an atmosphere of uncertainty over further subsidy cuts, especially in the economic climate which prevailed following the American stock market crash of 1929 which had effected trade and investment the world over. The economic crisis of 1931 had been immediately followed by

the fall of the second Labour government and the concern of the new National government had been the implementation of a rigid economy campaign. In an attempt to reduce an estimated budget deficit of £120 million the new government rigorously pursued orthodox policies of retrenchment, i.e. taxation was increased and public expenditure cut.⁶⁵ Local authorities were consequently instructed to restrict their building activity, to refrain from embarking on new schemes and to specialise only in building small, non-parlour houses.

During the economy campaign of 1931-1932 the decision was taken to concentrate subsidies on those who needed them the most, the slum dwellers. With the passing of the Housing (Financial Provisions) Act of 1933, which discontinued the Wheatley subsidy, the Conservatives finally succeeded in abolishing subsidized "general needs" house building. From now on council housing was to be downgraded to a residual slum clearance role. Sir Hilton Young, the newly appointed Minister of Health, who drew up this Act, believed in times of such economy stringency subsidies should be used the most efficiently i.e. on the slum dweller but he also believed that "normal" conditions had finally returned to the housing market. The fall in building costs and interest rates which had occurred convinced him that the private sector could now be relied upon to meet ordinary working class housing needs. A Report on Local Expenditure published in 1932, supported this view by claiming that private enterprise could now build and let houses at a rent of 9d. a week (4p) more than had been envisaged in 1924 for Wheatley houses. Hilton Young consequently concluded, erroneously, that private enterprise was prevented from resuming its "normal" role because of the competition of subsidized council

housing.

The 1933 Act received a great deal of criticism from various sources throughout the country. The National Housing and Town Planning council claimed that the limiting of council housing to a residual slum clearance role was unthinkable at the present time,⁶⁶ whilst the Economist wrote that in the light of the continuing chronic housing shortage it was impossible to see how the abolition of the general needs subsidy was going to help.⁶⁷ The subsidy had been discontinued despite the fact that the Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Rent Restriction of 1931 had clearly shown a chronic deficiency of working class houses. This Committee had discovered that, although 1½ million houses had been built in England and Wales since 1918, such activity had done little to improve the condition of many working class families.⁶⁸ In order to overcome the housing shortage roughly one and a third million houses with a rateable value of under £13 had been required between 1921 and 1931. However of the total 1½ million houses built during this period 1 million had been for sale and the only increase in the rented sector had been the approximately 600,000 houses provided by local authorities. Consequently since there were between 5-6 million pre-war houses rented by working class families the supply of accommodation to this sector had only increased by about 10% whilst the supply available to those who could afford to buy had increased by 50%.⁶⁹ Given the fact that the population of England and Wales increased by 5.5% between 1921 and 1931, whereas the number of families increased by 17.1% the same increase of 10% had done little to overtake the arrears in this class of accommodation. The Committee

consequently decided that for class "C" houses, the "real" working class house with a rateable value of £13 and under, there remained an acute shortage and therefore such houses should no longer be decontrolled on vacant possession. Complete decontrol was advocated for houses with rateable values of over £35, Class "A" houses, and continued decontrol on vacant possession for houses with values between £13 and £35, Class "B" houses.

The Committee's recommendations were embodied in the Rent Act of 1933 which complemented the Housing (Financial Provisions) Act of the same year. Rent control and general purpose house building it was decided were no longer necessary for Class "A" and "B" houses where private enterprise could be relied upon to meet the demand but at the bottom end of the market in Class "C" houses it was unlikely that private enterprise would return. Rent control and the replacement of the slums by local authority building were therefore offered as a solution.

The Private Sector 1933-1939.

The Housing Act of 1933 effectively re-established private enterprise as the primary producer of houses but on completely different lines than before 1914. The Conservatives in abolishing general purpose subsidies believed that since private enterprise could now afford to build cheap, working class houses for rent they would automatically do so. This did not prove to be the case. The 1930's did witness a boom in private building but very few houses provided were for rent. During the decade 2.7 million houses were built in

England and Wales, 2 million by private enterprise, without assistance from the state and mainly for sale.⁷⁰ This rapid growth in owner-occupation had been made possible by the availability of cheap credit from building societies. During the depression building societies had received vast inflows of funds when investment in industry had become unattractive. It was also a period of falling building costs and interest rates, with building societies reducing their mortgage rate from 6% in September 1932 to 4.5% in April 1935. At the same time repayment periods were lengthened from 15 to upto 25 years while many purchases only required a down payment of 5%.

All these changes meant that house purchase became a real possibility even for the better paid manual worker in regular employment. Before the war owner-occupation, even for the middle classes had been a restrictive form of tenure, accounting for as it did only roughly 10% of the national housing stock. Between the wars however nearly 50% of the houses built were for owner-occupation. During this period 60% of middle class families were purchasing their own homes while 18% of urban insured workers, mainly with salaries not exceeding £250 per annum, became owner-occupiers.⁷¹

In predicting that private enterprise would once again become the chief supplier of working class rented accommodation, Hilton Young failed to realize that rent control and the increasing use of legislation to raise housing standards had undermined the confidence of the private sector in this type of housing. He also failed to grasp the dramatic change which had occurred in the private capital market since 1914. Small investors were now offered a wide range of opportunities in other spheres and building societies increasingly

provided a safe and profitable haven for small savings, which were channelled into a different form of housing tenure, owner-occupation. Private enterprise did build houses for let but only on a limited scale and such activity was mainly concentrated in the late 1930's when the demand for houses for sale began to slacken. Only 12% of the total output of private enterprise in 1934 had a rateable value of below £13 and was built to let.⁷² This figure had only risen to 17% by 1939 and consequently only a small proportion of private enterprise building was for the lower end of the housing market.

Under the 1933 Act local authorities could build unsubsidized general purpose housing in their areas if private enterprise failed to function but frequently the pressures of slum clearance programmes militated against this. Consequently the withdrawal of the Wheatley subsidy in 1933 meant that in future unless a family could pay an economic rent, or a commercial rent for a new house, if there happened to be one available, or unless they fell within a slum category they were left unprovided. The Conservatives saw council housing as a challenge to the free market system and their response in the 1930's was to contain its growth and to downgrade it to an inferior form of tenure for those unwilling or unable to compete in the market, while promoting owner-occupation as a more desirable form of tenure. As Bailey commented,

"the principle of 1923, unwillingly abandoned after the Wheatley Act had finally triumphed. Practical responsibility for dealing with any but the very worst housing conditions had been abandoned".⁷³

1930 Slum Clearance Legislation.

When Labour had returned to power in July 1929 they were committed to dealing with the country's appalling slum problem. The years of municipal housebuilding had done practically nothing to relieve the continuing problems of the slums and the failure of public policy to attack this subject was a major issue in the General Election of 1929. The situation had deteriorated since 1914 as one commentator reported

the slum dwellings are sixteen years older and in corresponding worse condition.⁷⁴

In 1928 it had been estimated that in England and Wales there were over 1 million houses below a satisfactory standard and 2 million houses, including many of the unfit ones, which were severely overcrowded.⁷⁵ The situation was worst in the large towns, e.g. Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds and Birmingham where up to one half of the existing dwellings, by contemporary standards, could be classed as slum properties. Although local authorities had possessed powers since 1868 to deal with slum property very few utilised them and by 1930 only about 200,000 people had been removed from slum areas.⁷⁶ Between 1919 and 1929 less than 9,000 houses had been demolished and 10,639 replaced houses completed. Slum clearance had been left largely untouched since carrying out a slum clearance scheme was an extremely complicated business which received inadequate financial assistance from the Exchequer. More importantly however, local authorities deemed it inappropriate to embark on large scale demolition in view of the acute housing shortage.

The Minister for Health, Arthur Greenwood, in the second Labour government began the assault on the slums. His Housing Act of 1930 was designed to supplement the Wheatley general needs scheme by adding

a slum clearance programme which provided subsidies to clear slums and rehouse poor families. The Act of 1930 removed financial and procedural difficulties and established slum clearance as a central part of local authority housing policy. The Powers of local authorities to condemn insanitary areas and individual properties were strengthened, considerable changes were made in the law affecting compensation and certain provisions enabled local authorities to acquire cleared sites at less than their market value. As part of his general policy to stimulate local authorities into action Greenwood required every urban authority with a population over 20,000 to formulate and submit a quinquennial statement of work for the relief of slum conditions. By bringing pressure to bear on local authorities to submit a five year slum clearance programme Greenwood also hoped to increase the output of general purpose houses under the Wheatley Act.

Unfortunately local authorities were extremely slow in responding to Greenwood's Act and between August 1930 and June 1933 only 185 authorities had passed resolutions declaring 847 areas, containing 21,938 houses, as insanitary.⁷⁷ This was perhaps not surprising in the light of the national economic crisis of the period which was bound to have a dampening effect on local enterprise. Apart from this however slum clearance to most local authorities was just not practicable since the level of subsidy was not sufficient to enable them to provide new houses within the reach of impoverished, displaced slum dwellers. This was not possible till after 1933 when the fall in interest rates and building costs enabled a Wheatley house costing £375 with interest at 4% to be let at a net rent of 4s. 8d. (24p). Furthermore since there was little difference in the Wheatley and

Greenwood rates of subsidy many local authorities chose to continue building under the former Act until it was withdrawn under the 1933 Act believing as they did that ex-slum dwellers would be far more troublesome than their general purpose tenants.⁷⁸ The attack on the slums therefore did not really commence till after 1933 when the Wheatley subsidy was abolished. Under the Wheatley-Greenwood Scheme the Labour government had hoped to provide additional houses for the working classes, whilst operating a system of replacing old, slum property. Unfortunately this comprehensive approach to the country's extensive and diverse housing problem was never implemented for as soon as the Conservatives regained power through the National government steps were immediately taken to withdraw Exchequer money from general purpose house provision. If the Wheatley-Greenwood scheme had become fully operational the housing situation by 1939 would have been greatly improved, but the withdrawal of the 1924 subsidy meant by this date there still existed an acute housing shortage in this country.

After the withdrawal of the Wheatley subsidy local authorities had to submit new slum clearance schemes. The local authority programmes submitted by 1934 provided for the demolition of 266,851 houses and the re-housing of 1,240,182 people in 285,189 houses.⁷⁹ In the absence of any central inspection there can be little doubt that many local authorities deliberately under-estimated the extent of this slum problem since the number of houses to be closed or demolished amounted to only 2.8% of the national housing stock. Later revisions raised the number of houses to be demolished to 377,000 in 1937 and 472,000 in 1939, indicating that the initial targets had been too

low.⁸⁰ If performance is judged by the original programmes submitted by local authorities the results achieved were satisfactory. Between 1934 and 1939 245,272 houses were closed or demolished and 1,001,417 people rehoused in 255,701 houses.⁸¹ By the revised standard of 1939 however just over 50% of the target number of houses had been demolished or closed. This fact however should not be allowed to obscure the vast achievement of local authorities during this period in abolishing nearly 1/4 million slum properties and the re-housing of over 1 million people.

Unfortunately the new emphasis on slum clearance in the 1930's was accompanied by a further attack on housing standards. There was a greater emphasis on two- and three-bedroomed non-parlour type houses and although officially room sizes were not changed there was an increasing tendency to regard the minimum as the maximum, despite the fact that slum-dwellers were known to have above average sized families.⁸² Lower standards of design coupled with the estates function of re-housing slum dwellers made the 1930 council estates immediately less desirable and many such estates acquired a negative reputation which persists today. The switch to slum-clearance also witnessed the establishment of the tenement as an alternative to the suburban cottage. Tenements however only contributed 5% of the total subsidized building between the wars. The 1930's tenements were generally built to a high density and low standards of internal lay-out and finish and by the 1960's many of them had come to be regarded as the lowest rung on the council house ladder, difficult to let and consequently allocated to those with low priority and homeless families. By comparison the 1920's suburban estates remain popular

today, frequently requested by prospective tenants and more likely to be bought by sitting tenants.

The 1930 Housing Act however did bring council house occupancy to the very poorest in the community and those in the greatest housing distress. Even the lower rents achieved under the Wheatley subsidy had still been beyond the means of the poor who needed houses with rentals, including rates not exceeding 6s. 0d. (30p) to 7s. 0d. (35p) a week.⁸³ Under the Wheatley Act differential renting would have been possible to enable local authorities to house the poorer members of the working classes but since this would probably have involved increased burdens on the rates most local authorities before 1930 chose to ignore the acute housing problems of the poor. Prior to 1930 local authorities had the freedom to select their own tenants and naturally they chose families sufficiently affluent to afford council rents. Under the 1930 Act however local authorities were obliged to re-house thousands of families regardless of their ability to pay rent. Consequently the subsidy provision of the 1930 Act had to ensure that slum families could afford the rent of their new replacement homes. When drawing up his Bill Greenwood had been well aware of the low-rent paying capacity of many slum dwellers. It was generally accepted at the time that 50% of families could not pay the normal rents charged under the Wheatley Act and consequently further Exchequer assistance was required.⁸⁴ Under the 1930 Act subsidy arrangements therefore were based on the number of persons displaced rather than the number of houses provided, with the Exchequer contributing £2 10s. 0d. (£2.50) for 40 years per person rehoused in rural parishes and £2 5s. 0d. (£2.25p) in urban parishes, whilst the

local authority contribution was £3 15s. 0d. (£3.75p). The expense of re-housing people in inner-city areas was also acknowledged by the introduction of an additional subsidy per person for people accommodated in blocks of flats over three stories on expensive sites. However to ensure that local authorities could let 50% of replacement dwellings at up to 3s.0d. (15p) a week less than Wheatley houses Greenwood authorised the introduction of differential rents but stressed that

"rent relief should be given only to those who need it and for so long as they need it".⁸⁵

Local authorities consequently, under the 1930 Act, were encouraged to vary rents as they saw fit. They could either calculate a rent reduced at a flat standard rate by the whole subsidy or else retain a certain proportion of the subsidy in reserve to give extra relief to families who could not pay the full standard rate. Under the 1930 Act therefore rent rebates were confirmed as a working principle . Unfortunately however local authorities were not impelled to introduce schemes of rent relief and by 1938 only 112 local authorities had adopted a system of differential renting. As a rule rent rebates were applied on a sliding scale according to income on the one hand and family size on the other. No assistance as a rule was given to families earning over £3 a week and with the exception of Leeds, all other authorities insisted that a minimum rent be charged.⁸⁶ Leeds was the most enlightened council of the period since it introduced a scheme in which no minimum rent was fixed and as a result very poor families lived rent free.⁸⁷ Leeds also included general purpose 1923 and 1924 Act houses in its rebate scheme whereas other local

authorities generally limited their schemes to slum clearance tenants of 1930's. The failure of many authorities to implement rent rebate schemes meant that many families must have suffered extreme hardship as a result of their enforced suburbanization while the very limited rent-paying capacity of other families forced them to decline altogether the offer of a replacement council house. Rent rebates were electorally unpopular due to the fact that tenants objected to being means-tested with the prospect of higher rents in order to subsidize poorer families from the slums and so many local authorities simply ignored the issue, thereby avoiding complex administrative procedures.

Many local authorities however were able to charge lower rents for 1930 Act houses but this was not because of the level of the subsidy, which really was not much more generous than the 1924 subsidy. Rents fell because building costs and interest rates declined. In 1934 the average net council rents were as low as 3s. 4d. (17p) a week and even by 1938 when building costs began to rise they were still only 4s. 8d. (24p) a week.⁸⁸ In some areas the rent of 1930 houses was probably equivalent to the rents of demolished houses, perhaps, in a number of cases even lower.

The Housing Act of 1935.

Rehousing slum families had highlighted the rigidity of the flat-rate subsidy and had brought the rent question to the fore. Local authorities under the 1930 Act were encouraged to operate subsidies in a more progressive manner by ensuring that those who

could afford it should pay an economic rent, so that rents of the less prosperous families could be reduced. The Housing Act of 1935 was designed to extend the principle of rent rebates to all local authority tenants by the introduction of revolutionary changes in the basis of local rent scales.⁸⁹ Prior to 1935 separate revenue accounts had to be kept for each Housing Act and in most cases these accounts had to be examined by the District Auditor to ensure that rent conditions were being observed. Any surplus which accrued in one revenue account could not be used to relieve a deficit in another, it had to be forfeited to the *Ministry of Health*. This sectionalism of housing finance had produced a situation where in many areas houses of similar size and type often commanded vastly differing rents. The 1935 Housing Act however required local authorities to pool all the rents, subsidies, debt charges associated with all dwellings they had built since the Addison Act into a single Housing Revenue Account. This subsidy consolidation was welcomed by the Ministry of Health since it eliminated the need to examine the annual accounts of 1919 Act houses in order to fix rent levels, and made examination of 1924 and 1930 accounts unnecessary. It was also welcomed by local authorities as it gave them complete control over the fixing of their rent levels.

The main aim of the Act however was to pave the way for more sensible rent policies and remove all obstacles for the payment of rent rebates to poorer families. After 1945 rent pooling was used increasingly as a means of socialising the financial benefits of council housing but between 1935 and 1939 its effects were limited.⁹⁰ The majority of local authorities did review rent scales after 1935,

as evidenced from the statement of rents published by the Ministry of Health in 1937.⁹¹ The Act was mainly used to reduce the rent of Addison houses to bring them more in line with 1924 rents. However such revisions were seldom accompanied by the extension of rent rebate schemes and by 1939 most differential renting operated by local authorities still applied only to slum clearance tenants. Rent rebate schemes involved numerous political issues of redistribution between council tenants and local authorities preferred to limit schemes to 1930 tenants in order to minimise possible conflict.

The Housing Act of 1935 also tackled the problem of overcrowding making the relief of overcrowding the duty of local authorities. The 1931 Census had revealed that although overcrowding had reduced since 1921 50,000 families were still living at a density of more than 4 or more persons per room, 180,000 at a density of 3 or more to a room.⁹² The continuing existence of such chronic overcrowding led to the drawing up of the 1935 Act which forced local authorities to carry out a survey of overcrowding in their areas and submit proposals for its abatement.⁹³ Out of a total of 9 million working class homes inspected in England and Wales 341,554 or 3.8% were found to be overcrowded. Unfortunately the standard set for overcrowding had been extremely low including as it did living and sleeping rooms, normal segregation of the sexes, and a maximum of two persons over 10 years old per room, or 5 persons per 3 rooms, 10 persons in 5 rooms etc.⁹⁴ According to this standard a couple with 7 children under 10 years of age might not be classified as being overcrowded in a three-roomed dwelling. If a more realistic standard had been adopted which required that the living room should not be used for sleeping

purposes, the number of over-crowded families would have risen to 9.6% of the total.⁹⁵

Exchequer subsidies to relieve overcrowding, the Act stated, were only available if i) it was necessary to build flats, the subsidy being graduated according to the cost of the site ii) new houses were built to relieve overcrowding among agricultural workers iii) a maximum grant of £5 per annum was available for cottage building if the burden on the rates of providing new accommodation was unreasonable.⁹⁶ In all cases local authorities were to make contributions from the rates. The 1935 subsidy however compared unfavourably with the grant for flats and cottage building under the 1930 Act and it was hardly surprising that local authorities chose to build under the latter Act. By 1939 only 24,000 dwellings had been built under decrowding legislation.⁹⁷

The 1935 Act was important in that it made overcrowding a punishable offence and imposed a duty on councils to abate it. The Act further highlighted the need for rent rebates since local authorities in future had to house people according to their space requirements, regardless of their income. It was surprising however that the decision had been taken to treat overcrowding and slum clearance as two separate issues since they both stemmed from the same cause, poverty. People lived in bad housing conditions simply because they could not afford anything better.⁹⁸ This fact was recognized in 1938 when the Housing Act of that year abolished the distinction between slum clearance property and the abatement of overcrowding, by granting a uniform subsidy to both.

By 1939 a quarter of a million slums had been demolished, overcrowding had been reduced and local authorities had built 1,112,000 houses to a standard previously unknown in the working class housing market. Thousands of working class families had been transferred from crowded, unhealthy inner-city areas to salubrious, low-density suburban council estates. However, despite massive state involvement in the housing scene and the private enterprise building boom of the 1930's, at the end of the inter-war period the country's housing problem was far from solved. In 1939 there were still far more families than houses, for whereas the housing stock had increased by 3,487,000 the number of families had risen by 3,515,000.⁹⁹ The tremendous housing boom of the inter-war period had consequently done little to reduce the deficit of 610,000 houses which had existed in 1918, and the number of households who were either sharing or in unfit or substandard houses was still high. The Ridley Committee set up to investigate rent control in its Report of 1937 concluded that there was no longer a shortage of more expensive houses with rateable values over £20 but in many areas there remained a shortage of cheap, small houses and as a result control was retained on all houses with rateable values of £20 and under.¹⁰⁰ If the original 15 year Wheatley programme had been allowed to run its full course by 1939 it would probably have been possible to decontrol even small houses as thousands more suburban cottages would have been supplied for the working class market. As it was the Conservatives, with their belief in laissez-faire economics, decided that private enterprise should provide for this section of the housing market and its failure to do so condemned many families to substandard accommodation. The housing

and living standards of many working class families rose considerably during this period as a result of state intervention but far more could have been achieved if local authority output had not been continually unsettled by changes in subsidy levels and attempts to re-define the role of council housing in the light of changing economic conditions and political beliefs.

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CHAPTER II

The Black Spot on the Mersey Revisited

The remainder of this work examines the development of suburban council housing in one particular locality between the wars, Liverpool, beginning with this chapter which looks at the implementation of national housing by Liverpool City Council in the 1920's. There are several good reasons for choosing Liverpool as a study area. Firstly, during the nineteenth century owing to its appalling housing conditions Liverpool had earned the reputation of being the unhealthiest example of a Victorian town, being described once as the "black spot on the Mersey".¹ Partly out of necessity Liverpool consequently became a pioneer in housing reform and the very first council housing was built there in 1869. By the outbreak of the First World War Liverpool had a greater proportion of its population housed municipally than any other city and was second only to London in absolute terms.) Secondly, despite the fact that the city was controlled by a Conservative Council throughout the inter-war period municipal activity remained at a high level and council house building accounted for 60% of all house building as opposed to a public sector tally of 28% nationally.

Historical Background

Liverpool's existence depended on the discovery and development of the facilities it offered as a port. The first dock was built in

1715, fifteen years earlier there had been a mere dozen or so ships visiting the town and by 1841 the port had acquired a shipping list of 4,000.² The rapid growth of the port in the eighteenth century was largely due to the infamous slave trade, while expansion in the nineteenth century was linked directly to the Industrial Revolution. As Liverpool became the main port for England's industrial hinterland the line of docks was continually extended, while the few alternative industries declined.³ By the end of the nineteenth century Liverpool was not devoid of manufacturing industry but what had developed depended primarily upon imported raw materials and the commercial activities of the port. On the eve of the First World War the economic life of the city totally revolved around trade.

During the inter-war period the decline of Britain's old export industries and world trade in general profoundly effected the port of Liverpool and the employment opportunities of the city's population. The two main employment groups which accounted for over 50% of insured workers, shipping and shipbuilding, and transport and distribution not only failed to provide additional employment for the growing number of workers during this period, they could not even maintain their position. Despite the fact that new employment opportunities did emerge their development could not keep pace with the decline of traditional employment openings and the result was unemployment on a large scale. (During the 1920's and 1930's male unemployment in Liverpool was consistently above 20% and in the early 1930's one in three men were out of work, frequently for very long periods.⁴ The city was suffering from a permanent surplus of labour due to the structural decline) in the relative importance of the port compared

with its chief southern competitors. Liverpool City Council recognized the need for alternative industries and in 1936, in an attempt to attract new industries to the area it set aside 341 acres for industrial use at Speke, followed closely by an area of 300 acres at Aintree.⁵ Unfortunately such attempts to diversify the area's economy came too late to alleviate the mass unemployment of the 1930's.

Liverpool had grown with its commerce. The population of the city increased from 5,000 in 1700 to 781,948 in 1918.⁶ By 1835 the town had outgrown the limits of the old township and the borough was extended to include Kirkdale, Toxteth, Everton and parts of West Derby. The continued expansion of the built-up area necessitated a further administrative re-organization and in 1895 the borough boundary was further extended to include large parts of Walton, West Derby and Wavertree and in 1902 to include Garston. Administrative expansion up to this point had always lagged behind urban growth but after 1902 it preceded it. Fazakerly was incorporated into the borough in 1905, Allerton, Childwall, Little Woolton and Much Woolton in 1913 and since all these areas were essentially rural, Liverpool City Council on the eve of the war possessed many acres of land suitable for suburban development. In 1914 however the built-up area was still fairly compact being largely contained within the ring road, Queens Drive. During the inter-war period West Derby Rural and Croxteth Park were incorporated into the borough in 1928 and Speke in 1932 as large municipal and private enterprise suburban housing estates sprang up around the outer limits of the city.

Rapid urban growth in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth

century created an environment appallingly unhealthy. The annual death rate for the city for the five years prior to 1844 averaged 35 per 1,000 compared with a rate of 25 per 1,000 nationally; in the notoriously unhealthy Vauxhall ward the average age at death was 14 years.⁷ (Poverty, overcrowded and badly constructed houses, an inadequate water supply and an almost total lack of facilities for the disposal of refuse of all kinds had created such a situation. These features were of course present in all large cities but the first two were far worse in Liverpool than elsewhere. The reason for this appears to lie in the peculiar economic circumstances upon which the life of the city was based, which had led to the emergence of a social structure very different from that of other large, Northern cities. The wealthiest sections of Liverpool society were merchants not manufacturers and instead of a male working class composed predominantly of factory workers, the working class of Liverpool consisted largely of seamen, unskilled dockers and construction workers employed on a casual, irregular basis.

The casual labour system in Liverpool provided employers with a flexible workforce but it had condemned the working class population to a life of poverty and deprivation. (This poverty was a principal cause of overcrowding and bad housing. Builders had been unable to keep pace with the rapid population increase and the shortage of accommodation had sent town rents of decent houses soaring beyond the means of casual labourers who crowded together in unhealthy cellars and subdivided rooms.) As early as 1801 the census revealed that 2,306 people lived in cellars, a sight then rarely seen in England.⁸ (The cellars, which have been described as "disease factories", were

usually between 10 and 12 feet square, often less than 6 foot high, 4 to 5 feet below ground level, dark, damp and poorly ventilated. In the early nineteenth century as the cellar declined in importance the court system, cul-de-sacs of high density back-to-backs, became the standard Liverpool working class house.) This unhealthy system of building evolved because of the low rent-paying capacity of the city's working class population and the high return it offered on capital invested.

(In the early 1840's a group of local reformers led by Dr. William Duncan mounted a formidable public health campaign designed to demonstrate that the structure and arrangement of court houses, the inhabiting of ill-ventilated cellars and the general overcrowding of the population, were the principal causes of ill-health.) In 1841 the court population had risen to 55,534 persons, nearly one quarter of the total population, while 28,454 persons lived in cellars.⁹ (The campaign succeeded and in 1842 and 1846 Local Improvement Acts were secured from Parliament which established more stringent control over the building of court houses and granted powers to close the worst type of cellar dwellings. Between 1844 and 1851 25,000 people were ejected from cellars but unfortunately no alternative provision was made for them and the casual labouring poor had to squeeze themselves into the ever-diminishing stock of insanitary court houses.)¹⁰ The 1846 Act also served to dry up completely the supply of cheap housing since its improved building regulations, and consequently the low and irregular earnings of the working class population, made private landlordism an unprofitable activity.

The Acts of the 1840's however were too limited to dramatically

improve the health of the city and in 1864, against a background of climbing death rates, Liverpool became the first city in the country to obtain powers to order the demolition and improvement of slum property.¹¹ Between 1864 and 1913 the Council was responsible for dealing with nearly 10,700 insanitary houses while the needs of railway and warehouse companies removed a further 11,000.

Unfortunately (the inhabitants of the demolished houses could not rely on the efforts of private enterprise to provide them with new houses. A total of 55,055 houses were built during this period but they catered for the housing needs of skilled, regularly employed workers who could afford the 7s. 0d. to 8s. 0d. (35p to 40p) a week rental of a new terrace house. Before 1914 a casual labourer earned on average 15s. 0d. (75p) a week and it was estimated that he could afford to pay 1s. 0d. (5p) per week, per room.¹²

The failure of private enterprise to provide decent cheap working class housing led to the building of St. Martin's cottages in 1869, the first public housing in the country.) (These cottages were intended to be an example to private builders that this type of building could be profitable. Private builders however remained unconvinced. St. Martin's cottages were not followed by others until the late nineteenth century when the Conservative Council, faced with continued high inner-city mortality, decided to build council tenements in an attempt to secure its political base.) In 1900 the 17 year old Insanitary Property Committee was renamed the Housing Committee, indicating the acceptance of the need to re-house as well as pull down.¹³ The number of houses erected by the Council between 1869 and 1914, 2,895 does not appear very impressive when compared

with the 38,000 built between the wars. However it must be remembered that these pre-war houses were built without subsidy and without any pressure from central government. Such municipal activity however did little to reduce the enormous gap between the number of working class houses demolished and those provided and by 1914 there was an acute housing shortage in the city.

(All the dwellings provided by Liverpool City Council before 1914 had been built in the inner-city, mainly in tenement form. Between 1900 and 1914 it was advocated on several occasions that people should be re-housed in the suburbs but in 1914 no suburban council houses existed in Liverpool. The Liverpool Housing Association, which came into existence in 1900, contemplated municipal housing on a far wider scale than had been proposed by the Conservatives to date and suggested that the working class population should be transferred to the healthier environment of the suburbs. Such proposals had a small body of support in the Council and had gained the approval of the Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Hope. Dr. Hope however did not envisage, like the Association, that the Council should become major suppliers of general purpose council housing, he merely suggested that mortality rates could be reduced by decanting dispossessed slum dwellers to the suburbs. Others in the Council Chamber believed that suburban council housing should be provided for the better-off members of the working class at rents of between 7s. 0d. and 9s. 0d. (35p and 45p) a week, thereby releasing their older property for ex-slum dwellers. (A feasibility study was carried out by the Corporation Surveyor in 1906 and his report claimed that a 5-roomed semi-detached house, built at a density of 16 to an acre would require an economic

rent of 11s. 0d. (55p) a week.)¹⁴ Since an additional 2s. 0d. (10p) a week would be required for travelling expenses it was decided that this type of housing would be beyond the means of even the more affluent workers and despite repeated attempts by Dr. Hope and several councillors to interest the rest of the Council in suburban development all pre-war council building took place in the inner-city area.¹⁵

Housing Policy 1914-1919

Between 1911 and 1914 no houses had been built in Liverpool to let at under 7s.0d. (35p) a week, excepting those erected by the Council, and the building of more expensive houses had also shown a marked decline following the 1909 Finance Act. The number of unoccupied houses of all rents had fallen sharply from 5,975 in 1911 to 2,738 in 1913 and those under 5s. 0d. (25p) a week from 1,416 to 529 respectively.¹⁶ Shortages of labour, capital and materials had virtually halted building operations between 1914 and 1918 but the need for houses had increased due to continued population growth and an increasing rate of household formation. Consequently in 1918 the housing shortage was not confined as it had previously been to the poorer sections of the community but it had extended to the middle classes and more prosperous groups in the working class. The result was that soldiers returning to Liverpool after November 1918 discovered that housing conditions had deteriorated markedly in their absence and even members of the artisan class were forced to crowd into insanitary accommodation.¹⁷

In 1918 the Director of Housing, Fletcher Turton, still believed that the Housing Committee's activities should be largely confined to clearing away insanitary property and the rehousing of people on the same cleared sites. He was highly critical of the LGB circular issued to local authorities in March 1918 which stated that only houses built to a density of not more than 12 houses to an acre would receive government subsidies. Such a financial arrangement the Director claimed would curtail the valuable work of the Housing Committee in clearing away the slums of Liverpool. When the Director announced his retirement in February 1919 the Housing Committee was still solely committed to central area improvement schemes and its failure to respond more positively to the housing crisis facing the city was fiercely criticized in the Council Chamber.¹⁸

Fletcher Turton simply had not grasped the size of Liverpool's housing shortage. In May 1918 a special Reconstruction Committee had been set up by the Council to plan for peace-time conditions.¹⁹ This Committee estimated that 8,000 working class houses were urgently needed, while an additional 1,000 houses would be needed annually to cope with the natural increase of the population. A further 4,000 houses were also required if the slum clearance schemes proposed by the Director of Housing were carried out.²⁰ Provision of houses on such a large scale, especially if they were to be built at a density of not more than 12 to the acre to ensure government subsidy, could not possibly be provided in the inner-city areas. Consequently by the time F.E. Badger took up his new appointment as Director of Housing in early 1919 Liverpool's housing policy had been reversed and attention was switched away from inner-city replacement building to large-scale

suburban development.²¹

Building Under the 1919 Housing Act

Badger took up his appointment against a background of mounting pressure from the public and press that the Housing Committee should speedily tackle the housing crisis.²² In July 1919 the Co-operative Women's Guild, the Council for Reconstruction and the National Federation of Discharged Soldiers and Sailors organized a demonstration at St. George's Plateau when complaints were loudly voiced about the housing shortage and the lack of response from the Housing Committee.²³ At the same time a more positive response from the local authorities was also called for from Dr. Addison.²⁴ Badger, a far more energetic chief official than his predecessor, immediately began to apply himself to the situation confronting him and the city.

The first requirement was suburban land. A Joint Committee set up to report on the availability of suitable land for suburban building found that there were only two suitable sites available, Lisburn Farm, Queens Drive and Elm House Estate, Edge Lane.²⁵ The two sites owned by the Corporation, contained 42 acres and 24 acres respectively and would provide approximately 880 houses. To meet the housing shortage the Committee stressed that an additional 600 acres of suburban land was urgently needed which Badger on his appointment set about acquiring. By the end of October he had purchased land in West Derby, the Larkhill Estate, containing approximately 180 acres and a further site had been adopted in Fazakerley, containing 36 acres, to provide in all a total of 2,592 houses.²⁶ By this time contracts had also

been entered into for the erection of 100 houses on the Elm House Estate and 100 on the Lisburn Farm site.²⁷

In an attempt to speed up building operations the City Council in June 1919, following a recommendation from the LGB, had delegated all its powers in relation to the various Housing Acts to the Housing Committee.²⁸ It was hoped that procedural delays involved in Council approval would thereby be minimised. The Housing Committee in fact adopted a series of schemes in its attempt to speed up housing provision. They included,

a) The use of military huts

In March 1919 the enlightened Councillor Eleanor Rathbone suggested to the Council that as an emergency measure vacant military huts should be purchased to convert to temporary dwellings.²⁹ After initially rejecting the idea in April the Council in August decided to use vacant military huts at Knotty Ash to relieve housing congestion until permanent dwellings were ready.³⁰ Knotty Ash had been a rest camp for American troops passing through Liverpool en route to France. The huts were speedily purchased and converted by the end of 1920 into 480 bungalows, providing temporary homes for over 2,000 people. The bungalows comprised a living room, scullery, bathroom and w.c., 2,3 or 4 bedrooms and all were supplied with electricity and hot water and their rapid provision contributed greatly to the solution of a very pressing problem. These temporary dwellings however created many problems for the Maintenance Department. Between May 1922 and 1923, for example, 2175 complaints were received from tenants about dampness and leaking roofs.³¹ The continuing housing shortage throughout the

1920's meant that these temporary dwellings were not finally demolished until 1933. (The newly formed Ministry of Health also tried to encourage local authorities to convert empty large houses into flats but this suggestion was rejected by the Housing Committee on the grounds that it would be too time consuming.)³²

b) Innovatory building methods

Faced with a chronic shortage of labour and materials Badger persuaded the Housing Committee that he should be given permission to investigate the feasibility of building concrete or other specimen dwellings. Accompanied by the Chairman of the Housing Committee, Councillor Rankin and several members of the Technical Sub-Committee, Badger travelled extensively around the country examining innovatory methods of building and by early 1920 contracts had been entered into with the Waller Housing Corporation, Leyland and Company and the Economic Building Corporation for the erection of 2,516 concrete dwellings.³³ Concrete houses were no cheaper than more conventional dwellings but they could be completed in a much shorter time using unskilled labour. *Since speed was of paramount importance and there was an estimated shortage of 700 skilled men for the various housing schemes, such a method of building was doubly attractive to Badger and the Housing Committee.* Badger had been very disappointed by the rate of house production in early 1920 when only half of the houses he had hoped for were in the course of erection. The problem was the shortage of skilled labour especially bricklayers, the housing schemes having only one quarter of the number that was needed. By building concrete houses Badger hoped to overcome such delays and speed up

house provision.

c) Ban on luxury building

In an attempt to stop labour and materials being channelled into non-essential building the Housing Committee, using its powers under Sections 5 and 6 of the Housing (Additional Powers) Act of 1919 set up in March 1920 a Prohibition of Building Sub-Committee.³⁴ By the end of the municipal year this committee under its energetic and enthusiastic chairman, Alderman A. Mather, had sat no fewer than 33 times to deal with 1,020 plans, conserving as far as possible the available tradesmen and materials for building purposes.³⁵ However at a time of rising unemployment it was impossible for the Committee to retard industrial and commercial enterprises which would generate employment therefore it was agreed that construction work could continue as long as other materials were substituted for brick. The ban, mainly directed against luxury building such as hotels and cinemas, however was criticized by the Operatives Stone Mason's Society who complained that it would cause unemployment amongst its members.³⁶ A deputation from this Society which waited on the Housing Committee, suggested that stone work could be included in council housing schemes. The outcome of this meeting was that Badger decided to build 4 houses in stone on the Larkhill Estate as an experiment to determine how much they would cost. In all 24 stone houses were built before their construction was halted due to cost-inflation and they were arguably the most attractive of all inter-war council housing in Liverpool.

d) Building by direct labour

The stone houses were in fact included in a scheme to build 500 houses by direct labour. In November 1919 the Ministry of Health suggested that in order to ascertain the most economical method of building, several selected local authorities should build 50 or more houses by ordinary tender, 50 or more by some outside firm of wholesale cottage builders and 50 or more by direct labour. Liverpool was chosen to be included in the experiment and Badger was authorised to proceed with the erection of 100 houses by direct labour.³⁷ It is very interesting to note that the original standard house-plans submitted by the Ministry were rejected by Liverpool Housing Committee on the grounds that they were inferior to their own designs, especially with regard to the fact that the bathrooms were placed downstairs.

Following Badger's report that Birmingham had undertaken to build 500 houses by direct labour, Liverpool similarly extended its direct labour scheme to 500 houses.³⁸ Faced with ever-increasing bills of cost Badger had attempted to reduce expenses by by-passing the contractor and setting up his own work force. This move was welcomed by the Mersey District Branch of the National Federation of Building Trade Operatives who claimed that builders were deliberately forming themselves into rings and holding back the building of houses in order to force up prices.³⁹ By employing his own work force Badger was able to keep a close watch on costs and efficiency, while at the same time it enabled him to maintain the housing programme when tenders were not forthcoming from private contractors. The houses, 370 parlour types and 130 non-parlour, were built on the Larkhill

Estate and the 310 acre Walton-Clubmoor site which had been acquired in 1920. They were all completed by 1922 and were the cheapest houses built by the Council under the Addison scheme costing £807 for a non-parlour house and £857 for a parlour house. The lowest figures for private enterprise building were £836 and £911, respectively.⁴⁰

e) Partly developed private enterprise sites

Parlour houses had in fact been erected by David Roberts, Son and Company and R.J. Jones for £859 and £860 respectively but these houses were built to pre-war standards on sites which had been partly developed by private builders before the war.⁴¹ The Housing Committee purchased 554 such houses from these contractors under Section 12 (3) of the 1919 Housing Act in an attempt to relieve the housing shortage. This move however had not been welcomed by tenants already living on these estates who strongly objected to having council tenants as their neighbours.⁴² In order to allay their worst fears that ex-slum dwellers would be invading their estates the Housing Committee insisted that only high quality parlour houses would be built and that special consideration would be given to the selection of tenants.

Despite all these measures to speed up the provision of houses, when Dr. Addison accompanied the Housing Committee on an official inspection of the various housing schemes in September 1920 he was disappointed to find that only 484 bungalows and 156 permanent houses had been completed and tenanted.⁴³ The acquisition of building materials was no longer a problem but the shortage of labour was still slowing down the building programme. At this time the total number of men, skilled and unskilled, engaged on the whole of the housing

schemes was 3,000 but double that number was required. It was an ironical situation for at a time of chronically high unemployment the question of demarcation meant openings for labourers were kept closed because of the scarcity of skilled labour. The Chairman of the Housing Committee consequently made an emotional plea to bricklayers and other operatives to,

"patriotically step forward to help in this truly great national work of overcoming the serious shortage of working class houses".⁴⁴

and to assist also in the fight against unemployment.

The output of houses may not have been as great as Dr. Addison would have liked but by the end of 1920 the Housing Committee had achieved remarkable progress. A total of 1,221 acres of land was now available for building, further sites having been acquired in Mossley Hill (300 acres), Allerton (184 acres) and Walton-Clubmoor (310 acres). Contracts covering 4 to 2,000 units had been entered into for 6,300 houses, while others for an additional 2,000 were under consideration. Despite the fact that the Housing Committee was inviting tenders for work worth over £6 million extreme difficulty had been experienced in getting local builders to tender for contracts, preferring as they did the more lucrative rewards of commercial and industrial building. In an attempt to encourage local builders the Housing Committee decided that all contracts should be designed to provide automatically for increases in the cost of materials and labour.⁴⁵ Such a decision it was felt was necessary since the cost of building houses had increased considerably since the first contracts had been entered into. The cost of a non-parlour house had risen from £709 to between £836 and £906 and a parlour house from £875 to between

£911 and £1,014.⁴⁶

In 1920 the Housing Committee not only had difficulty in obtaining adequate supplies of labour but its housing programme was also threatened by lack of capital. In March the City Treasurer warned the Housing Committee that it was proving very difficult to raise money for its housing programme.⁴⁷ The Finance Committee consequently was requested by Badger to make the strongest representation to the government that owing to the difficulty of raising money Liverpool Housing Committee might be compelled to suspend the acceptance of contracts with the consequent delay in the erection of houses.⁴⁸ The Finance Committee while agreeing to the request expressed alarm at the scale of the building programme, especially as the Council had delegated all its powers to the Housing Committee. In April therefore the Housing Committee accepted the Finance Committee's proposal that in future it would not enter into any new contracts without first consulting the Finance Committee.⁴⁹

Withdrawal of the Addison Subsidy

When the Addison scheme was halted in July 1921 1,056 houses and 484 bungalows had been tenanted and a further 2,706 houses were in various stages of erection.⁵⁰ A total of 2,400 houses had yet to be started on but they had been approved by the government and so were still eligible for subsidy. In the same month the Housing Act of 1921 abolished the section of the Housing (Additional Powers) Act of 1919 which gave local authorities powers to prohibit building operations which interfered with the provision of houses. Commenting on the

withdrawal of the Addison subsidy the Chairman of the Housing Committee lamented that the housing shortage was still far from over in Liverpool and yet the work of his Committee had been curtailed before any substantial progress had been made.⁵¹ The extent of the acute housing shortage was revealed in the 1921 Census which showed that in Liverpool 11,064 families or 6.4% of the population were occupying one room dwellings.⁵² Liverpool in fact had the highest percentage of one-room families of any town in Lancashire and consequently it was not surprising that the Housing Committee had received 17,000 applications for its huts and houses in 1921.⁵³

Under Badger's enthusiastic guidance good progress was made throughout 1921 and by the end of that year 1,470 houses were tenanted which equalled the combined number in occupation under the London, Glasgow and Manchester schemes.⁵⁴ During the municipal year 1921/1922 the Housing Committee completed 2,292 houses a remarkable achievement in view of the fact that the annual rate of production by private enterprise in the boom years of 1900 to 1905 had been only 2,068.⁵⁵ During the course of this year contracts had to be re-negotiated with several builders to obtain a reduction in the number of houses contracted for as a revised programme was required to meet the government deadline for financial assistance. The total number of houses built by Liverpool City Council under the Addison Scheme was 5,805; 2,042 non-parlour types and 3,766 parlour types, the majority of which had been tenanted by the end of 1923. All the attempts to speed up housing provision had paid off and Liverpool's achievements were unrivalled by any other municipality. Manchester built only 3,900 houses, Leeds 3,329 and Birmingham 3,234.⁵⁶

Rents and Housing Management under the Addison scheme.

From the start it had been apparent that council houses would be relatively expensive due to the high cost of building. In an attempt to keep the level of Exchequer liability under control the Ministry of Health initially set net rents of 10s. 0d. (50p) a week for non-parlour houses and 12s. 6d. (62.5p) a week for parlour houses, but many local authorities, attempting to obtain rent reductions entered into protracted negotiations with the Ministry. Liverpool however never came into conflict with the Ministry over the question of rents and after protesting that the initial rents were too high the Housing Committee accepted the Ministry's revised rents of 10s. 0d. (50p) and 12s. 0d. (60p).⁵⁷ Liverpool's gross rents ranged from 15s. 11d. (79p) to 22s. 6d. (112.5p) and although they were higher than many other authorities they were in fact similar to pre-war house rents.⁵⁸ In the immediate pre-war period a newly built, high quality terrace house consisting of parlour, kitchen, scullery, bathroom and w.c. and 3 bedrooms rented at 7s. 9d. (37p) to 8s. 3d. (41.5p) a week. By 1920 such houses commanded rents of 20s. 0d. (100p) a week and over.⁵⁹

The high rents meant that only the better-off members of the working classes could afford an Addison house, such housing being well beyond the means of those in the greatest housing need. However as the industrial slump intensified in 1920 even those more affluent members of the working class experienced difficulties in paying their rent, and more and more families began to sub-let their homes to help meet their rent bill. At first the Housing Committee was totally opposed to sub-letting of its property claiming that it led to

overcrowding, undue damage to its property and subsequently to high maintenance costs.⁶⁰ However as rent arrears began to mount at the end of 1920 the Housing Committee agreed to allow tenants to sub-let in order to pay their rent. In December two tenants occupying bungalows were granted permission to sub-let one of their rooms provided the sub-tenants were ex-servicemen.⁶¹ At the same time Badger issued "a strong circular" to all tenants against sub-letting without first requesting permission and approval from the Housing Committee.⁶² There are no figures to show the incidence of sub-letting during this period. An increasing number of tenants were granted permission to sub-let but despite repeated warnings from Badger that tenants who sub-let without permission were contravening their tenancy agreements, a great deal of illegal sub-letting appears to have occurred. Evidence submitted to Badger in January 1922 suggests that far more illegal than legal sub-letting existed.⁶³

By 1924 so many tenants were sub-letting that the Housing Committee decided that in order to maintain control over the situation stricter guide-lines had to be laid down. The rents charged to sub-tenants now had to be approved by the Committee and all applications to sub-let had to be accompanied by a statement signed by the tenant and sub-tenant showing the amount of rent to be charged. On average sub-tenants appear to have paid about 20s. 0d. (100p) a week for two furnished rooms, 10s. 0d (50p) for one unfurnished room: Sub-tenants therefore paid as much for bed-sit accommodation as they would have done for a larger self-contained dwelling.⁶⁴ Families did not go into sub-let rooms because they were cheap. They were forced to suffer the inconvenience of sharing somebody else's house because

of the city's housing shortage.

The rent issue also led to the formation of tenant associations on the new estates which pressed for rent and rate reductions. Deputations, consisting of representatives of the various associations, waited on the Housing Committee in an endeavour to convince the Chairman that council rents were out of all proportion with tenants' incomes.⁶⁵ The tenants claimed that when they had first entered their houses the majority of them had been prepared to pay the rents, but unfortunately the changed economic climate meant that they now had the greatest difficulty in procuring the amount. Council tenants were particularly aggrieved that their houses had been assessed at a higher figure than houses of similar accommodation built in pre-war days and a petition signed by 2,600 tenants was handed to the Housing Committee in February 1923 calling for a rate reduction.⁶⁶

The tenants complaints fell on sympathetic ears for as one councillor declared in the Council Chamber they,

"Fully recognized the detrimental effects that unemployment, short-time working and falling wages have on the living-standards of the working class".⁶⁷

A special Sub-Committee was established to look into the rent and rates issue which reported in favour of the tenants and after protracted negotiations with the Assessment Committee the City Treasurer was able to report in March 1923 that a rate reduction had been agreed.⁶⁸ The new rating system meant that rents now ranged from 13s. 9d. (68p) to 20s. 3d. (101.5p) a week, but they were not sanctioned by the Ministry until September. A fortnight later the Ministry also granted permission to the Housing Committee to reduce

rent levels, almost a year after the Housing Committee had initially sought a reduction. Gross rents now ranged from 12s. 11d. (64.5p) to 19s. 6d. (97.5p) a week.⁶⁹

Eighteen months of hard work by the tenant associations resulted in an 8-17% reduction in rent levels. Unfortunately the reductions did not come quick enough for many tenants and from the middle of 1921 onwards the Housing Committee had received an increasing number of requests from tenants asking permission to transfer to cheaper privately rented accommodation.⁷⁰ Others simply just gave up their tenancies without bothering to arrange an exchange. The Housing Committee had produced nearly 6,000 good quality suburban houses but unfortunately it would appear that rents were far too high for many families occupying them.

Despite the high level of Addison house rents the Housing Committee were inundated with applications for houses owing to the acute housing shortage in the city; by the end of 1920 14,000 applications had been received.⁷¹ The number of applications consequently far exceeded the number of available houses and therefore it was essential that systematic procedures and priorities in selection were established. A Sub-Committee of the Housing Committee, the Allocation of Houses Special Sub-Committee, was established for setting the priorities and applying them.⁷² Initially top priority was given to ex-servicemen with family responsibilities who were Liverpool residents.⁷³ Special consideration was also given to expectant mothers and those under medical care.

By the end of the Addison scheme it would appear that the ex-servicemen rule was no longer rigorously applied as a survey of

council tenants revealed that 18% did not have a service qualification.⁷⁴ By this time ability to pay rent appears to have instead become the most important criterion in selecting tenants for council houses. As rent arrears began to mount during the industrial slump of the early 1920's the Housing Committee began to pay more and more attention to the rent paying capacity of future tenants. The Council obviously wished to ensure that its capital investment and that of the rate-paying public was protected and in 1921 the Housing Committee announced that they,

"reluctantly found themselves compelled additionally⁷⁵
to consider the financial stability of applicants".

The allocation policy was further ammended in 1923 to embrace only applicants with two or more children in an attempt to select those families in greater need from 20,000 unsatisfied applicants.

Once tenants had been selected and installed the Council insisted that they conformed to a set of regulations further designed to protect the city's investment. Tenants were prevented from altering their houses in any way, for example they could not install even one additional power point without permission, and as mentioned above they were not allowed to sub-let without the Housing Committee's consent. They were not permitted to keep poultry or pigeons and gardens had to be well cultivated.⁷⁶ Right from the start the Housing Committee encouraged tenants to hold garden competitions believing that a well kept garden was a sign of a good tenant. A great deal of faith was put in the beneficial effects of gardening at this time for it was believed that working class moral standards would be improved if men were encouraged to spend their leisure time in the garden, not at the

public house. In an attempt to protect its investment Liverpool City Council therefore decided that the ideal tenant should be a sober, clean-living family man who had sufficient income to pay his rent regularly.

The Garston Scandal

Despite the fact that Liverpool built more houses than any other municipality its success during this period was overshadowed by what has come to be known as "The Garston Scandal". The scandal arose out of Badger's determination to get as many houses built as quickly as possible. Faced with an estimated shortage of 15,000 houses Badger in his haste to provide houses had entered into contracts without paying sufficient regard to the capital reserves of his contractors.⁷⁷ By February 1921 it had been apparent that the Waller Housing Corporation Ltd., a company which had contracted to build 500 concrete houses, was in financial difficulties.⁷⁸ The following month the contract was terminated and the 78 houses in the course of erection were completed by direct labour, the company receiving a £5 royalty for every house built under its system. In all 94 houses were completed and the problematic nature of their construction made them the most expensive houses erected under the Addison scheme in Liverpool, costing as they did £2,111 each.

The termination of the Economic Building Corporation's contract however was to have far more disastrous consequences. Members of the Housing Committee had contracted this company at an exhibition in London in May 1920 and later a contract had been agreed for the

erection of 2,000 houses on the Allerton/Garston estate.⁷⁹ The agreement stated that no sum of money would be considered due to the company unless the amount was certified by Badger. In March 1921 a dispute arose between the Housing Committee and the company concerning the issue of quantity certificates and a subsequent enquiry discovered that the company had in fact been over-paid £338,818.⁸⁰ The company was unable to refund the amount and at the beginning of 1922 the Housing Committee took possession of the site. The Unit Construction Company was assigned the contract and although it was agreed by the Ministry of Health that the 2,000 houses would still be eligible for subsidy the over-payment of the £338,818 was made the subject of an official investigation.⁸¹

Mr. John Orchard, the Inspector of Audits for the North West, was appointed to carry out the investigation for the Ministry and in his final report in February 1924 he concluded that the Chairman of the Housing Committee, Councillor Rankin, was responsible for entering into the contract knowing the paid up capital of the company was only £3,000 but Badger was declared responsible for the over-payment of the £338,818.⁸² Badger's qualifications were discussed at great length, especially the fact that he had no architectural qualification? Prior to his appointment as Director he had been employed in Liverpool's Building Surveyor's Department but he had never prepared quantities for building contracts or issued certificates for payments of such contracts.

The City Council had also carried out its own investigation into the matter and the Special Sub-Committee appointed for the task also ruled that, even after making allowances for the circumstances of the

time, Badger had been incompetent and that he had been insufficiently qualified to handle such a big contract.⁸³ Consequently, it was decided that the delegation of the Council's power over housing matters to the Housing Committee be cancelled and the Housing Department was to be transferred to the control of the City Engineer, and Badger's future title was to be Housing Officer at a salary of £1,200~~0~~ a year instead of the £1,500 he was then receiving.

In February 1924, the Housing Committee accepted with "deep regret" the resignation of Councillor Rankin and in the following month Councillor Thomas White became the new Chairman of the Housing Committee.⁸⁴ Badger, granted indefinite leave in February on the grounds of ill-health, was never to return to his job and consequently the "Garston Scandal" led to the downfall of these two prominent men. There had obviously been negligence but it was a shame that the scandal came to overshadow the valuable work these two men had done in providing the city with 1,000's of attractive, well-planned houses which 60 years later still remain some of the most popular dwellings in the public sector.

Building Under the 1923 Housing Act

a) Suburban council house building

The re-shuffle of the Housing Committee and the transfer of the Housing Department to the control of the City Engineer, Mr. J. Brodie, brought suburban house building practically to a standstill in Liverpool.⁸⁵ The year of 1924 was an extremely troubled one for the

Housing Committee and only 156 houses were completed 124 of which completed the Addison Scheme while the remainder marked the commencement of building under the Chamberlain Act. The Chamberlain houses had been built by direct labour since the Housing Committee was very keen to keep a close watch on costs after the damaging "Garston Scandal". In April an attempt was made to restore confidence in the Housing Committee by the setting up of a special sub-committee, the Financial (Housing) sub-Committee to deal with all the financial aspects of the housing programme. The hope was that charges of "incompetence" would not be levelled at the Housing Committee in the future.

Liverpool built very few suburban dwellings under the 1923 Act)
owing to the fact that as soon as the Ministry of Health announced that the Wheatley subsidy would be available for all houses started after 1st. February 1924 the Housing Committee decided that the new subsidy was more applicable to their housing needs. Consequently the 1,248 houses scheduled to be built under the 1923 scheme at Larkhill, Walton-Clubmoor, Edge Lane Drive and Springwood were transferred to the new 1924 scheme. Many local authorities who did not wish to make a rate contribution to Municipal housebuilding or who were not concerned with achieving lower rents preferred to build under the 1923 Act during the 1920's. Liverpool however, opted to build under the more generous Wheatley scheme in an attempt to provide cheaper houses, despite the fact that it involved a rate fund contribution.⁸⁶ In addition to the 32 houses erected under the 1923 scheme, 169 suburban flats were also provided. (The scheme to build suburban flats was instituted in order that buildings more appropriate in height and

design should be erected on the main arterial roads of the city⁸⁷)
 They were built on Springwood Avenue, Mather Avenue and Muirhead Avenue with rents of between 28s. 0d. and 29s. 0d. (140p and 145p) a week, inclusive, ^{but} and they were strongly criticized in the press for being beyond the means of even the most affluent members of the working classes.⁸⁸ It certainly seemed a terrible waste of government subsidies to provide expensive flats for the middle and lower middle classes when 1,000's of families were condemned to a life in squalid, overcrowded conditions in the slum areas of the city.)

b) Slum clearance

The Chamberlain Act however was used to a limited extent to re-start slum clearance after pressure both inside and outside the Council Chamber had focussed the Housing Committee's attention on the slum problems of the inner areas. A letter submitted to the Housing Committee from the Society of Friends regarding one particularly insanitary area, Hunter Street, described the conditions which prevailed in Liverpool's slums.

"Many of the houses in the neighbourhood are grossly insanitary; very little ventilation, roofs in bad condition, dry rot in the floors, holes everywhere, staircases unsafe, fireplaces falling down, rats in abundance, one sanitary convenience only for a number of families, poor water supply, very inadequate supply of ash bins and consequently ash and filth lying everywhere".⁸⁹

People were forced to live in such appalling conditions because of their poverty which meant they could not afford anything better. A deputation which included Hugh Rathbone, M.P., Sir Leslie Scott, M.P., and members of the Victoria Settlement Women's Guild and the Liverpool Women's Citizen Association waited on the Housing Committee in early

1924 recommending that in future a certain proportion of new suburban houses should be of a type likely to bring them within the means of slum-dwellers.⁹⁰ The housing of the poor in high-cost suburban houses however was not considered feasible and instead Brodie launched a programme of inner-area tenement building for this section of the community.⁹¹

The initial problem in re-launching the slum clearance programme was of finding land on which to provide accommodation for the first batch of dispossessed slum dwellers. Finally two sites were purchased one in Dingle, South Hill Road and one in Kirkdale, Melrose Road and when they were opened in 1928 they provided homes for 458 families. Once these blocks were occupied the Director of Housing and the Medical Officer of Health were able to put into operation a large slum clearance scheme for the insanitary Baptist Street area.⁹² Considerable delay however occurred in proceeding with this scheme due to the fact that the property owners challenged the Compulsory Purchase Orders and in the end part of it was completed under the 1930 Housing Act. In all 1,349 tenements were provided under the 1923 Act despite the fact that the subsidy terms were far from generous, a consideration which deterred less active authorities from tackling their slum problem during this period.

c) Subsidized private enterprise building

The greatest number of dwelling provided under the 1923 Act were in fact built by private enterprise, and throughout the 1920's the Housing Committee spent a great deal of time administering the lump sum subsidy available to private builders. In order to encourage

private enterprise house building the Housing Committee granted a maximum grant of £75 per house.⁹³ Although local builders complained that the grant was too small, Bootle, for example, was offering £100, they were still quick to come forward to take it up.⁹⁴ The first houses were ready for occupation in March 1924 and by the time the subsidy was withdrawn in 1928 the Housing Committee had approved applications for a total of nearly 4,300 houses, four fifths of which were subject to price restriction.⁹⁵ In 1924 the Minister of Health reminded the Council that the financial assistance available should be the minimum to induce builders to erect houses and most importantly the houses should be available at prices suitable for the working class market. The Minister was doubtful whether the selling prices in every case had been such as to comply with the intention of the Act,⁹⁶ and suggested that in Liverpool the subsidy should be restricted to houses where the selling value, after taking into account the subsidy, did not exceed £600. An enquiry into the subject by the Town Clerk and Brodie found that in some cases builders had in fact made up to £200 profit per house but a restriction of subsidy to houses of £600 was not recommended since it was felt such a move would halt private building altogether. A compromise was reached with the Ministry whereby only houses which did not exceed the sum of £700 would be eligible for subsidy. In March 1925 in a further attempt to prevent profiteering on subsidized private enterprise houses it was announced by the Housing Committee that such houses could not be sold for more than their original price for 5 years.⁹⁷

Between 1919 and 1931 private enterprise built 7,586 houses in Liverpool, of which 4,294 were subsidized.⁹⁸ State assistance

therefore had stimulated house building in the private sector but the houses they provided were not inhabited by working class families as the Act had intended. They were built mainly for sale and as selling prices seldom fell below £600 in Liverpool during the 1920's these houses must have been purchased by middle class families.⁹⁹ At a time when wages were depressed working class families would have found it extremely difficult to find the necessary £50 deposit for such a house, let alone afford mortgage repayments of nearly £1 a week.¹⁰⁰ The only way this part of the Act benefited working class families was by a trickle-down process whereby the homes vacated by the 1923 house purchasers were released for the less well off. However it could certainly be argued that it should have been the working classes themselves who acquired the new, modern homes rather than having to make do with older, inferior cast-off terraced housing since the wealthier members of the community were perfectly capable of competing on the open market for accommodation.

Building Operations Under the Wheatley Act

The failure of the 1923 subsidy to induce private enterprise to build working class accommodation led to demands both inside and outside the Council Chamber for the Housing Committee to adopt a much more vigorous approach.¹⁰¹ Overcrowding in Liverpool was about 3 times as bad as anywhere else, there were 20,000 unsatisfied applicants on the housing register but the building of council housing was practically at a standstill. A special meeting of the Housing Committee was held in May 1924 to discuss the problem where Brodie

claimed that over the next 3 to 4 years 8,000 to 10,000 houses would be urgently required.¹⁰² Under the Addison scheme the Council had acquired 1,257 acres of land of which 664 acres had been built on leaving 593 acres for development under the 1924 scheme. The decision was taken to begin building on an undeveloped area lying between 2½ to 4 miles from the Town Hall, which ran between Utting Avenue and Pinehurst Road and was virtually a continuation of the 1919 Walton/Clubmoor housing scheme.

Brodie's recommendations were accepted by the Housing Committee and the City Council and from May 1924 a vigorous housing programme was adopted designed to radically increase the working class housing stock. A conference was arranged with the Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the Finance Committee, Health Committee and Tramways Committee to expediate the carrying out of the Walton/Clubmoor scheme, while Brodie was authorised to institute a Building Department under the Corporation for the purpose of building by direct labour.¹⁰³

To cope with the increased work load a chief Assistant was appointed to work under Brodie. Lancelot Keay, a 41 year old architect who had previously been employed as the Chief Housing Assistant in Birmingham's City Engineer's Department, was selected from a large number of applicants.¹⁰⁴ Until Brodie's retirement in 1926 the two men worked energetically together to alleviate the city's housing problem, supported by an enthusiastic Housing Committee united in their desire to provide decent working class houses in large numbers. When Brodie retired, Keay was appointed Acting Director of Housing in a separate Housing Department, becoming Director of Housing in July 1929.¹⁰⁵

The 1924 subsidy created the conditions for the vast expansion of council house building which occurred in Liverpool during the second half of the 1920's. By the end of the decade 12,387 houses had been built under the Wheatley Act, 5,680 with parlours and 6,707 without.¹⁰⁶ The period however witnessed a decline in housing standards for not only were fewer parlour houses built under the 1924 scheme than the Addison scheme, but the overall dimensions of all houses were reduced and after 1927 many of the non-parlour houses did not even have water supplied to their upper stories.

The 1924 building programme began in October 1924 when Brodie had been instructed to submit plans for the building of 5,000 dwellings and in the following month the Government Valuation Department had agreed that the land purchased by them on behalf of the Ministry of Health under the 1919 scheme could be transferred to the City Council. The land included a substantial portion of the Clubmoor site (225.3 acres) and smaller areas at Larkhill (22.9 acres), Springwood (69.7 acres), Mossley Hill (165 acres, a large part of which was later sold for development by private enterprise), Edge Lane Drive (14.8 acres), Fazakerly (10.3 acres) and Knotty Ash (1.5 acres).¹⁰⁷ The beginning of 1925 saw a further big purchase of land approved by the Council lying between Walton Hall Avenue in the North and the continuation of Muirhead Avenue in the South.¹⁰⁸ The majority of this land formed the Norris Green Estate which originally comprised 680 acres of agricultural land and at the time of acquisition for housing purposes 470 acres were outside the city boundary, within that of Sefton Rural District Council. This portion of the estate was added to the city under the provisions of the Liverpool Corporation Act of 1927. By the

end of 1925 the Chairman of the Housing Committee was the largest estate agent in that part of the country.¹⁰⁹ By this time contracts had been let for 4,309 houses to be erected on the Springwood, Highfield, Pinehurst Road and Walton/Clubmoor sites and building had commenced on 3,078 houses. Such an achievement demonstrated the Council's commitment to the housing programme.

Building under the 1924 Act however got off to an extremely slow start and White, the new Chairman of the Housing Committee, complained that whereas he had predicted that 2,000 houses would be completed by the end of 1925, the total was only 416.¹¹¹ Delays had been caused by the administrative set backs of the Garston Scandal, and by a 6 week long national strike of building workers in the summer of 1924, caused by Liverpool employers insisting that they be allowed to settle their wage rate locally at a level above the standard rate. However the main reason for the slow rate of progress achieved by the Housing Committee was the continuing shortage of building materials and labour.¹¹² Despite the Northern District Brick Federation claim that during the first 9 months of 1925 it supplied 30 million bricks to builders in Liverpool, council house building was frequently brought to a halt because of a lack of bricks.¹¹³ The situation deteriorated to such an extent that in August 1925 the Housing Committee recommended to the council that building other than housing should be carried out as far as possible by other methods of construction. Unfortunately even when bricks were available work sometimes had to stop simply because there were no bricklayers to lay the bricks.¹¹⁴ In order to increase the supply of building workers White pleaded with the trade unions to take a broad and generous view of the labour problem but unfortunately they

would only agree to a modest dilution of labour. The Ministry of Health had suggested that a Building Trade Committee be set up in Liverpool to carry out a scheme whereby builders engaged on council schemes would employ one apprentice for every three craftsmen in an attempt to increase the supply of labour.¹¹⁵ The scheme however was rejected by both employers and operatives on the grounds that augmentation was unnecessary since there were already 1,500 tradesmen and 300 to 400 boys employed on such schemes.

Brodie had in fact warned the Housing Committee in 1924 that building materials would be in short supply for a number of years and that any agreements with the trade unions on dilution would take some time to effect output.¹¹⁶ He consequently recommended that whenever possible new methods of construction should be utilised to overcome the shortage of materials and labour. When Wheatley had set up the Moir Committee in 1924 to report on this very subject Brodie had in fact been invited to sit on the Committee.¹¹⁷ Liverpool in a way anticipated this Committee's Report in early 1925, which recommended that local authorities should make use of what was known as the "poured in situ concrete system" of construction.¹¹⁸ At the time no work of this character was actually on hand in Liverpool, so far only concrete blocks had been used, but the most recent contracts let by the Housing Committee had been for houses to be erected by this innovatory method.¹¹⁹ On a visit to Amsterdam Brodie had been very impressed with this system of building which ensured rapid construction, while cutting down prices and the need for skilled workers.

A wide variety of innovatory materials were in fact adopted by the

Housing Committee in their efforts to increase the rate of house production. Liverpool participated in the Ministry of Health's sponsored experiments with steel houses,¹²¹ Occidental,¹²² Unit Construction,¹²³ Boswell,¹²⁴ and others, and greatly increased direct labour operations. With the aid of such methods output rose from 499 houses in 1925 to 2,907 in 1926, by which time the Housing Committee were providing houses at the rate of 100 per week.¹²⁵ Progress was so great that even Labour councillors were moved to praise the way the Conservative Chairman of the Housing Committee, admirably assisted by Keay, had galvanised the Housing Committee into action. One Labour councillor declared that White had attacked the housing problem with such vigour that he ought really to belong to the Labour Party.¹²⁶ Praise indeed!.

By 1926 the Housing Committee once more had to acquire additional land in order to maintain the housing programme at Fazakerly and outside the area boundary at Dovecot. Keay decided to utilise large contractors for developing municipal sites since they tended to be more experienced and financially secure and by 1926 offers had been received to build 8,100 houses in Clubmoor and Norris Green. The houses were included in eight contracts covering 250 to 2,000 houses at an average cost per house of £520 for those with parlours, £450 for those without parlours, to be built in blocks of 4.¹²⁷ By 1926 therefore houses were nearly half the price of Addison houses. Throughout 1926 fears had begun to mount about a possible cut in subsidy levels and consequently the Housing Committee decided to include a break clause in all contracts whereby either party on or before 12/12/26 could reduce the number of houses in their respective

contracts.¹²⁸

In May 1926 the Council approved the tenders for the 8,100 houses, 4,600 parlour and 3,500 non-parlour types but when the Town Clerk had applied to the Ministry of Health for subsidy approval Liverpool was requested to reduce the extent of its commitment, as the proposed housing programme was thought to be far too large.¹²⁹ The Ministry informed the Housing Committee that it attached great importance,

"to securing that numbers of houses to be undertaken by local authorities at any one time should be such as can be expeditiously be carried to completion by the labour and the materials available and it has been the practice only to approve plans which can be completed in twelve months".¹³⁰

Apart from the 8,100 houses sanctioned by the Council the Housing Committee had already signed contracts for 5,016 houses under the 1923 and 1924 Housing Acts, but only 917 of these houses had been completed. After discussions between Brodie, Keay and the Minister of Health, Chamberlain, a compromise was reached when it was agreed that the Housing Committee could accept contracts for a further 4,075 houses.¹³¹ The Ministry had argued that in the interest of economy the Housing Committee should proceed in stages so that they could take any benefit accruing from falls in labour costs and materials. However it is far more likely that the Ministry sanctioned caution in the letting of contracts because it was contemplating a cut in subsidy and it sought to limit contracts approved at the original subsidy level. Brodie and Keay were disappointed in the reduction of houses since they favoured large contracts as mass production meant the economical utilisation of large scale plant. For example, the Unit Construction contract had been increased from 1,000 houses to 2,000 houses when the company agreed to reduce the cost of each house by £10 if the larger

contract was accepted, thereby saving the Council £20,000.¹³²

When the subsidy cut was announced at the end of 1926 the Housing Committee had approved contracts for nearly 9,000 houses, a total which included three direct labour schemes. The Housing Committee then made an all out effort to complete as many houses as possible before the cut in subsidies came into effect in October 1927. An amazing total of 5,696 houses was in fact completed during 1927.¹³³ Despite such an achievement Liverpool still had a colossal housing problem and week by week the Housing Committee had to deal with numerous cases of the most terrible overcrowding and unhealthy conditions. There were still 9,689 unsatisfied applicants on the housing register, one third of which had requested parlour houses, two thirds non-parlour dwellings.¹³⁴

With such a long waiting list for houses the Housing Committee had to press ahead with its housing programme despite the cut in subsidy levels. White, in declaring that,

"We have about 13 years of work ahead of us".¹³⁵

was only too aware that in addition to the 9,689 families on the housing register there were 1,000's more poorer families living in the most appalling slums who could not even contemplate applying for a council house because the rents were so high. In order to press ahead with the suburban development programme the city boundary was extended in 1928 to include the undeveloped 244 acre Dovecot Estate and the remaining portion of the Norris Green Estate. The final piece of land acquired by the Housing Committee in the 1920's was a 12 acre site appropriated from the vast Speke Hall Estate purchased by the Finance Committee which fell within the area of Whiston Rural District

Council.¹³⁶

Building Under the Reduced 1924 Subsidy

Building activity fell sharply after the cut in subsidies, only 2,464 houses were completed in 1928, 1,418 in 1929. This fall in output occurred despite the fact that the reduction in subsidies was largely offset by a corresponding fall in building costs. The Housing Committee, fearing that the 1924 subsidy might be further reduced or even withdrawn altogether, were extremely reluctant to embark on large scale developments. The cut in subsidy however not only effected the quantity but also the quality of houses provided. Far fewer parlour houses were built and non-parlour houses were smaller and inferior to earlier models. In December 1926 the Housing Committee had announced that tenders were invited for a new "special" type of non-parlour house with an average floor area of 710 superficial feet.¹³⁷ The "special" feature of the house was the provision of a bath on the ground floor to be screened off by folding doors from the rest of the scullery when in use.¹³⁸ At ordinary times the bath would be two thirds covered so the the top could serve as a scullery table. In 1919 the Housing Committee had refused to accept the Ministry of Health's house plans which incorporated a downstairs bath but in 1926 when the local authority was keen to minimise the cost of housing this blatant lowering of housing standards was passed off as constituting a "special" feature. This type of non-parlour house was to be built in blocks of 4, 6 and 8 and except in certain feature blocks, bay windows were also eliminated. By the means of such economies a 710 square

feet non-parlour house could be built for £348 in 1928, £330 the following year, a figure which compared very favourably with the £450 it cost to build the ordinary Wheatley non-parlour house with dimensions of between 768 and 814 superficial feet.¹³⁹ In 1928 in an attempt to further reduce costs the Housing Committee sanctioned the building of even smaller non-parlour houses with downstairs bathrooms, 2 and 3-bedroom types of only 620 square feet which could be built for only £298 each.¹⁴⁰

Rents and Housing Management under the Wheatley scheme.

The rents of Wheatley houses were very much lower than Addison rents. By reducing parlour houses to 950 square feet and non-parlour ones to 768/814 square feet the Housing Committee was able to charge rents of 16s. 6d. (80.5p) and 13s. 3d. (66.5p) a week inclusive, respectively in 1925.¹⁴¹ Cheaper building costs had also played an important part in reducing rents. Such rents however were still beyond the means of many ordinary working class families. Liverpool was an area of low, irregular earnings and the average working class male was an unskilled labourer earning around £2 10s. 0d. (£2.50p) a week. In order to meet the housing needs of these unskilled workers the Housing Committee had adopted a policy of "building down" to poorer families, a policy advocated in a Ministry of Health circular in 1927.¹⁴² An alternative approach to the problem of housing these poorer families was put forward by Councillor Eleanor Rathbone who proposed a system of rent rebates such as had been adopted on a large scale in France and Belgium.¹⁴³ By such means high quality housing

could have been brought within the means of even the poorest family but unfortunately the Housing Committee decided instead to lower housing standards and build 710 and 620 square feet non-parlour houses with rental of 10s. 11d. (50.5p) and 9s. 6d. (47p) a week respectively.¹⁴⁴ In Liverpool therefore housing standards fell not only in response to subsidy cuts but also in an attempt to bring council housing within the reach of more ordinary working class families.

Despite the lower rents charged for Wheatley houses many tenants still found it difficult to meet their rent payments. Tenant Associations repeatedly petitioned the Housing Committee for cheaper rents, declaring that they were convinced

"some alteration must shortly be necessary to mitigate the hardships our people are struggling against".¹⁴⁵

Such pleas however fell on deaf ears and the tenants were informed that they should consider themselves fortunate that their rents were not increasing since the Council was already bearing a heavy charge in respect of rents.¹⁴⁶ A report submitted to the Housing Committee at the beginning of 1927 from the City Treasurer had shown that the rents being charged for Wheatley houses was inadequate to limit the Council's contribution to £4 10s. 0d. (£4.50p) per annum per house.¹⁴⁷ When all the houses under contract were completed it was estimated that it would be necessary to meet out of the rates a yearly shortage of £51,237 over and above the local authority's annual statutory contribution. This would mean an annual total charge of £93,249 upon the rates, equivalent to a rate of approximately 4d. (2p) in the £.¹⁴⁸ In order to restrict the charge upon the rates to the

statutory £4 10s. 0d. (£4.50p) the City Treasurer therefore recommended that the rent of parlour houses should be increased to 19s. 11d. (99p) a week inclusive and non-parlour types to 16s. 5d. (82.5p). Such a proposal brought a quick and vociferous response from the Liverpool Council of Corporation Tenants Association which informed the Housing Committee that,

"in view of the great amount of poverty prevailing on the different Corporation estates we resolve that the Corporation be written to in order to submit to them our opinion, which is that it is not the time to consider any proposal to increase our rent".¹⁴⁹

Faced with such strong opposition from the tenants the decision was taken to charge a housing rate of 4d. (2p) in the £1, i.e. Liverpool's rate fund contribution was above the statutory level.

The mounting rent arrears problems had convinced the Housing Committee that it would be futile to raise rents when it was blatantly obvious that many tenants could not afford their present rent let alone face an increase of between 2s. (10p) and 3s. (15p) a week. In 1925 20% of tenants living in suburban council houses had been in arrears with their rent,¹⁵⁰ but by 1928 the figure had risen to nearly 30%.¹⁵¹ The amount of arrears outstanding on the 1st. April 1928 had been £5,717 5s. 8d. (£5,717-29p) but by December the amount had increased by £4,668 14s. 9d. (£4668-73p).¹⁵² The increase in arrears was attributed to the general trade depression and the the fact that many tenants who were allocated the cheaper, smaller non-parlour houses on the new estates were casually employed and could not pay their rent regularly. As arrears continued to mount during 1929 the city Treasurer was requested by the Housing Committee to prepare a report on the recovery of rent arrears, and the re-possession of

premises. The City Treasurer's report clearly showed that tenants were only evicted as a very last resort since during 1929 only 7 families had been ejected involving a loss to the Corporation of £140, while there had been 240 cases of distraint.¹⁵³ The number of council house tenancies at this time numbered 21,300. Before any tenant was evicted the consent of a Judge in the County Court had to be obtained and once a tenant had been summoned before the Court he received four weeks notice of the Corporation's intention to apply to the Court for possession. Even however when an order for possession was given it was generally suspended to give the tenant an opportunity to pay off his arrears in small weekly payments. The Housing Committee were extremely reluctant to evict tenants mainly because their arrears were then written off as bad debts. The City Treasurer's report pointed out that some local authorities, in an attempt to combat their rent arrears problem, had decided that action should be taken upon a tenant falling into arrears to a stated sum. However the Housing Committee decided that each case should continue to be considered separately as factors such as length of tenancy, past rent record, unemployment and illness needed to be considered. The procedure for recovering rent arrears therefore remained unaltered following this investigation but the decision was taken that in order to try and contain the whole rent arrears problem, in future the main criterion for selection of council tenants should be their financial ability to pay rent.¹⁵⁴

By the end of the decade the Housing Committee were aware that nearly one third of their council house tenants could not afford their new, modern homes. They were aware that low wages were the root of

the rent problem but what could be done? The Housing Committee were reluctant to lower rents because the increased burden this would place on the rates, and they also refused to consider any scheme of differential renting which would sensibly distribute subsidies according to need. Councillor Eleanor Rathbone repeatedly drew the Committee's attention to the fact that many well-to-do tenants could easily afford to pay an economic rent but that many poorer families desperately needed some form of rent relief to help them meet their rent bill.¹⁵⁵ The Housing Committee's solution to the problem had been to "build down" to the needs of the poorer tenant and to ensure that in future only families who could prove their ability to pay rent would be allocated houses. Such a solution appears to have overlooked the fact that the very tenants for whom the cheaper, smaller houses were provided for were least likely to be able to pay rent regularly since many of them would be employed on a casual basis.

The fact that ability to pay rent became the main stated criterion for selection for a house in 1929 was also unlikely to dramatically improve the arrears problem since the rent-paying capacity of tenants had played a vital part in the allocation process from the beginning of building operations in the early 1920's and this had not prevented arrears problems. Throughout the 1920's the Housing Committee, like estate agents, had required proof that an applicant had paid a rent similar to a council house rent for a considerable period of time but this obviously had been no guarantee that tenants could afford the extra expenses suburban living involved such as travelling costs, and more expensive shops.

During the 1920's therefore families in Liverpool were not

allocated council houses because they were in acute housing distress but because they appeared to be able to afford council rents. In 1925 the allocation policy had become more clearly defined due to the fact that by this time the Housing Department was overwhelmed with applications for houses. Each applicant now had to have lived in Liverpool for five years, to come from overcrowded or insanitary property, his family had to consist of four closely-related members and the gross family income had not to exceed £7 a week.¹⁵⁶ When there were more applicants than houses preference was to be given to ex-servicemen and large families. In theory therefore priority was to be given to large families from overcrowded or slum property. However the high rent of council house property and the lack of rent rebates meant that such families would be unlikely to come forward for such property or if they did that, they would be selected for a tenancy because of their low rent-paying capacity. The Housing Committee obviously wished to appear to be housing those whose need was the greatest but the repeated references to "ability to pay rent" in their Committee minutes suggest that a tenant's financial standing carried far greater weight than his housing need in the selection process.

The Housing Committee in fact found it impossible to adhere to many other aspects of their stated allocation policy when they began to experience difficulty in letting some of their large, more expensive dwellings.¹⁵⁷ Problems were first encountered with trying to tenant the expensive flats erected on Muirhead, Mather and Springwood Avenues, and finally the Housing Committee were forced to de-restrict them and advertise them in the local press.¹⁵⁸ However difficulties were still experienced in letting the de-restricted flats

and at the end of 1927 the Housing Committee reduced their rents by between 5s. 0d. (25p) and 9s. 0d. (45p) a week. By the middle of 1927 the Housing Committee was also experiencing problems in finding tenants for parlour houses, especially those of more elaborate design built in prominent positions and on main arterial roads rented at between 18s. 3d. (91.5p) and 19s. 6d. (97.5p) a week. Consequently the decision was taken to de-restrict all parlour houses rented at over 17s. 0d. (85p) a week in an attempt to obtain tenants for them.¹⁵⁷

In relation to other cities Liverpool had reason to be proud of its housing achievements in the 1920's. Its total of 18,824 dwellings built by the Council, at a cost of £17 million, was unsurpassed by any other provincial city. New residential districts had sprang up on the urban fringe creating a new way of life for 1,000's of Liverpudlians. The densely packed terraced street had given way to the low-density suburban estate and the dark, gloomy bye-law house to the bright, airy council house with its large garden.

Despite this high level of municipal activity Liverpool's housing problem remained unsolved simply because private enterprise built too few houses for letting, the local authority did not build sufficient houses to meet the housing needs of ordinary working class families, as evidenced by the 1,000's of unsatisfied applicants on the housing register and the houses that were built were generally too expensive for many families. Furthermore not only did the Housing Committee fail to cater for ordinary working class families but they also failed to meet the housing needs of those in the worst conditions, the slum dwellers. Few of the city's notorious slums had been demolished by

1929 and the promised homes fit for heroes too often remained the same flea-ridden, bug-ridden, rot-ridden, lousy hell-holes.¹⁶¹

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CHAPTER III

The Anti-Slum Decade

In 1930 Liverpool's housing problem had two aspects, quantitative and qualitative. Consequently the 1930 Housing Act, designed to combine general purpose house building with a programme of housing renewal based on slum clearance and re-housing, was ideally suited to housing conditions existing in the city. This chapter examines the continued growth of suburban council housing in Liverpool during the 1930's, and the factors which determined the nature of the Council's response to the 1930 Housing Act and the subsequent housing legislation of this decade.

Housing Policy 1930-1934.

i) The five year programme

Under Section 25(2) of the Housing Act of 1930 local authorities had to submit to the Ministry of Health a five year programme of action under both the 1924 and 1930 Housing Acts. The quinquennial statement submitted by Liverpool City Council provided for the demolition of 2,000 insanitary houses and for the production of 13,000 houses, 10,000 under the 1924 Act and 3,000 under the 1930 Act.¹ Unfortunately before issuing this statement the Housing Committee had failed to carry out a detailed survey of their area and their proposals most definitely fell far short of meeting the housing needs of the city. If we look first at the quantitative problem we find that

far more than 10,000 houses were required in the five year period. Despite the fact that the local authority and private enterprise between them built more than 26,000 houses in the 1920's there was still a severe shortage of accommodation owing to the unprecedented increase in the number of families in the city. Between 1921 and 1931 the number of families increased from 171,565 to 201,426 but the number of separate dwellings available rose from only 147,818 to 173,935.² The deficiency of dwellings occupied in relation to families in 1931 therefore was 27,488 and was considerably greater than it had been in 1921. Since the number of families so markedly exceeded the number of dwellings available the city suffered from severe overcrowding. The Social Survey of Merseyside carried out in 1929 found that 11.4% of working class families i.e. nearly 17,000 families were living in overcrowded conditions;³ a separate survey of six especially bad areas found 31.4% overcrowding.⁴

As to qualitative needs, the Merseyside survey revealed that over 1,600 insanitary court houses still remained and despite the Liverpool Corporation Act of 1908, which prohibited the separate occupation of cellars where the floor was more than 2 feet below ground, nearly 100 cellars were still in occupation.⁵ In addition there were about 6,000 houses, not in courts, but as regards to ventilation and sanitary conveniences, unfit for human habitation. The Housing Committee's proposal to demolish only 2,000 slum properties consequently was a very half-hearted attempt to deal with the city's slum problem.

The Housing Committee's whole response to the Greenwood Act was in fact extremely cautious for they were aware that large scale slum clearance would create serious political, economic and social

problems. The City Council's 2 year battle in the court with owners of slum property in the Queen Anne Street area had clearly shown how politically unpopular slum clearance was among local landlords and how costly it could prove in terms of litigation. Since the majority of slum dwellers were casual labourers who had to live near the docks and could not afford high rents, the Housing Committee's policy had been in the past to rehouse dispossessed slum dwellers in inner-city tenements.⁶ Tenements were expensive to build, around £300 per unit more than suburban cottages, and as a result were not financially an attractive proposition.⁷ Sir Hugo Rutherford, the new chairman of the Housing Committee,⁸ estimated that under the Greenwood Act each tenement dwelling built on a cleared site meant a loss to the Corporation of nearly £30 per annum.⁹ Keay therefore recommended that as far as possible people should be rehoused in cottages in the outskirts where it would be possible to build small non-parlour houses to let at rentals of 9s. 0d. (45p) gross a week.

The Merseyside "survey of 6 areas of bad housing, with special reference to the Housing Act of 1930", however found that the majority of slum dwellers would not be able to afford even a small suburban cottage. The most usual rents in the areas were 4s. 6d. (22½p), 5s. 6d. (27½p), 6s. 6d. (32½p) and 7s. 0d. (35p) respectively for dwellings of 1, 2, 3 and 4 rooms and as they were areas of considerable poverty, 34% of families were living below the poverty line, only about one-third of families could afford to increase the rents they were actually paying.¹⁰ In order to bring new houses within the means of poorer families a system of rent rebates based on the number of dependant children was proposed. Alternatively it was

suggested the solution might be solved by building several types of houses at different rents, the most needy families being re-housed in the cheaper dwellings.

This survey had been designed to lead to a clearer understanding of the complex problems of social adjustment involved in re-housing schemes.¹¹ Displaced tenants did not have to be re-housed in new houses and so a policy of "filtering up" was recommended in order to achieve the best adjustment. If the Corporation had in its possession a belt of property $1\frac{1}{4}$ or 2 miles from the Pierhead to which displaced tenants from slum areas could be moved, the houses on the outskirts being occupied by those from the belt, it was thought that a better re-housing adjustment would be made, and the problems of religious and sound re-organization simplified. This was a view shared by Keay who believed that the best results would be achieved by gradually introducing people to improved housing.¹² He claimed that slum dwellers had personal habits which had been affected by generations of unclean, squalid living and as they had no concept of higher standards they were not likely to benefit if they were abruptly moved to improved conditions. In the new tenements built under the 1923 Act many reports of tenants abusing their surroundings had been received. As many of the pre-war tenements were occupied by people who had benefited from their years of residence in dwellings far superior to the insanitary property they formerly inhabited they would be given the new tenements, thereby releasing older dwellings for people displaced under the 1930 Act. Trained women property managers were also proposed by Keay to educate people before they moved into high rented tenements. During the 1920's over 60% of ex-slum dwelling

families living in pre-war tenements were in arrears with their rents,¹³ compared with only 20-30% of families occupying suburban houses, and by adopting a policy of filtering up and using property managers the Director hoped that the rent arrears problem among new slum-clearance tenants could be contained and the physical damage to Corporation property prevented.

The 1930 Act was much debated in the Council Chamber in 1930 and 1931 but its introduction did not mark a radical change in housing policy in Liverpool. The many complex problems associated with large scale slum clearance effectively delayed action until the general needs subsidy was withdrawn. All houses completed by 30th. June 1934 qualified for subsidy under the 1924 Act, by which time only about 300 tenements and no houses had been completed under the 1930 Act.¹⁴

ii) Further developments under the 1924 Act.

Between 1930 and 1934 the Housing Committee provided 7,286 houses; 1,579 (21.67%) with parlours, 5,707 (78.33%) without.¹⁵ Not only were far fewer parlour houses built than in the 1920's but the non-parlour types provided were predominantly small, incorporating the "special feature" of a downstairs bathroom. About 86.3% of non-parlour houses had floor areas of either 620 or 710 superficial feet compared with only 36% in the 1920's and many were provided in terraces of 10-12 houses. Building activity during this period was at a fairly low level; the average annual production was 1,619.¹⁶ This was partly due to the fact that the Council, fearing that the subsidy could be withdrawn at any time, were reluctant to sanction large scale building. Keay's plan to build 2,000 houses a year was reduced by the

Council to 1,000 to the annoyance of the Ministry of Health, which urged an expansion of the building programme in order to take full advantage of the favourable conditions which prevailed.¹⁷ The building programme was expanded to 2,500 houses a year following the criticism received from the Ministry. However after the economic crisis of 1931 the new National Government no longer advocated expanded building programmes as attention was switched to questions of economy and reduced local expenditure. In Liverpool a Special Economy Committee was established to closely scrutinize municipal expenditure with the result that building activity was maintained at a fairly low level.¹⁸

Another factor which slowed down the rate of production of houses was that in order to provide low-rented houses the Housing Committee required cheap land which could only be purchased outside the city boundary and the involvement of a second local authority restricted progress. In February 1931, Keay informed the Committee that additional land was urgently required to expediate the 5-year programme and in early 1932 the Huyton Farm Estate, located some 6 miles from the city centre, was purchased for housing purposes.¹⁹ The 88½ acre estate, costing £150 an acre, was outside the city boundary and approval of the lay-out had to be obtained from Huyton-with-Roby Urban District Council.²⁰ Many members of the Huyton-with-Roby District Council were fiercely opposed to the proposed development. They christened it the "Liverpool slum-dumping scheme" claiming that it would detract from the residential character of the area as the class of houses to be erected and the class of tenants expected to occupy them would depreciate the value of high-class housing in the

area.²¹ Despite Keay's assurance to Huyton residents that only the best possible type of tenants would be selected for the scheme his initial lay-out was rejected by the District Council, and a second scheme was only approved in April. Problems were then encountered with drainage which effectively delayed the completion of the first house until September.²² Similar difficulties were encountered with the other estate acquired in early 1932 for housing purposes, the Knowsley Estate. This estate of 1,740 acres was largely outside the city boundary, in the districts of Whiston and Huyton-with-Roby, located 6 to 7 miles from the city centre.²³ Late in 1932 Keay submitted a lay-out plan for 1,000 houses to be built on the small portion of the estate, 77 acres, which lay within the city boundary.²⁴

When the Housing (Financial Provision) Bill was submitted to Parliament announcing the discontinuance of financial assistance, only 620 houses at Huyton had been approved by the Ministry out of a total of 1,016 and preliminary plans only had been submitted for the 1,000 houses to be built at Knowsley.²⁵ Representations to the Minister of Health for permission to proceed with these schemes had to be made and after negotiations an extension up to 30th. June 1934, was granted which enabled the whole of the Huyton Farm scheme to be completed and 840 houses at Knowsley.²⁶

The whole emphasis in the early 1930's was on providing low-rented houses for the poorer members of the working class. Many felt, including Keay, that this could be best achieved by providing houses at a density of 16 to 20 to the acre instead of 12.²⁷ It was estimated that this would reduce building costs by about 20% and rents

by 25%.²⁸ The Ministry however chose to maintain the 12 to the acre standard and instead aimed at providing low-rented accommodation by enjoining local authorities to specialise in small non-parlour houses. In late 1931 the Ministry objected to the number of parlour houses included in the Dovecot scheme and contracts had to be amended to reduce their number.²⁹ Two months later the Ministry's circular 1238 informed the Committee that in future they should confine their operations to building non-parlour houses with a superficial area of no more than 760 square feet, unless special approval was granted for houses of greater size to accommodate larger families.³⁰ Due to the fact that applications were frequently received from families with up to 10 children of both sexes the Committee was already providing 4-bedroomed non-parlour houses of 950 square feet.³¹ The Committee since 1930 had also recognized the need for accommodation of smaller dimensions for old people, whether married or single despite the fact that under section 46 of the 1930 Act the subsidy payable was reduced from £7 10s. (£7.50p) to £5 as the smaller houses were reckoned to be equivalent to two-thirds of a house.³²

To some authorities, for example Manchester, who had not adopted a policy of "building down" in the late 1920's and early 1930's the 760 square feet standard must have appeared somewhat restrictive.³³ To Liverpool however it probably appeared quite generous as housing standards had already been dramatically reduced in an attempt to meet the housing needs of its low, irregularly paid working class population. Unfortunately the smaller houses were built for the very families who were more likely to have a large number of children. The survey of Merseyside found that on average the unskilled worker had

4.3 children compared with only 2.4 for the "black-coated worker".³⁴ By adopting a policy of "building down" the Committee tried to match the size of a house with the rent paying capacity of the family, rather than with the size of the family. It is not surprising that the Committee was soon receiving complaints from Huyton-with-Roby District Council that many of their houses were severely overcrowded.³⁵

In 1928 Councillor Cleary, had drawn the Housing Committee's attention to the badly overcrowded conditions which existed in the Garston district, calling upon them to prepare plans to relieve the situation.³⁶ A careful survey of undeveloped land in the area found no suitable site for development but eventually a 4½ acre site was appropriated from the Public Assistance Committee.³⁷ The site was not developed until 1932-1933 when 246 tenements were erected. The decision to build tenements in the outskirts was taken following a report by Keay which stated that the land was unsuitable for cottage development which would have involved the construction of an additional 36 feet road in order to obtain the required density level.³⁸ Keay estimated that 84 cottages could have been provided on the site but as they would have cost £450 each to build the Ministry would have been unlikely to approve such a lay-out in the light of the government's economy campaign. The decision to provide suburban tenements was only taken after much discussion in the Council Chamber as many Councillors felt it was undesirable to build tenements in the outskirts. The matter was referred to the Economy (Special) Committee who referred it back to the Housing Committee for further consideration.³⁹ Finally it was decided that as it would be too costly to build cottages and as there were 100's of unsatisfied

applicants in Garston living in overcrowded, often insanitary conditions, the tenements would be erected. The Director however was keen to stress that this in no way constituted a reversal of the policy of the Housing Committee to restrict the building of tenements to schemes of re-housing in the inner city areas.⁴⁰ The tenements were built by direct labour. The average cost of £384 per year, or £111 3s. 7d. (£111.18p) per habitable room was the lowest price ever reached on any post-war scheme and the buildings were completed in a record 13 months.⁴¹ In all, 11.8% of all dwellings built under the 1924 Act were provided by direct labour, 895 parlour houses, 197 non-parlour types and the 246 flats at Garston.⁴²

Rents and Housing Management 1930-1934.

Owing to the decline in the cost of building and borrowing the price of a 620 square feet non-parlour house fell from £318 in 1930 to £264 in 1933, a 710 square feet from £335 to £301.⁴³ The local press was delighted to report in September 1932 that for the first time since the war the price of a non-parlour house had been under £300.⁴⁴ The fall enabled the Housing Committee to reduce the rent of non-parlour 1924 houses by between 8 and 12%:⁴⁵ The rent of houses built under the 1924 Act was calculated over the whole number of houses built in any area with the result that the rent of the later, lower priced houses contributed to the cost of the earlier, more expensive houses. The Ministry of Health however believed that the poorer tenants selected for the later houses should have the benefit of the reduction in building costs and it was suggested that their

rents should be calculated without reference to the cost of houses already constructed under the 1924 scheme.⁴⁶ The adoption of such a system would have meant that the rent of non-parlour houses on the Huyton and Knowsley Estates would have been 2s. 4d. (12p) a week lower than earlier 1924 houses.⁴⁷ The Housing Committee however decided that these houses should be included in the rent pool, thereby passing the benefit of falling costs onto all their tenants. Tenants on the Huyton Farm and Knowsley estates were adjudged to be just as capable, in the majority of cases to pay the rents prevailing as earlier council tenants. A fairer system would have been the one proposed by Labour councillors whereby any surplus accruing on the housing revenue account would have been used to adopt a rent rebate scheme.⁴⁸ The Conservative Council remained opposed to the granting of rent rebates on political grounds and also because their payment would involve a great deal of additional administrative work. Consequently the situation remained whereby on the one hand many council tenants, as shown by the number of applications received for permission to build garages,⁴⁹ were affluent enough to afford cars, while on the other hand rent payments were depriving many tenants of the bare necessities of life.⁵⁰

Despite petitions from tenants associations⁵¹ and recommendations from the City Treasurer the Ministry refused to reduce the rents of 1919 Act houses.⁵² The Committee were informed that before the Ministry would consent to accept further liability with regards to these houses proof was required that their rents were in excess of comparable houses which had been built before the war.⁵³ Even when a survey carried out by the City Treasurer showed that the exclusive

rents of typical, working class pre-war parlour and non-parlour houses were 11s. 3d. (56p) and 7s. 11½d. (40p) respectively i.e. much lower than 1919 houses, the Ministry still refused to reduce rents.⁵⁴ The government obviously thought that it was paying a heavy enough subsidy, about 18 shillings (90p) per house, per week, already.⁵⁵ A deputation consisting of the Chairman of the Housing Committee, the City Treasurer, Keay and Councillor Williamson failed to alter the Ministry's decision.⁵⁶ The rents of these houses in fact increased during this period owing to rate increases, much to the tenants dismay.

The rate increases were due to the economic depression which caused a sharp increase in spending on public assistance. In Liverpool the cost of relieving the able-bodied unemployed at the height of the depression was £2 million a year.⁵⁷ Every large exporting industry which had been ailing in the 1920's was hammered in the trough of the depression between 1929 and 1932. As practically all the goods handled by the port of Liverpool came from, or were destined for the exporting industries of the old industrial areas, the fortunes of the city likewise suffered, as 1 in 3 men were thrown out of work. Nearly 60% of the unemployment among insured workers was concentrated in the 2 main employment groups, shipping and transport and distribution.⁵⁸ The majority of men in these two groups were casual labourers who experienced violently fluctuating wage levels, and were constantly in danger of falling below the poverty line. Unemployment therefore fell with exceptional severity on the very class of workers least likely to have any means of supplementing their meagre dole, while their economic position was further affected by the

fact that they tended to have a large number of children. Despite complaints from ratepayers that one-third of the rates was going on poor relief, Liverpool's public assistance scales were far from generous; a family of 5 received 29s. 0d. (£1.45p) a week, a family of 7 received 35s. 0d. (£1.75p).⁵⁹ It is hardly surprising that a great deal of extreme poverty and deprivation existed. The Merseyside Survey, carried out in 1929 before the slump had begun to be seriously felt, found that 17.3% of working class families in Liverpool were living in poverty.⁶⁰ This survey had used a poverty line standard well below that of other social surveys reflecting a tradition of poverty and low wages in the area which led to a lower assessment of minimum needs for reasonable health. If Rowntree's more generous "human needs" standard had been adopted the number of families falling below the poverty line would have risen to over 30% at a time when unemployment among men was only 17%.⁶¹ In 1932 when 1 in 3 men were out of work, nearly 60% of the working class population of Liverpool were probably being deprived of the bare necessities of life.

In such an economic climate managing the Corporation's housing stock became extremely problematic. By the beginning of 1932 40% of suburban council house tenants were in arrears with their rent.⁶² The greatest difficulty experienced in collecting rents was on the Norris Green estate and a portion of the Walton/Clubmoor estate; in spite of the fact that in Norris Green there was a larger proportion of cheaper houses than in other areas. At the time the allocation policy was under review and the City Treasurer informed the Committee that if the rapidly increasing burden upon the rates was to be checked it could only be accomplished by regarding ability to payment as an essential

qualification for tenancy. It was estimated that if the £24,000 owing by the 8,789 tenants were written off it would be equal to a further rate contribution of £3 in respect of every such house for the current year.⁶³

The allocation policy was amended in April 1932 to "widen the field of allocation so as to include applicants whose need was urgent and to simplify procedure".⁶⁴ An applicant had to fulfill 3 conditions before he was considered for a house: ability to pay the rent of the house suitable to the applicants requirements: residence in Liverpool for 5 years: and an income of less than £7 a week. Houses were to be allocated in the following proportions, 60% Category A (families with 2 or more children), 15% Category B (families with 1 child) and 5% Category C (families without children).⁶⁵ The remaining 20% of houses were to be allocated by the Director; 15% on the report of the Medical Officer of Health (of which 5% to be tubercular cases, 10% overcrowding), and 5% for special cases. No tenancy was to be offered to any applicant who at the time of qualification for allocation was in receipt of public assistance, without the special authority of the Housing Committee. In the face of a gigantic rent arrears problem the Committee was trying to ensure that nobody was allocated a house who might not be able to meet his rent payment.

The issue of application forms was discontinued and the waiting list closed in March 1932 in preparation for the implementation of the new lettings policy.⁶⁶ However the list remained closed until October 1933 due to the demand from tenants for transfers to cheaper accommodation which occurred at a time when the output of houses was declining. A special Sub-Committee of the Allocation of Houses

Sub-Committee had been appointed in July 1932 "to consider cases of tenants in arrears in consequence of their present rentals being above their means".⁶⁷ Since the Housing Committee felt that it was unreasonable to compel such tenants to remain in houses they could not afford when sooner or later ejection proceedings would have to be taken, the Special Sub-Committee transferred the majority of cases referred to it to cheaper accommodation. By June 1933 995 such cases had been transferred and a further 231 were waiting approval.⁶⁸ As a result many non-parlour houses completed after 1932 were allocated to tenants with financial difficulties. This was unfortunate not only from a social point of view as the segregation of a particular type of tenant was undesirable but it also meant that only higher-rental houses vacated by transfer cases, were available to those on the waiting list and delays ensued.

Under the 1930 Act the Housing Committee had to submit a 5-year programme to meet the housing needs of its area. The Housing (Finance Provisions) Act of 1933 still placed an obligation on the Committee to provide for any shortage in working class accommodation and the waiting list was re-opened in October 1933 so that the current housing needs of the city could be assessed as building under the 1924 Act was nearing completion.⁶⁹ The new allocation policy was finally introduced but in addition to the 20% of houses set aside for medical reasons etc., 20% were to be set aside for transfer in cases of serious financial difficulty.⁷⁰ The City Treasurer opposed the return to the normal letting procedure, fearing that by restricting the percentage of houses allocated to transfer cases would lead to a great deal of hardship.⁷¹ The return to normal letting was justified on the

grounds that there had been a slight improvement in the economic climate but new applicants were warned that their applications would not be dealt with for a considerable time.⁷²

When building under the 1924 Act was completed in June 1934 19,673 dwellings had been provided, 12,414 non-parlour and 7,259 parlour types. Leeds built 5,700 houses under this Act, Manchester 16,277 but Liverpool's achievements were far surpassed by Birmingham who built an astonishing total of 33,612 houses.⁷³ Birmingham however had not had to contend with a damaging, unsettling "Garston Scandal" or the level of unemployment experienced by Liverpool which diverted much needed funds from housing to public assistance for unemployed families. Under this Act Liverpool City Council became a major supplier of new housing and by 1934 12% of the city's population lived in council property, the vast majority of which was situated in the suburbs.⁷⁴ However the Act was unfortunately withdrawn before any real impression was made on the housing shortage, evidenced by the fact that when the housing register had been re-opened in 1933 26,841 applicants qualified for inclusion.⁷⁵ In 1934 Liverpool's housing problem still contained two aspects, quantitative and qualitative.

Private Enterprise Building 1934-1939.

The National Federation of House Builders in 1933 had informed the Minister of Health that the withdrawal of the general purpose subsidy meant that it would now be possible to provide low-rented accommodation for the working classes on a large scale. The house builders claimed that a small house could now be built for £370 and

without any public charge be let at a rent of 10s. 6d. (50.5p) a week inclusive, which was only 9d. (3.5p) more than a subsidized Wheatley house of similar dimensions. Liverpool Housing Committee claimed that in their area such a house could only be built to let at 11s. 6d.

(57.5p), while enthusiastically declaring that,

"if private enterprise can step into its own again and take this responsibility from us, it will be a very fine thing".

The opening of the campaign for the return of private enterprise into the provision of houses for the working class was heralded by the Ministry's Circular 1334 to local authorities encouraging them to hold local conferences with builders, investors and building society representatives to consider the housing situation in their cities as a result of the withdrawal of the general needs subsidy.⁷⁸ A housing expert in Liverpool euphorically claimed that,

"The private investor is⁷⁹ about to return to his old love of bricks and mortar".

However when builders and representatives from building societies attended a conference at the Town Hall in July 1933 on the invitation of the Housing Committee, it soon became apparent that private enterprise were not that keen to resume its "normal" role in the housing market. The city needed 15,000 10s. 6d. (52.5p) a week houses but the Housing Committee were informed that it would be unprofitable for private enterprise to provide houses to rent at 10-12 shillings (50-60p) a week at a density of 12 to an acre, since houses being built at 22 to an acre in Everton demanded an economic rent of 16 shillings (80p).⁸⁰ One builder told the conference that investors were only interested in the terrace type of house which did not cost

so much for repairs and a resolution was passed that stated Liverpool house builders could not possibly provide such cheap accommodation unless the restriction on densities was revised.

Private enterprises response to the 1933 Act therefore was lukewarm owing to the stumbling block of the density question. At the beginning of 1934 the Minister was happy to report that the country was in the middle of a housing boom and that 110,000 houses had been built by private enterprise in the last 6 months of 1933. Over the last 2 years private enterprise had increased its output by 30-40%.⁸¹ Unfortunately it was not providing cheap rented accommodation. For example, between 1st. April 1933 and 31st. March 1934 Liverpool builders provided 1,024 houses of 950 square feet or under for let but none were for rental under 16 shillings a week and were consequently beyond the means of average working class families.⁸² Before 1914 about 1,300 houses per annum had been erected by private enterprise for under £35 annual rental but not a single house of this type was provided after 1917.⁸³ By emphasising the growth of owner-occupation and council housing the impression can be given that private renting was crippled by the economic effects of the First World War and was insignificant after 1918. However, houses were built for let in Liverpool between the wars, although not for the ordinary working class family and in fact private unfurnished letting remained the dominant tenure form in the city until after 1961.⁸⁴

Private enterprise built 18,829 houses for sale or rent in the 1930's, activity being greatest between 1934-1936 when over 3,000 houses were provided annually. In all private enterprise built 26,415 houses during the inter-war period, 40% of the total number of houses

provided compared with a private sector tally of 72% nationally.⁸⁵ Far fewer houses proportionately were provided privately in Liverpool than in other parts of the country due to the fact that low-incomes, large families and high unemployment created a demand for houses much cheaper than private builders were prepared to produce.

Unsubsidized Local Authority Building.

When the general needs subsidy was withdrawn of the 26,841 applicants on the waiting list 75% had incomes of less than £3 a week and therefore required accommodation which did not exceed 10s. (50p) a week rental.⁸⁶ In order to ascertain whether or not private enterprise was meeting the needs of these people after the passing of the 1933 Act from March, Keay required quarterley returns from the City Building Surveyor of all houses erected by private enterprise of 950 feet and less.⁸⁷ From these returns it soon became blatantly obvious that private enterprise was not providing low-rented houses. In the first 2 quarters 306 houses were built for let at rentals at 16s. 6d. (82.5p) - 27s. 7d. (£1 38p) a week, i.e. none could be considered as having provided accommodation for lower-paid workers.⁸⁸ In view of the complete failure of private enterprise to build for the poorer members of the community the Housing Committee in August 1934 decided to build 1,000 houses even though no financial assistance was available.⁸⁹

When the Housing Committee's scheme to erect 1,000 houses without subsidy was submitted to the Council for approval the Finance and General Purpose Committee refused sanction, claiming that the Housing

Committee was departing from the Association of Municipal Corporation's policy of pressing for the renewal of general need subsidies.⁹⁰ As soon as the Housing (Financial Provisions) Bill had been introduced in Parliament the Association of Municipal Corporations had expressed misgivings about leaving the provision of working class houses to private enterprise who had clearly demonstrated in the past its reluctance to cater for the bottom end of the housing market. Between 1932-1934 the Association had been pressing the Government for the re-introduction of general needs subsidies to provide accommodation for the 1,000's of families who were unlikely to be dealt with under a slum clearance scheme but who were living in great discomfort in 1, 2 or 3 highly rented rooms without baths, water-supply or any modern amenity. The Finance Committee believed that once local authorities showed their willingness to build houses without subsidy the Government would be only too happy to leave them to it and would be unlikely to offer any financial assistance in the future. The economy minded Finance Committee therefore referred the scheme back to the Housing Committee with the suggestion that building should be delayed until general needs subsidies were re-introduced. The Housing Committee had estimated that the rent of a house at an all-in cost of £400 would be 11s. 2d. (56p) a week inclusive.⁹¹ By providing houses at such a rental the Housing Committee claimed they would not undermine the AMC's policy as they still firmly believed that the Council should press for subsidy from Government to enable houses to be built for letting to the poorest workers at 7s. 6d. (37.5p) a week.⁹² Two months after the scheme was introduced the Finance Committee approved

the erection of 1,000 unsubsidized houses at Knowsley although they wanted it placed on record,

"that they are still of the opinion that financial provision for all persons requiring houses had not yet been met. There are still some families of the working classes requiring accommodation who are not able to pay the present rents without the assistance of subsidy from the national Exchequer".⁹³

When preparing the scheme Keay was of the opinion that it was very undesirable from a social point of view to continue the practice which had been forced upon local authorities of building only a small type of non-parlour house, thereby segregating one class in large numbers on housing estates and for this reason he recommended that a number of parlour houses should be included. The proposed lay-out consisted of 300 parlour houses and 700 non-parlour, 50% of which were to have floor areas of 760 square feet, the remaining 50% 710 or 620 square feet.⁹⁴ The Housing Committee fixed the rents of these houses slightly in excess of the rents of similar houses built under the 1924 Act; they ranged from 9s. 6d. (47.5p) for a 3 bedroomed 620 square feet non-parlour to 16s. 8d. (83p) for a parlour type. Special conditions of letting were imposed for these houses to ensure that a call on the rates was avoided. The applicants had to prove their ability to payment, bearing in mind the travelling expenses which would be involved in living on an estate 7 miles from the city centre. Their present homes had to be free of vermin and display a good standard of cleanliness so that they would not involve the Corporation in heavy maintenance costs should they be selected.⁹⁵

The houses were built under the consolidation Housing and Town Planning Act of 1925, on the Longview Farm Estate which formed part of

the Knowsley Estate purchased by the Corporation in 1932. The first houses were not completed until late 1935 due to drainage problems, exacerbated by the fact that the whole of the estate lay outside the city boundary.⁹⁶ Progress was also delayed by the failure of Keay to obtain reasonable tenders from contractors. Between April and June 1935 the tender price for a 710 square feet non-parlour house rose sharply from £319 to £339.⁹⁷ A slight increase in building materials had taken place and an increase in the wage of building operatives was anticipated but these did not explain such a substantial increase. It was probably in fact due to the shortage of keymen, especially bricklayers, at a time when there was a considerable amount of building work in hand in the country. This was borne out by the Manager of the Employment Exchange in Leece Street for there were only 17 men on the books of which 9 were not members of a union and would probably be more accurately described as jobbers.⁹⁸ In an attempt to maintain the building programme Keay gave contractors permission to import labour from outside the district, suggesting that less problems were likely to occur with the unions if contractors were also carrying out work in other parts of the country. When Keay re-advertised he received tenders which were acceptable both to the Housing Committee and the Economy (Special) Committee.⁹⁹

Continued pressure from several councillors,¹⁰⁰ persuaded the Housing Committee in March 1935 to build an additional 1,000 unsubsidized houses on the Speke Estate;¹⁰¹ and in the beginning of 1936 the Committee were instructed to proceed with a further 1,000 houses at Knowsley following a report by Keay which showed that there were 35,868 unsatisfied applicants on the waiting list, 28,699 for

non-parlour houses and 7,169 for parlour types.¹⁰² Since the number of non-parlour houses coming available for letting and re-letting at this time was so small the decision was taken to close the register indefinitely and the allocation policy was yet again amended in an attempt to ensure that those in the greatest need were dealt with first.¹⁰³ Non-parlour houses were now allocated on the following basis: i) Priority cases i.e. tubercular cases 50%, ii) Category "A" 35%, iii) Category "B" 8%, iv) Category "C" 2%, v) Special cases 5%. The quota of vacancies allocated to necessitous transfer cases was discontinued, although urgent cases of this nature were to be dealt with by the City Treasurer and the Director of Housing. The allocation of parlour houses continued to be based on the procedure approved in 1932. All applicants still had to show ability to pay rent, have been resident in Liverpool for not less than 5 years and to have a personal income not in excess of £7 a week.¹⁰⁴

Under the new allocation rules a concession was made to the economic conditions which prevailed in Liverpool. Applicants in receipt of public assistance and unemployment benefit were no longer considered ineligible so long as their current rent book showed their ability regularly to pay rentals of not less than half the amount proposed to be charged by the Corporation. In 1936 Liverpool had the highest ratio of poor relief to the population than any other county borough with 1,205 per 10,000 of the population being assisted.¹⁰⁵ The extent of poverty in the city and the low earning capacity of its population prompted several councillors to move that the maximum income of applicants for houses should be reduced from £7 to £6 a week to ensure that the houses were tenanted by the class of persons for

whom they were intended.¹⁰⁶ This proposal was rejected on the grounds that difficulties were already being experienced in letting some parlour houses. Furthermore the segregation of large bodies of people of the same financial class was now recognized as a deterrent to social progress and the Housing Committee were reluctant to assist further segregation by limiting income to £6 a week.¹⁰⁷

The development of the vast Speke Estate lying 7 miles from the city centre was based on the belief that a social mix enhanced social well-being. When the Council decided to develop Speke as a self-contained unit in 1936 5,000 houses were to be provided under the 1925, 1930 and 1935 Acts.¹⁰⁸ Acute unemployment in the 1930's had stimulated attempts by both local and national government to diversify the area's economy. In 1936 the Corporation had, in an effort to attract new industries to the area, obtained unique powers from Parliament to develop land for industrial use and 341 acres had been set aside for this purpose at Speke.¹⁰⁹ New industries were not likely to be attracted to the area unless houses were going to be available for future workers and so 650 acres of the Speke estate were transferred to the Housing Committee for the erection of 5,000 houses. The Director was instructed to prepare a comprehensive development scheme to include all classes likely to be employed on the industrial estate, and to include the provision of churches, libraries, schools, swimming baths, welfare clinics, shops cinemas and recreational grounds.¹¹⁰ The development was to be carried over on a separate unit, separated from the remainder of the city by a wide park belt. The idea was to create a separate township rather than a dormitory estate in order to minimise journey-to-movements, thereby not adding

to the city's already substantial traffic problem caused by the daily transportation of 1,000's of workers often from outside the city boundaries to the city centre and the docks. Since many families experienced difficulties in adapting to suburban living due to the fact that several years often elapsed before essential amenities were provided, it was felt that migration to suburban estates would be helped if families could be moved to complete townships rather than estates which were growths of the existing town.¹¹¹

The development of the Speke Estate was interrupted by the outbreak of the 2nd World War by which time only 1,631 houses had been built, all of which were erected without subsidy under the 1925 Act. Even though the entire estate was inside the city boundary problems were still encountered with the result that whereas the Director predicted that 300 houses would be completed by the end of 1937, only 25 were finished.¹¹² The sale of a large site to Rootes Aircraft Factory meant that the lay-out had to be amended and work on the scheme did not commence until April. The initial work on the roads and sewers was delayed owing to the difficulty the contractor experienced in retaining the services of Liverpool men due to the transport problems to Speke. Apart from Garston, transport to other areas was difficult owing to the distance involved.¹¹³ The Director pointed out that anything up to 3,000 men could be employed on the schemes at any one time and therefore the Passenger Transport Committee were requested to provide buses at convenient points to ensure that the men were able to begin work at 8a.m. and return at 5p.m., at a reasonable fare.¹¹⁴ Rising tender prices also delayed progress as the Director was asked to report on the desirability of

providing the first 300 houses by direct labour. The Housing Department, Keay informed the Housing Committee, was not anxious to tender owing to its present workload and also in order to complete the first 100 houses by December some inducements might have to be offered to certain operatives by means not open to him.¹¹⁵ The need for houses for the factory personnel was so urgent that Keay was forced to accept tenders of £465 for a parlour house and £385 for a 760 square feet non-parlour type.¹¹⁶

As the number of factories completed at Speke grew so did the pressure on the Housing Committee to provide houses for the new work force. The Chairman of Rootes Securities pointed out in March 1938 that the Committee was failing to honour the agreement he had made with Liverpool Corporation that if he agreed to site his factory at Speke, houses would be provided for his employees. He estimated that 1,285 houses would be required over the following 4 months, more than he had originally calculated mainly because extreme difficulty was being experienced in retaining even Liverpool employees unless they were resident in the district, on account of the inaccessibility of Speke.¹¹⁷ In reply to the criticism from Rootes at the dealys in housing provision Keay reported that the speed at which development could take place was affected by many factors, but particularly by the supply of operatives available in the Liverpool district. At that time contracts had been let for 5,616 houses and flats. Of these 3,510 had been commenced and only 809 completed and certain contractors were already finding difficulty in securing an adequate supply of skilled labour to complete the houses already contracted for within the specified times. He therefore would not recommend that any

further large contracts were let before October at the earliest, thereby ruling out the chance of any radical improvement in the rate of housing provision.¹¹⁸

Owing to the increase in building costs the unsubsidized houses built at Speke had higher rentals than those provided on the Longview Estate; a 950 square feet parlour house cost 18s. 6d. (92.5p) a week, a 760 non-parlour 13s. 6d. (67.5p).¹¹⁹ As the estate was designed for all classes of the community a number of slightly larger sized parlour houses were built with garages to let at 23s. 6d. (£1.17.5p), for occupation by higher paid operatives and foremen.¹²⁰ At the end of 1937 the waiting list which had been closed since February 1936 was re-opened for houses on this inaccessible estate in an attempt to overcome the problems experienced in letting houses on other outlying estates.¹²¹ Houses on the Huyton Farm Estate had been especially difficult to let and in the end applicants who had deposited forms were invited to apply specially for the estate and were dealt with irrespective of rotation.¹²² On the Speke Estate application forms were filed according to whether the applicant was a) already on the list, b) not on the list. The houses were first offered to suitable applicants on list preference being given to cases in which a member of the family was employed on the industrial estate.¹²³

Speke, with its award-winning design was intended to provide a garden suburb township for 22,000 people. However,

"Like several post-war award-winning designs for development in the city, it was never fully implemented and many of the intended community facilities never materialised".¹²⁴
It did however attract new industries to this high unemployment area and got a little way to relieving the vast housing shortage. A total

of 2,721 houses were erected without subsidy under the 1925 Act at Knowsley and Speke before the outbreak of war, a not inconsiderable figure in view of the large slum clearance programme being executed at the same time. During the period of the war an additional 367 houses were built without subsidy under authority of the Ministry of Health.¹¹⁵

The Slum Clearance Programme.

A survey of working class housing conditions carried out in 1933 by H.V. Morton, a leading housing expert, revealed Liverpool's slums to be the worst in the country; nauseating, revolting and sub-human. The report claimed that,

"The heart of Liverpool is one huge slum, a garbage heap that has been accumulating horror and compound interest for 100 years".¹²⁶

There were still 13,000 people living in court houses which were regarded as unfit for human habitation 80 years ago. In describing the conditions prevailing in the courts the report continues,

"Some ghastly architect of the period conceived of the idea of building 2 square brick houses facing one another across a flagged court. Each row of bricks is in fact 2 rows of houses. In the awful court he put 1 water tap for the use of the 2 rows and at the end of each row he built 1 lavatory for about 10 houses. This happened before the invention of plumbing. It was a cess pit lavatory and is still there. And these are still in use in Liverpool as they were in 1833, exactly the same, except that they have rotted, fallen to pieces and become even more terrible, than they were then".¹²⁷

Mortality in slum areas clearly illustrated how such housing affected

public health. In 1931 the general death rate for Liverpool was 14.3 per 1,000, the infantile mortality rate 93 per 1,000.

<u>Slum Wards</u>	<u>Death Rate</u>	<u>Infantile Mortality Rate</u>
Exchange	20.0	117
Everton	17.1	113

Middle

Class Wards

Wavertree	11.6	68
Woolton	12.7	50

128

In the 1920's and early 1930's councillors representing inner city areas had attempted to focus attention on the appalling housing conditions in their districts but in Liverpool, as in the rest of the country, housing policy had concentrated on increasing the size of the total housing stock, to the detriment of the slum problem.¹²⁹ Between 1919 and 1932 31,964 houses were erected in the city but only 1,586 were demolished.¹³⁰ Slum clearance only became a priority after the passing of the 1933 Act which tied Greenwood's subsidies exclusively to housing renewal.

In April 1933 the Medical Officer of Health, responding to the Ministry of Health Circular 1331, carried out a survey of unhealthy areas with the result that the slum clearance target was increased from 2,000 to 13,065 houses.¹³¹ In view of the fact that the average population per dwelling in the St. Anne Street and Gerard Street clearance areas had been 6.6 and 8.6 respectively, Keay suggested that

when the numbers of persons to be dispossessed and rehoused from these insanitary houses was estimated the number of persons per dwelling should not be 4.5 as proposed by the Medical Officer of Health, but 5 or a total of 63,710. According to the 1931 Census the average family size in Liverpool was 4.06 and therefore the number of families likely to be affected was calculated at 15,692.¹³² The Census also provided information of the percentages of families of various sizes and on the basis of this evidence it was proposed that the rehousing accommodation for the 63,710 persons should be as follows: bedsits (5%), 1 bedroom flats (15%), 2 bedroomed houses (32%), 3 bedroomed houses (36%) and 4 bedroomed houses (12%). The Housing Committee from the late 1920's onwards had become increasingly aware of the need for a more diverse housing stock to cater for a wide range of family sizes. In view of the size of the slum clearance programme Keay informed the Ministry that it would take at least 10 years to complete the work. Of the proposed 15,692 replacement dwellings 5,000 were to be provided in the form of suburban cottages and 10,692 in *central* area tenements.

Suburban Housing Under the 1930 Act.

At the beginning of 1934, following a request from the Ministry the slum clearance programme was shortened to 8 years.¹³³ Initially 1,000 houses were to have been provided annually for 5 years but under the new reduced programme 1,000 were to be provided in the first year and then 2,000 annually for 2 years.¹³⁴ Keay only reluctantly agreed to the reduction and cautioned the Committee against being too

optimistic about the rate of housing provision since most of the land available for building was outside the city boundary on the Knowsley Estates and experience had clearly shown that this factor could greatly restrict progress. By the middle of 1937 only 1,267 houses had been completed, proof that Keay's fears were not ill-founded.¹³⁵

The Finch House Estate was the first portion of the Knowsley Estate to be developed under the 1930 Act. All of the 1,152 houses erected between 1935 and 1936 were non-parlour types, 72% of the smaller variety with floor areas of 710 or 620 square feet, 18% with 760 square feet and 5% with 950 square feet.¹³⁶ Owing to the fact that a large proportion of the families to be re-housed consisted of 2-3 persons 5% of the accommodation was provided in cottage flats similar to those built for old age pensioners.¹³⁷

By June 1935 571 houses were ready for occupation but the Housing Committee did not have any dispossessed tenants to accommodate at this time. Owing to the time occupied between the Representation made by the Medical Officer of Health and the 6 months following the Confirmation of Clearance or Compulsory Purchase Orders by the Ministry of Health it was evident that a number of these houses might stand empty for a considerable period. Keay in 1934 had visited 4,180 tenants of central tenements to find out how many would like to transfer to the outskirts. The aim of the exercise was to make available as quickly as possible the largest number of flats in which to accommodate families displaced from clearance areas awaiting demolition and so give practical effect to the suggestion of the Minister of Health in Memorandum 1138, that there may be links in the chain of replacement.¹³⁸ Keay was disappointed to report only 150

families would be willing to move to the Finch House Estate as those wishing to move requested accommodation of estates nearer the city centre. In order to fill the empty 571 houses the Director therefore recommended that 324 should be deemed to have been erected under the 1925 Act and form part of the unassisted scheme for the building of 1,000 houses, a similar number being transferred to the 1930 Account when completed on other parts of the Estate.¹³⁹

In August 1936 Keay informed the Committee that the city's slum property was far greater than realized in 1933 for of the 7,346 properties already represented to date, no less than 2,468 were not included in the original survey and therefore the Ministry should be informed that the original programme would have to be extended.¹⁴⁰ The size of the slum problem was increasing but unfortunately the provision of replacement dwellings was proceeding at an extremely slow rate. The Committee were told that for a variety of reasons it had been possible only to let contracts up to the present time for the building of 1,414 houses. The development of the remaining portion of the Knowsley Estate, the Woolfall Heath Estate, had been delayed by the failure of Huyton-with-Roby Urban District Council and Whiston Rural District Council to honour an agreement made in January 1935 to provide sewerage and drainage on the site. In the beginning of 1936 Keay informed the Committee that the failure of the 2 authorities to provide the necessary outlets was proving to be extremely serious as it was greatly slowing down the slum clearance programme Liverpool undertook to proceed with in 1934.¹⁴¹ Three weeks later agreement was finally reached on the terms which the sewerage was to be drained from the Knowsley Estate into Liverpool sewers but advertisements

inviting tenders for the erection of houses were only inserted in the local press 18 months later. This delay was due to the fact that Keay, having regard to the current activity in the building industry, did not want to launch into a further large scale development until he was sure that material and labour would be available otherwise costs would rise, nullifying the avowed intention of the 1930 Act to provide accommodation for the low-paid ex-slum dwellers.¹⁴²

Delays over the Knowsley Estate prompted the Committee to look for additional land inside the city boundary and in 1935 the 50½ acre Sparrow Hall Estate was acquired by the Housing Committee for housing under the slum clearance programme.¹⁴³ This estate was situated on the East Lancashire Road, the new arterial highway from Liverpool to Manchester, and lay between the older developments of Fazakerley and Norris Green Estates. The original lay-out for the site was submitted in the beginning of 1936 and the number of houses of various types was arrived at by having regard to the accommodation needed to re-house displaced slum dwellers and as the Committee now wished to see a social mix on their new estates 63 of the 630 houses were to be of the parlour type. In view of the fact that it was becoming increasingly difficult to find accommodation for old people and single people displaced by slum clearance schemes 48 bedsits and 26 one-bedroomed flats were included. The majority of the non-parlour houses were of the smaller variety, 380 were 2- and 3-bedroom units of either 710 or 620 square feet, while 111 had 760 square feet. The needs of larger families were catered for by the provision of 46 4-bedroomed non-parlour houses.¹⁴⁴

The contract for the Woolfall Heath Estate was not let until

building on the Sparrow Hall Estate was well under way. The initial tenders from 7 firms was rejected because they were deemed to be too high and a tender from Unit Construction to build 2,000 houses was only accepted in October 1937.¹⁴⁵ Housing standards on this estate were higher than on earlier 1930 estates for 22½% of the houses provided were parlour types and the non-parlour houses were slightly larger. Only 13% had floor areas of 620 square feet, none were built at 710 square feet and 55% had 760 square feet with the bathroom incorporated upstairs.¹⁴⁶ This slight improvement in standards was due to the fact that the Committee now believed that their estates should accommodate a social mix. The overcrowding survey carried out by the Medical Officer of Health had also pointed to the need for larger accommodation as many families on the later 1924 and earlier 1930 estates were living in overcrowded conditions. Although Unit claimed that in order to acquire the contract they were forced to cut prices to the bone,¹⁴⁷ Keay still felt that £389 for a 760 square feet non-parlour house and £475 for a parlour house was excessive. However houses were urgently needed to provide alternative accommodation for displaced slum dwellers and so the tender was accepted.¹⁴⁸ Building by direct labour was proposed but Keay stated that in view of the shortage of skilled labour, and the increased workload of the Housing Department i.e. slum clearance operations, re-development and the relief of overcrowding and the maintenance of housing estates, he preferred to contract out the scheme.

In 1938 a further contract was let to Unit for 305 houses, 50 parlour and 255 non-parlour on the Woolfall Heath Estate¹⁴⁹ and development of the recently acquired 22½ acre Woolton Grove site

began.¹⁵⁰ To re-house families displaced by slum clearance operations in the Woolton district on the south-eastern outskirts of the city a scheme for 38 houses had been built in 1934 on a site in the immediate neighbourhood. Building on the larger Woolton Grove site began in early 1938 but progress was slow because the contractor had difficulty in obtaining sufficient bricklayers.¹⁵¹ Of the 321 houses built on the site 28% were parlour types and the majority of non-parlour houses had 760 square feet.

The need to re-house large numbers of people of low-rent paying capacity led to the building of suburban tenements in Old Swan (222 flats), Wavertree (72 flats), Larkhill (96) and Garston (66 flats). By building tenements higher densities were achieved in suburban slum-clearance schemes and although their erection was opposed by a number of councillors, Keay persuaded the Council that they provided the most suitable accommodation for those slum families who did not need to live in the central areas but did not wish to be housed in cottages 7 miles from the city centre.¹⁵² There can be little doubt that the building of such tenements lowered housing standards for the need to build cheaply resulted in high densities and low standards of internal lay-out.¹⁵³ A survey carried out in 1942 by Liverpool Council of Social Services among 386 tenement dwellers found that only 11% were happy living in flats, 8.4% were undecided and 80.6% would have preferred to live in a house.¹⁵⁴ The flats it was claimed afforded no privacy, were noisy, had filthy staircases and provided nowhere for the children to play.¹⁵⁵

The majority of houses built under the 1930 Act were provided at a time when housing costs were generally low and the rate of interest for loans was only about 3½% which meant that in theory the net rent of a 760 square feet non-parlour house should have been around 3s. 1½d. (15p) a week exclusive i.e. very much lower than equivalent houses built under the 1924 scheme.¹⁵⁶ Many local authorities in fact fixed 1930 rents below 1924 rents but Liverpool unfortunately decided to charge comparable rents after Keay pointed out that the 1930 houses would not necessarily be occupied by families displaced under slum clearance schemes. The Housing Committee's reluctance to charge lower rents for 1930 houses also stemmed from the fact that they were also involved in large scale re-housing in the inner areas on extremely costly sites. High rents therefore it was argued were necessary for suburban housing in order to subsidize high cost bearing inner-city tenements.

The 1930 Act provided for the granting of rent rebates in necessitous cases and the Housing Committee decided that this course of action should be considered rather than fixing rents of 1930 Act houses lower than earlier houses. The question of differential renting did in fact receive a great deal of attention from the Committee for it was feared that the Minister might withhold subsidies if a system of rent rebates was not implemented as the Ministry of Health Circular 1130 had clearly stated that,

"exchequer assistance..... was intended to enable a local authority to let a proportion of the houses at a definitely lower rent than that normally charged for other houses owned by them".¹⁵⁸

A Special Sub-Committee was appointed in February 1935 to consider the whole rent question¹⁵⁹ and an investigation was carried out into how a

rent rebate scheme similar to that adopted by Birmingham would operate in Liverpool. For the purpose of the investigation the rent paying capacity of people to be rehoused from the Gerard Street slum clearance area in inner-city tenements and suburban housing, was analysed.¹⁶⁰ Under the Birmingham scheme a sliding scale was used taking into account the number in each family and a minimum rent of 6s. 6d. was payable by a tenant receiving rent rebate. The Committee found that 69.8% of families in this slum clearance area would be entitled to rent relief under the Birmingham Scale, a figure which persuaded the Committee that the scale was certainly not suitable for Liverpool. The cost of relief could be met in one of two ways, either the other tenants would have to bear the cost on the housing or the housing rate would have to be increased. The large number of arrears cases among these families clearly showed that there would be insufficient remaining tenants to bear the cost of rent relief and fearing heavy rate increases the Committee abandoned the idea of implementing a rebate system. By this time it was becoming apparent that subsidies were not going to be withheld if differential renting was not introduced and the subject consequently was left in abeyance. The Committee still preferred to fit tenants in according to rent rather than to adjust rents to tenants' income. This removed the necessity for repeated inquiries into incomes but as many Labour councillors pointed out it was not a very satisfactory system for although a range of houses was provided at different rents, the cheapest house was still much too expensive for poor families and it also failed to take account of the changing needs of the families who could be plunged periodically into poverty through unemployment,

sickness or the birth of an additional child.

Even when the Housing Revenue Account was established following the rent pooling legislation of 1935, Liverpool still failed to introduce differential renting. Freed from the shackles of the detailed control of the Ministry of Health the Housing Committee in 1935 had been in a position to adjust rents as they saw fit. However no rent revision was undertaken and even 1919 Act rents were not adjusted to bring them more in line with cheaper, suburban 1924 and 1930 housing.¹⁶¹ Rent revision depended on the prosperity of the Housing Revenue Account and the Housing Committee argued that there were insufficient surplus funds to reduce Addison rents. The annual surplus from "profit" earning houses built in the later stages of the 1924 scheme and under the 1930 Act was offset by the considerable number of high cost bearing dwellings built under the 1919 Act, during the early years of the 1924 Act and under inner-city re-housing schemes. Consequently despite repeated deputations from tenant's associations 1919 Act houses remained upto 4s. 0d. (20p) a week more expensive than other council housing.¹⁶² The gap between Addison houses and later houses was however reduced slightly at the end of the period when the City Council introduced a variation in the rate compounding allowances which had the effect of increasing the rates payable on houses rated up to £13 a year.¹⁶³ As this did not include Addison houses their rents were reduced by 2d. (1p) a week owing to a fall in rate poundage while other non-parlour rents rose by between 3d. and 11d. a week. During August 1939 many tenants on 1924 and 1930 estates in fact withheld their rents for a number of weeks in protest at these increased rents.¹⁶⁴

Despite the many obstacles in the way of the suburban housing programme by the end of this period 4,663 dwellings had been provided under the 1930 Act, 4062 houses and 601 flats. The Housing Committee however had encountered many problems in letting the houses situated on the more inaccessible 1930 estates lying up to 7 miles from the city centre. In October 1938 the housing register had been re-opened for parlour houses owing to the problems in letting houses on the remote Woolfall Heath Estate.¹⁶⁵ It was hardly surprising that the Housing Committee had difficulty in persuading ex-slum dwellers to transfer to distant estates since rents had not been reduced to compensate for their low-rent paying capacity or for the cost of travel to and from these remote districts which meant that many families chose instead to accept a tenancy of a new inner-city tenement.

Inner-City Building Under the 1930 Act

During the 1920's the low-density suburban cottage was viewed as the ideal home for working class families. Only London and Liverpool, who had traditions of tenement building going back to the middle of the nineteenth century, continued to build this type of dwelling in the 1920's. Far fewer flats however were provided than cottages, accounting as they did for less than one twelfth of the annual municipal production in Liverpool, between 1920 and 1932.¹⁶⁶ After 1933 the building of flats increased markedly and by 1939 3,727 had been provided under slum clearance legislation and a large programme of building was still in hand.¹⁶⁷ This movement to flats occurred as

a result of the termination of the Wheatley subsidy and the launching of the national slum clearance campaign, and the need to build at high densities. In Liverpool flats contributed about 14% of the total subsidized building between the wars compared with a figure of 5% nationally.¹⁶⁸

Many reasons can be put forward as to why inner-city tenement building constituted such a large part of Liverpool's housing programme in the 1930's. For example, large scale slum clearance operations before 1914 had established the tenement as the best solution to the problems of re-housing dispossessed slum dwellers because of their low rent paying capacity which made cottage building on expensive central land out of the question, and their need to be re-housed near to the docks because of the casual nature of their work.¹⁶⁹ In the 1930's it had been revealed that the majority of slum dwellers were in fact not tied industrially to their areas¹⁷⁰ but nevertheless central tenement building was still an attractive proposition because it overcame the problem of how to transport 1,000's more workers from the outskirts to the city centre.¹⁷¹ The development of Speke in the late 1930's aimed at alleviating the transport problem by taking the factory to the workers but during the decade the severe limitations of the transport system must have played an important part in policy making decisions.

Keay also was an enthusiastic supporter of the modern flat movement and while the majority of City Architects regarded flats as an unfortunate necessity, he was unusual in making a virtue of them.¹⁷² He greatly admired the modern flats built in Vienna under Socialist administrations in the 1920's believing that such dwellings

provided healthy homes, convenient to clean and keep warm. The movement to flats was further encouraged by Part I of the 1935 Housing Act which empowered local authorities to clear congested areas and to re-develop them on modern lines.¹⁷³ The Ministry in framing the legislation had anticipated that the re-development of cleared sites and the adjacent land should be for the erection of flats of 3 or more storeys in height, whereas under the 1930 Act it had been recommended that alternative accommodation should be provided by the erection of cottages on sites other than those on which the slum property formerly existed. This Act was ideally suited to dealing with Liverpool's severely congested inner areas and the city was in fact the first to produce a re-development scheme under the legislation.¹⁷⁴ Prior to the suspension of operations under the Housing Act of 1939 action had been taken to re-develop 8 areas, comprising 333 acres near to the city centre. In these 8 areas there were 9,613 dwellings, many of which were occupied by more than 1 family.¹⁷⁵

Flats certainly were not preferred because of cheapness since they were far more expensive to build than *non-parlour* houses even when account was taken of the additional subsidy. They were considerably better designed than pre-war tenements, though still smaller in area than council houses. Rents ranged from 5s. 0d. (25p) for a 1-bedroomed flat to 9s. 6d. (47.5p) for a 4-bedroomed dwelling which meant that in effect they were not very much cheaper than *non-parlour* houses.¹⁷⁶

Flat building under the 8 year slum clearance programme got off to a slow start owing to the fact that central land needed for decanting purposes was extremely difficult to obtain. In 1936 a surveyor was

appointed whose sole task was to seek sites for development, while estate agents and surveyors were continually contacted to enquire whether they had any sites suitable for central tenement building.¹⁷⁷ Shortages of labour and materials also slowed down progress and by 1939 only 3,727 flats had been completed out of the original 10,692 planned.

Overcrowding

The last major innovation in housing policy between the wars came with the 1935 Housing Act which made overcrowding a punishable offence and imposed a duty on local authorities to abate it. In accordance with the requirements of the Act an inspection was made by officers of the Public Health Department, of houses up to, and including a rateable value of £16, and other houses known to be let to more than 1 family, in order to ascertain the extent of overcrowding in the city. The Medical Officer of Health's Report revealed that of the 155,399 houses surveyed 11,554 or 7.43% were found to be overcrowded.¹⁷⁸ A high percentage of council houses were found to be overcrowded viz. 2,183 or 10.38% of the 21,025 dwellings inspected.¹⁷⁹ This was due to the fact that in older properties families had grown up and many children on marriage found it impossible to obtain suitable alternative accommodation and so remained with their parents. Also in the houses erected under the 1924 Act preference had been given to the housing of the largest families in accordance with the intention of the Act. Furthermore in the late 1920's and the early 1930's there had been a tendency to limit non-parlour houses to floor areas not

exceeding 760 square feet and in the absence of larger accommodation the Housing Department had no alternative but to put large families into whatever accommodation was available. In order to abate overcrowding, Keay proposed that 5,000 houses were to be erected in the next 3 years, in addition to the slum clearance programme and the proposals for unsubsidised building under the 1925 Act.

In 1938 a second survey was carried out by the Medical Officer of Health in order to ascertain how successful the Health Department had been in dealing with overcrowding.¹⁸⁰ The new survey revealed that the percentage of known overcrowded families within the city had fallen from 7.43% to 3.91% in 2 years. There were 6,144 known cases as against 11,554 in May 1936. Overcrowding in council houses however had only fallen to 8.19% i.e. 1,747 families, owing to the fact that houses had not yet been provided by the Housing Committee for the abatement of overcrowding and those houses which were available were simply not big enough. Between 1936 and 1939 only 60 flats were built under the 1935 Act as attention was focussed on slum clearance which provided far more favourable subsidy provisions.¹⁸¹ By 1939 only 310 4-bedroomed and 16 5-bedroomed flats and houses had been built which meant that the majority of overcrowded families could not be transferred to larger non-parlour type accommodation as it did not exist.¹⁸² Nor in the absence of a rent rebate scheme, could they be transferred to larger but more expensive parlour houses as large families tended to be poor ones. Council houses had been built initially to improve the housing conditions of the people but the modern properties were in danger of deteriorating into slums because of the failure of the Housing Committee to establish a rent policy

designed to meet housing need. Not all overcrowding however was due to large families for in the original survey 6.2% of council houses were sub-let, much of which was overcrowded.¹⁸³ However whether a house was overcrowded as a result of family size or sub-letting the reason was generally the same, poverty. In the case of sub-letting however overcrowding was easily abated by serving notice to quit on the sub-tenant. When overcrowding was the result of family size the problem was more intractable.

Housing Maintenance

During the 1920's maintenance costs had been relatively low despite the problem of sub-letting as the housing stock was new and the class of tenant accommodated tended to look after the houses. In the 1930's however maintenance costs rose steeply due to a number of factors. Many of the houses built under the 1919 Act had to have certain fittings renewed and whereas the Committee had only decorated the exterior of houses in the 1920's, in the 1930's it was decided to decorate the interior of houses also every 7 years.¹⁸⁴ The number of re-lettings also increased markedly due to the natural desire on the part of the Committee to transfer tenants in financial difficulties to lower-rented accommodation. This resulted in expenses being incurred in addition to the normal cost of re-decorating every 7 years and in the cases of extreme poverty the cost of re-decorating was extremely high.

Maintenance costs in the 1930's however were most severely affected by the damage caused by the transference of vermin from old

properties to new council houses. As the Committee housed more and more low-income families, especially those from slum clearance areas dirty and verminous houses became more prevalent. In 1934 when the Health Committee and the Housing Committee agreed to share the cost of disinfecting council properties only about 800 houses were being treated a year, at a cost of £1,400.¹⁸⁵ By the end of 1935 the fumigating of van loads of furniture and the disinfection of houses was costing £19,000 a year, of which £12,000 was chargeable to the Housing Committee.¹⁸⁶ The Medical Officer of Health claimed that experience had shown that there was a wide spread infestation of houses and furniture with bed bugs and that the infestation of new houses brought with it in its train such deplorable results that no trouble or reasonable expenditure should be spared to prevent it. The bed bug was a very important factor in the evolution of a slum. It was feared that if the new corporation houses were allowed to become bug-infested there was a considerable likelihood that their inhabitants would allow them to revert to slum-like conditions which they were designed to replace.

In an attempt to counteract the problem new, more economical methods, and more effective methods of disinfecting were employed and the furniture of all families re-housed from slum clearance areas was compulsory treated before it was placed in council houses.¹⁸⁷ Unfortunately only too frequently houses turned into or relapsed into a bug infested state owing to the indifference of the housewife to 1 or 2 bugs and it became clear that expenditure on disinfection would largely be wasted unless the tenants themselves were re-educated and kept under close supervision. The Housing Committee consequently

approved the appointment of two women property managers for the after-care of tenants, particularly those removed from the slums, instructing them on the best use of the improved standard of amenities provided in their new homes.¹⁸⁸ From February 1937 onwards inspectors from the Housing Department also checked all houses regularly for vermin. As the inspections progressed the standard of cleanliness improved for in 1937 houses below average good standard of cleanliness equalled 3.11%, while in the six month period 1/4/38 to 30/9/38 out of a total 6,030 houses inspected only 54, or 0.09% were below standard.¹⁹⁰ Early information was therefore obtained about those houses likely to be verminous which in the long-term cut the cost of disinfection and so aided the Repair Fund.

Despite the economic depression, the many changes in policy and the decisive shift in emphasis to slum-clearance with all its inherent problems, the Housing Committee provided 20,478 dwellings during the 1930's, 1,654 more than in the 1920's. Nearly three quarters of the dwellings erected were in the suburbs and there can be little doubt that the work done by the Housing Committee in rehousing families in healthier more salubrious conditions contributed greatly to the fall in the city's death rate from 18.5 per 1,000 in 1910-1914 to 13.3 per thousand in 1939.¹⁹¹ Between 1936 and 1939 overcrowding had been relieved in 1,581 cases¹⁹² and 5,792 houses had been demolished during the decade compared to only 1,386 in the 1920's.¹⁹³ Liverpool City Council had been far more active than most other local authorities and by the outbreak of the Second World War a sixth of the city's housing stock were publically owned, compared with less than one tenth in

England and Wales as a whole. However, despite such efforts Liverpool's housing problem was still not solved since there were still 30,000 unsatisfied applicants on the waiting list and there were still 15,000 insanitary slum properties still waiting for demolition. In 1939 many aspects of Liverpool's housing problem remained unsolved.

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CHAPTER IV.

From Court House to Council House.

The preceding chapters have established how and why the 33,355 suburban council dwellings built by Liverpool City Council between the war came into existence. This chapter seeks to establish to what extent those suburban dwellings differed from traditional forms of Liverpool working class housing and how their provision effected working class housing and living standards.

Housing Standards before 1875.

During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Britain's towns grew at a phenomenal rate. Unfortunately speculative builders during this period were allowed to build in whatsoever place or form they wanted, unchecked by public control. The type of accommodation they provided for the working classes varied from region to region but it all had one thing in common, it was built solely for the realisation of profit without reference to health or decency. In Leeds almost all working class housing was of the back-to-back variety built in long unbroken rows or enclosed courts. This type of dwelling generally only had two rooms and the worst reached densities of 70 to 80 houses to the acre.¹ In Glasgow the overcrowded tenement was the characteristic working class dwelling while Birmingham and Nottingham were characterized by insanitary courts and rookeries. Liverpool, suffering more than most from the demographic pressures of eighteenth and nineteenth century industrialism, housed its working class population in notorious cellars and court houses where death rates were as high as 40 to 50

per 1,000.

Bye-Law Terraced Housing.

The Public Health Act of 1875 was designed to check the worst features of contemporary building by regulating the standard of building and the width of streets. Bye-law terraced housing between 1875 and 1914 was mainly of four types. The first had four rooms, two up and two down, the two rooms downstairs usually being called the kitchen and the scullery. The kitchen was the larger of the rooms where the family lived, cooked, ate and sometimes slept. The scullery was for washing, laundering and bathing. No hot water system or gas lighting was provided and at the back of the house there was a yard, usually just big enough for the W.C. and the dustbin. The houses were provided in streets of the minimum width required by the bye-laws but they afforded very little privacy owing to the fact that their front doors opened directly on to the pavement.² Houses of this type were built in Liverpool right up to the end of the nineteenth century.

Housing standards in fact only improved very slowly after 1875. Working class families were given slightly more space in the second type of terraced housing to be built where the addition of a makeshift lean-to scullery at the rear of the house was provided to relieve the congestion of the back kitchen. Such an arrangement allowed working class housewives to keep the front room of the house for special occasions, that is, if it was not required as an additional bedroom. By the 1890's it had become common practice to build a third bedroom over the scullery with the unfortunate result that direct light was excluded from the rear room on the ground

floor. These houses were deeper than they were wide, an arrangement which suited the speculative builder since the number of houses per acre was limited by the width of frontage allowed each house. By the 1890's however a little more earth space was given which meant that it was possible to provide a set-back from the pavement of about six feet. In some cases an effort was also made to secure privacy by the building of a wall and the provision of an iron gate.

By the beginning of the twentieth century new building regulations had given rise to the fourth type of housing. These houses had a more spacious lay-out with the amount of set-back increased to ten to twelve feet and a bay window provided. The accommodation consisted of a parlour, kitchen, scullery, usually a small larder under the stairs, while upstairs there were three bedrooms, a bathroom and W.C. These superior terraced houses were usually also provided with a hot water system and gas lighting.³ In the interests of economy however frontages had not been dramatically improved. Under Liverpool bye-laws 41 houses to an acre could be provided so long as the frontage was limited to 15 feet, while a frontage of 18 feet dramatically reduced the permitted density to 31.⁴

From the point of view of construction and sanitary arrangement bye-law terrace houses were well built but unfortunately they came,

"in interminable rows, they are all built to the same plan, with the same height of rooms; the same width of street; the same bay window; the same red brick; the same slate roofs; there are 1,000's of them; their monotony is appalling".⁵

The late Victorian and Edwardian developer was not interested in design or lay-out, only in the provision of small, cheap houses which yielded the maximum amount of profit.

The Garden City Movement.

The late nineteenth century was a period of anti-urbanism when writers such as William Morris and John Ruskin lamented the effects of industrialization and advocated a return to a small-scale economy of agriculture and a simple rural life. Progressive housing theorists also rejected the drabness and ugly conformity of bye-law housing which displayed so little regard for the human environment. They sought a healthier more attractive alternative, based on the village and the countryside. The model villages of Port Sunlight and Bournville were in fact a reaction against metropolitan life and form the first stage of England's contribution to the modern art of town planning.⁶

Port Sunlight was founded in 1888 by W.H. Lever for the workers employed in his factory and was an experiment in housing reform, as well as an example of industrial paternalism. The aim was to re-create the atmosphere of English village life by the building of picturesque half-timbered houses, a village green and an English pub.⁷ Each house had a back yard beyond which lay a service road and a wide area of allotments. A few years later in 1895 the Cadbury brothers decided to build a model village next to their cocoa factory at Bournville. The village was based on a belief in low-density housing and consequently each house had a garden of about one eighth of an acre.⁸

The reaction against high density bye-law housing gained momentum and three years after Bournville was founded, Ebenezer Howard published his famous book Tomorrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform. Instead of model villages this book advocated that the

whole population of the country should be re-housed in a network of self-contained garden cities which combined all the advantages of town and country without the disadvantages of either. Each city was to have a population of about 32,000, its own industries, shops and communal buildings. When the population of a city reached 32,000 development would be halted in order to maintain the agricultural belt around the city and another city established some distance away in its own agricultural zone.⁹

As a result of Howard's book, retitled Garden Cities of Tomorrow in 1902, the Garden City Association was founded in 1899 and in 1903, together with the Garden City Pioneer Company, it began to raise money for the redevelopment of Letchworth Garden City on a co-ownership basis. The two architects employed on the scheme, Raymond Unwin and Barry Parker, ensured that the garden city movement became synonymous with low-density housing set in large gardens surrounded by trees and open spaces. Letchworth was the only true garden city built before the First World War owing to the fact that the transport revolution did away with the need for satellite towns. Garden suburbs, situated at the periphery of cities, instead became the typical housing pattern of the twentieth century.

By 1913 55 low-density housing schemes on garden city lines had been started in Britain and their development marked a revolution in residential lay-out and design.¹⁰ Instead of providing houses at 40 or more to the acre, garden city housing was built at 12 to the acre. Such a reduction in density was achieved by introducing the occasional cul-de-sac into a scheme which saved road costs. Set-backs and open-spaces were also used to create breaks in the

building line thereby producing more picturesque and varied lay-outs. With regard to the internal arrangement of the houses the main aim was to eliminate cramped frontages and rear back projections which blocked healthy sunlight from the interior of bye-law housing. Frontages consequently were increased, sometimes up to 25 feet, in order to allow the scullery and the third bedroom to be brought into the body of the house. Following the example of middle class houses the bathroom was also located upstairs.

Pre-war garden suburb housing, even today, appears attractive and well-planned. When houses in Wavertree Garden Suburb, Liverpool, began to be sold off in the 1930's they were advertized as "having been designed and planned by idealists".¹¹ The picturesque individuality of garden suburb housing however had not come cheaply. Before the First World War such housing was beyond the means of all but the most affluent members of the working classes who could afford to be part of a co-ownership scheme. The first houses to be tenanted in Wavertree Garden Suburb for example, contained 6 teachers, 13 clerks, 7 printers, 5 building contractors, a chief steward and a musician, paying inclusive rents of 7s. 0d. (35p) a week for a two-bedroomed unit, 8s. 6d. (42.5p) for a 3-bedroomed type.¹² Hempstead Garden Suburb had in fact been designed from the first as a middle class dormitory.¹³

When local authorities had begun building under Part III of the 1890 Housing Act many recognized the desirability of low-density housing but it soon became evident that the price of land prohibited building to densities found at Port Sunlight and Bournville. London City Council for example found that it was only able to provide houses at a density of over 25 to the acre which meant that wide

frontage houses, with all they meant in terms of internal arrangement, were an unrealistic proposition. The only way garden city housing could be provided by the state without subsidies was if it was limited to the most affluent members of the working classes. The house-plans provided by the Board of Agriculture in 1913 were on garden city lines but they were intended for the labour aristocracy of the village community who would release their old property for impoverished farm labourers. By 1914 therefore garden city housing was advocated by the state for the most affluent members of the working classes. It took a war to bring it within [the reach of the working class population as a whole.

Suburban Council Housing.

i) Lay-out.

By accepting the recommendations of the Tudor Walter's Report which were incorporated in the LGB Housing Manual of 1919,¹⁴ the Coalition government ensured that the quality of inter-war council housing was superior to existing working class housing in the private sector and also a marked improvement on pre-war local authority building. The Manual informed local authorities that densities were not to exceed 12 houses to the acre in urban areas, 8 in rural areas and that suburban sites should be used because of cheapness and attractive outlooks. A great deal of attention was in fact given to the planning and lay-out of housing estates and local architects were encouraged to imaginatively exploit the physical configuration of sites.

Unfortunately inter-war suburban housing lacked the picturesque individuality of garden city housing mainly because more economical

forms were required for the ordinary working class market. The Tudor Walter's Committee, faced with the economic realities of the need for low-cost building, had advocated the need for simplification of design and standardization of building components, such as doors, windows, fire grates and mantels. With regard to elevations every interesting feature had to be eliminated in the quest for economy and consequently the houses, copied from designs in the Manual by local authorities all over Britain, soon came to be dubbed "boxes with lids". The houses had hipped roofs, symmetrical multi-paned casement windows and hooded doors. Such designs were far removed from the romantic, gable-ridden elevations associated with the pre-war garden city movement.¹⁵

The Manual recommended decorative elevations only for those houses in the most prominent part of an estate, while those in less conspicuous parts were to rely for visual effect on the "grouping of simpler blocks".¹⁶ Unfortunately local authorities faced with the problem of providing large numbers of small, cheaper houses tended to pay little attention to the aesthetic quality of their housing estates. By 1920 Unwin was lamenting the tedium of municipal suburbia and he criticized local authorities for not using "grouping" to make a more varied effect with their plain houses.¹⁷

ii) House-plans.

In terms of size and amenity the house-plans illustrated in the Manual were far superior to pre-war working class housing. Local authorities were allowed to modify the Manual's house-plans, provided they adhered to the spirit of the recommendations and space regulations. However the speed at which houses were required and

the unfamiliarity of large-scale council house building meant that local authorities tended to rely heavily on the Manual. The result was that a relatively standardized house form emerged which eroded the regional diversity of pre-war working class housing. The Manual stated that the general dwelling type was to be the two-storey cottage, while flats and bungalows were to be built only in exceptional circumstances. Two classes of cottages were permitted which were unlike any pre-war bye-law property- "A" (non-parlour) and "B" (parlour) types. While three bedrooms were to be the norm a small proportion of two and four bedroomed houses were to be allowed on most estates.

The basic requirement of a house is space, and the Manual recommended 900 square feet for three-bedroomed non-parlour units and 1,080 square feet for parlour types: this was a vast improvement on bye-law housing which averaged only 650 square feet. These dimensions were in fact comparable with many middle-class detached houses and considerably larger than most speculative semi-detached.¹⁸ The decision whether or not to include parlours in the new municipal property had in fact been "the most debateable point in reference to accommodation" for the Tudor Walter's Committee. Unwin and the other architect sitting on the Committee, Frank Baines,¹⁹ both believed that where a tenant could only afford a modest rent, it was far more practical to provide a large living room than a small living room and even smaller parlour.²⁰ The Tudor Walter's Committee however, when interviewing families both in urban and rural areas, found that the majority wanted parlours. A parlour was a sign of respectability, a symbol that, like the middle classes, the working classes could afford the luxury

of having a superfluous room. The parlour was a place to house the piano and the ancestral furniture and a place to gather at times such as funerals, weddings and other special occasions.²¹

However, despite the fact that the Tudor Walter's Report recommended that, "whenever possible a parlour should be provided", only six of the nineteen house types illustrated in the Report included a parlour and as a result the A3 house, i.e. 3-bedroomed non-parlour type, was the most widely built house throughout the country under the 1919 Act.

The Tudor Walter's Report had suggested that as working class living standards continued to rise there would be an increasing wish to differentiate rooms by functions, that cooking would increasingly be done in the scullery, while meals would be eaten in the living room. The separation of eating and cooking meant the additional expense of an extra fire and consequently it was recommended that where gas was available, a gas cooker would be placed in the scullery. Three basic plan types were illustrated in ascending order of cost, the cheapest having the cooking range in the living room whilst the scullery contained a gas cooker for occasional use when the range was not lit, in the second a modified grate was provided only for limited cooking, while in the third cooking was eliminated completely from the living room. In the Manual however only the most basic method was recommended, the one in which the cooking range was situated in the living room. The Manual's house designs consequently were unlike modern houses in that there was no kitchen, only a scullery with a cooking range in the living room.

The Manual recommended that the scullery in non-parlour houses should contain a coal-copper for water heating. Hot water was to be

supplied directly from the copper to the bath, which therefore had to be located in the scullery. Only in parlour houses was the bathroom to be upstairs, an arrangement which necessitated the addition of a hot-water circulating system, the hot water coming off a back boiler working off the living room fire. The scullery was also to contain a well ventilated larder, a very important feature of a house in the days before refrigerators. Space also had to be found for a mangle or wringer and wash-tubs and ample cupboard space and shelves to take pots, pans, brushes and other such appliances.²³ Opening off the scullery there was to be a coal-store and in the case of non-parlour houses a W.C. In parlour houses the W.C. was situated upstairs.

Upstairs bedrooms of 150, 100 and 65 minimum square feet were recommended as providing for the proper separation of the sexes in an average family of five persons. With regards to internal arrangements in the Manual internal passageways on the ground floor were eliminated and the living room was used for circulation. Prospective tenants however criticized this arrangement mainly because it meant that chamber pots had to be carried from the bedrooms through the living room to be emptied. When the Manual was revised in 1920 therefore direct access was provided to all rooms from a central circulation space.

Before the First World War, apart from in rural areas, only the middle classes had enjoyed the privacy and advantages afforded by a garden. By limiting building to 12 houses to an acre now working class families were to enjoy the benefits of a sizeable garden plot. In the Manual houses were generally shown set back from the pavement at a distance of between half to the full depth of the

house, which meant that these houses escaped the "dust, noise and small nuisances" of busy main roads.²⁴ The provision of a rear garden meant that children had somewhere to play safely while at the same time it gave parents the opportunity to grow vegetables and flowers.

There can be little doubt that the recommendations regarding layout and house design in the Manual represented a major revolution in working class house standards, despite the fact that by placing the bath in the scullery of non-parlour houses, they were far less heroic than they might have been. Unfortunately as soon as it became apparent that Addison houses were costing upwards of £1,000 to build the newly established standards began to be attacked. By the middle of 1921 local authorities were being urged to reduce room sizes and encouraged to concentrate on building small 2-bedroomed non-parlour houses, while in 1923 the government went so far as to state that it was willing to sanction the building of houses without bathrooms.²⁵

The squeeze on housing standards worsened with the passing of the Chamberlain Act of 1923 which excluded parlour houses from the subsidy scheme and limited the £6 subsidy to houses with a superficial area of not less than 620 square feet and not more than 950 square feet. The Wheatley Act of 1924 restored to the local authorities the power to build parlour houses but the demise of this type of house continued due to the fact that local authorities preferred to minimise their rate contribution by building cheaper non-parlour houses. During the late 1920's and the early 1930's the cut in subsidy, the economic climate and the continuing need for cheaper forms of housing re-inforced the trend away from parlour

houses. It also led to a reduction in dimensions and overall living space as frontages and internal layout became more cramped. By 1932 local authorities had to concentrate on providing small non-parlour houses not exceeding 760 square feet, a far cry from the generous space requirements of the Manual.

When the government announced in 1933 that, from now on it was going to concentrate public effort and money on the clearance and improvement of slum conditions, it was feared that further economies in space and standards would be required to bring council housing within the means of ex-slum dwellers. Standards probably reached their lowest level around 1936 and as Burnett points out,

"it was not without difficulty that the fundamental principles of Tudor Walters were maintained in face of pressure for the minimum standard house".²⁶

Economies were made by increasing the density of development on housing sites and by reducing architectural and landscaping detail to a minimum. Whereas houses had been provided in blocks of 2 and 4 under the Addison scheme, terraces of 12 houses were now common place. Officially room size were unchanged but there was an increasing tendency to regard the minima as the maxima. Despite the fact that the basic philosophy expressed by the Tudor Walter's Report remained throughout the inter-war period housing policies continually squeezed housing standards so that by 1939 suburban council housing was merely a pale reflection of Unwin's romantic, picturesque garden city housing.

Housing Standards in Liverpool

i) Under the Addison Scheme

Before the First World War housing standards in Liverpool had been extremely low. In an attempt to relieve the colossal slum problem the Housing Committee had built 2,895 dwellings but by modern standards even these dwellings were of poor quality. They had been built for low-income, ex-slum dwellers and had been provided mainly in tenement form in the central areas of the city. In 1919 therefore the Housing Committee was called upon to provide a far superior type of dwelling, for a different class of tenant. The houses they provided were laid out at 8 to 12 to the acre, built in blocks of 2 and 4 with front and back gardens. The majority of houses were of brick although a large proportion were of various types of concrete construction.²⁷ House plans were standardized to about six types, the majority of houses being of the plain, boxes-with-lids, neo-Georgian type.

Every attempt was made to relieve the monotony and uniformity which resulted from the repetition of a limited number of house types on large estates. The Parks and Gardens Committee planted hundreds of trees along carriageways and avenues which did much to screen the plainness of the houses. Unfortunately many of the trees were Dutch elms and their death over the past few years clearly shows how trees can enhance the environment and contribute to the "street picture". The most picturesque lay-outs achieved by Badger were those which benefited from the survival of large trees which provided contrast with the small two-storied cottages. Badger and Brodie in fact tried to ensure that as far as possible all the natural beauties and amenities of sites were preserved, and in some cases improved upon. From the point of view of situation and natural beauty, Springwood Estate was the most magnificent of all

1919 sites and in its lay-out the preservation of its fine trees, combined with its advantages of contour were carefully and effectively treated. A feature of the Larkhill Estate was the preservation of a magnificent belt of trees flanking a drive which was transformed into a beautiful boulevard 230 feet wide, Muirhead Avenue.

Although Badger tried to introduce as much variety as possible into his lay-outs, on less conspicuous parts of some estates monotony undoubtedly creeps in due to the "sameness" of the houses. He was not a qualified architect and he failed to use "groupings" and set-backs sufficiently or imaginatively enough to mask his simple house designs. However by the prolific use of trees and careful landscaping much of the housing was attractive and definitely compared very favourably with anything produced in other parts of the country.

Addison housing may have been relatively dull from an architectural point of view but in terms of size and amenity it was of an extremely high standard. Nationally the A3 house had been the type most generally provided but in Liverpool far more parlour houses, 64%, were built than non-parlour types. The superficial area within containing walls varied from 1,018 feet to 1,060 feet in parlour houses, 854 to 894 feet in non-parlour houses, i.e. only slightly less than the maximum dimensions recommended by the Manual. Attempts by the Ministry of Health to reduce room sizes after 1921 were largely resisted by the Housing Committee. The only concession made by the Housing Committee was that 24 smaller non-parlour houses were built with general dimensions reduced to 760 square feet.²⁸

With regards to the internal arrangement of the houses direct access was provided to all rooms from a central circulation space. On the issue of how best to arrange cooking and heating functions Liverpool chose to ignore the advice of the Manual and all cooking was eliminated from the living rooms in both non-parlour and parlour houses. The living rooms contained only a "sitting room" grate with back boiler, while a gas cooker was provided in the scullery. This arrangement allowed the bath to be placed upstairs which necessitated the introduction of an expensive hot water circulating system. A hand basin was provided in the bathroom of all houses, although a separate upstairs W.C. was only included in parlour houses, the internal W.C. in non-parlour houses being provided in a lobby off the scullery. Such a high level of services was not provided by many other local authorities. For example the most common house built by London County Council had a downstairs bath,²⁹ while houses in Bristol had no constant hot water system. The bath water was heated in a copper and pumped by hand to the bathroom, which incidentally did not have a hand basin.³⁰ The Manual had merely been a guide to local authorities and each authority could pitch its standards as high or as low as it pleased, within certain limits. The high standards achieved by Liverpool were the direct result of the work done by the two sub-committees, the Special Technical Sub-Committee and the Women's Sub-Committee, established by the Housing Committee to investigate every aspect of the housing issue.³¹

The middle class ladies of the Women's Sub-Committee ensured that only the most up-to-date equipment and services were included in the new suburban houses. Good sized sculleries were provided which

contained, as well as the gas cooker, a gas heated wash boiler and clothes rails, a glazed sink with ample wooden draining boards. Other features in the houses included an internal coal-store, situated off the scullery, a well ventilated larder in the hall, a large cupboard to one side of the fireplace in the living room and a linen cupboard on the landing, which in the case of parlour houses contained the hot water tank. In the interests of economy the hot water tank was placed in the scullery in non-parlour houses. All houses had a hall and well-lighted staircase and landing and separate access to all bedrooms. Only three-bedroomed houses were built under the Addison Scheme, gas fires and cupboards being provided in the two larger bedrooms. Apart from the small Elm House Estate, all Addison houses were supplied with electric lighting and power plugs.

Electricity, hot-water systems, separate bathrooms, inside toilets were luxuries previously unheard of in working class houses and consequently the Housing Committee were inundated with requests for their new houses.

As soon as they started to build them, my husband said we should get our name down for one of them. They were such lovely, you know, modern houses just like you would find in the countryside. The old terrace houses were dark and ever so miserable but well the council houses were bright, we were ever so pleased when we were given one. Compared with the old houses they were a dream to keep clean and then having running hot water, well that was wonderful, especially for the women with young kiddies. All my life, till we came here, I had had to go down a yard to the toilet, you can imagine the difference it made having the toilet next to your bedroom, especially in winter, you felt like the Queen. Mind you, they weren't cheap, the rents in those days were very high but everybody who could afford it wanted one. They were called sunshine houses, you know, because they were so lovely and bright.³²

The new houses were also in such great demand owing to the chronic

housing shortage which existed in the city.

Well, after the war there just wasn't any houses for anybody, everybody had to squeeze in with their parents if they weren't lucky enough to get a couple of rooms. At the time the Corporation were the only people building houses so, as you can imagine, everybody wanted to get on their waiting list. I don't know if you know this, but the houses were for the men, for the soldiers who had been in the trenches. So many men had been killed or gassed that the government felt it had to pay the people back, give us something, like, and so they built those houses for us. My god, I was certainly glad to get this house because we had been living with his parents and they had made my life hell. I had got pregnant when he was on leave and we couldn't get married till he came home again after the war. My mother had thrown me out and I had to go and live with his parents. They were good enough to take me in but they made my life hell, they treated me like something the cat dragged in. I lived with them for about four years and they were the worst four years of my life. Apart from the way they treated me, it was so overcrowded with his parents, brothers and sisters and us with the baby. They finally gave us a house when I fell pregnant for a second time, it was like paradise having a home of our own, the quietness and all the space.³³

Families who were lucky enough to acquire rooms frequently found themselves paying exorbitant rents for inferior accommodation.

We were married in April 1922 and we went into two rooms in Hartington Road, off Eaton Road, you know, in West Derby. A single lady rented the rest of the house and we had the two best rooms downstairs. The house was pretty decent but, well, it was old and very damp. It did have an inside toilet and a bathroom of sorts. The bathroom had been a bedroom which had been converted and well to be honest it wasn't very nice. The old lady used to wash her dog in it and really that was all it was fit for because it wasn't very clean, looking back I don't suppose the rest of the house was. I would go next door for a bath. The old lady and I shared the kitchen and for that we paid £1 a week in rent. Now, look what we got here, the three bedrooms, a parlour, this room, the kitchen and the bathroom and, my dear, all this was only 19s. 6d. (95p) when we moved in. And, yes, of course the electricity, that was quite a novelty because we had previously only known gas. It was the kitchen I loved most, it was so bright and convenient, so brand new, it was lovely.³⁴

Without rent control there can be little doubt, given the size of the housing shortage, that the rent of such inferior accommodation would

have risen beyond even £1 a week.

The majority of families, 42%, moving into new Addison houses had in fact previously been living in 2 or less rooms or with parents.³⁵ The average number of rooms in the previous houses of tenants had been 3.15, compared with 4.65 in the new Addison houses. The acquisition of council houses therefore meant a 47% increase in accommodation for tenants, in addition to vastly superior services and facilities. Addison tenants had formerly paid on average 14s. 9d. (73.2p) in rent and on acquiring their council houses their average rent had risen to 18s. 6d. (92.4p) which meant they had obtained a 47% increase in accommodation for a 26% increase in rent.

The houses generated so much interest when they were being built, because of the high level of equipment they provided, that the privacy of the new tenants was often invaded by sightseers.

People read in the papers about the sunshine houses being built here, and in Fazakerley and, well they came to see for themselves. There was always people walking up and down our road inspecting the houses and well, they were so cheeky, sometimes they would even walk up our path and try and look in through the window. The weekends were the worst. I think it was a day out for people, they would get the tram from town. They used to come in their dozens.³⁶

ii) Chamberlain and Wheatley Houses.

After 1924, when nearly 6,000 council houses had been built, such spectacular interest in the new houses began to fall, so unfortunately did housing standards. Far fewer parlour houses were built after 1924 and whereas 64% of this type of dwelling had been provided under the 1919 Act, the proportion fell to 45% between 1924 and 1930, 21% between 1931 and 1934.³⁷ The level of services and equipment remained very much the same as in Addison parlour houses

but overall dimensions were reduced to 950 square feet. Non-parlour houses suffered a similar fate, their dimensions falling from the previous norms of 858 and 894 square feet to 768/814 square feet and 807/828 square feet. The only significant difference between this type of house and the A3 Addison type was that, after 1925, in order to give tenants a cheaper form of cooking more and more houses were provided with a cooking range in the living room.

After 1926 the quality of non-parlour houses had been further reduced by the building of cheaper, smaller 710 and 620 square feet houses. In these houses the living room and bedrooms were of the usual size but the hall was practically eliminated and the scullery reduced to allow space for the bathroom on the ground floor.³⁸

The elimination of the hall meant that now the only way to the scullery and the back of the house was through the living room. Such an arrangement had been strongly criticized in 1919 but now it became acceptable policy as Liverpool pursued a policy of "building down" to its low-paid working class population. Space was further saved by siting the larder off the living room and the elimination of the inside coal-store from A620 type houses. All houses were provided with a cooking range in the living room, in addition to a gas cooker and gas-heated boiler in the scullery.

To cater for smaller families A620 units were also built with only two bedrooms and the needs of larger families were also met by the provision of three-storied four bedroomed A950 units. A small number of bed/sitting room units and one-bedroomed flats were also provided for elderly people. By the beginning of the 1930's therefore the housing stock had become far more diversified in an attempt to meet the housing needs of families of varying sizes. A

number of suburban flats were also built by the Housing Committee. Those provided under the 1923 scheme were built on very prominent positions on main roads and consequently were provided with very decorative elevations. Those provided under the 1924 scheme were erected to relieve overcrowding in the Garston district and were of a very much more simple design. All the flats had the usual equipment of larder, bath, hot-water circulating system, internal W.C., electric light, power plugs, gas points and gas heated wash boiler.

Between 1924 and 1934 housing standards fell in Liverpool and whereas the commonest house built in the Addison period contained between 1,010 and 1,046 square feet, by 1934 it was only 710 square feet, a reduction of roughly 36% had taken place. The level of architectural design however did improve somewhat following the appointment of Keay as Acting Director of Housing in 1925. The majority of houses were still of the Georgian style but instead of the simple "box with a lid" Keay's designs showed a complexity of form. Bay windows, dormer windows, double fronts, asymmetrical roofs and timbering were all used to create more decorative and varied elevations.

More attention may have been paid to architectural design after 1925 but overall the housing estates built during this period were not as attractive as earlier Addison estates. This was partly due to the fact that 1924 estates were bigger, Norris Green for example housed a population the same size as that of Shrewsbury and this aggravated the monotonous repetition of a limited number of house types. The smartest neo-Georgian fronts, as in the Addison scheme,

were still only displayed on those houses occupying prominent positions on estates. Further into the estates architectural detail was kept to a minimum, a practice made worse by the provision of houses in long terraces. As the Housing Committee was called upon to provide cheaper and cheaper houses the number of houses to a block rose from 4, 6 or 8 in the late 1920's to 8, 10 or 12 in the early 1930's. In the Georgian period elegant houses for the wealthy had been provided in long terraces but dramatic street pictures had been created by the use of open spaces and large trees to provide contrast. The small, terraced Wheatley houses however did not receive the benefit of wooded settings. In the drive for economy far fewer trees were planted during this period than under the 1919 scheme. As housing standards fell frontage shrank, bay windows disappeared, privet hedges were no longer provided, grass verges shrank and roads narrowed but the sparse use of trees, more than anything else, accounts for drabness of many 1924 estates.

The large 1924 estates were not only exceedingly drab, they were also soulless. Lacking a coherent and centralised plan in their general lay-out they ended up just being a collection of streets and houses. There was no central point on the estates, no point of focus for the activities of a district. The largest estate, Norris Green, for example, was laid out in concentric circles. Unfortunately the centres of the circles were centres only in the geographical sense with no shops or public building to give them meaning. Newcomers to this estate often found themselves lost among identical roads, unable to find their own house.

When we first moved in all the houses were painted the same, you know green and cream. Well, when I didn't know the estate very well I was always getting lost, so were the

kids. I used to find the kids crying their eyes out, bawling at the tops of their voices because they was lost. All the houses and all the crescents looked just the same. I would walk all the way round a crescent looking for our house, just to find I was in the wrong crescent. I would never go out at night at first, well I was scared I would never find my way back.³⁹

Tenants on other large estates experienced similar difficulties in identifying their houses among so many identical houses, in the absence of any familiar land marks.

You see, at first there was nothing to get your bearings by, no pubs, no shops, no nothing⁴⁰ just streets of houses that all looked the same.

The fact that their houses were all so similar however did not appear to have bothered tenants and overall the level of satisfaction exhibited by the tenants with their housing was extremely high. The placing of the bathroom on the ground floor in smaller non-parlour houses was the most regrettable consequence of the Committee's "building down" policy and this arrangement was criticized by several tenants in this study.

Our mother loved our new little house but there was one fault, there was no proper bathroom like in the parlour houses. We only had a bath in the back kitchen. In the mornings mother would be trying to do the breakfast and us kids would be trying to get a wash in the kitchen sink. You usually ended up only giving yourself a splash. I had two brothers and when I got older there just wasn't any privacy. I would shut the kitchen door and, shout over and over again, as I got undressed, don't come in, don't come in, I'm having a wash. You couldn't afford hot water for baths in those days⁴¹ and so you just had a proper washdown at the sink.

The siting of the bath in the scullery had reduced the scullery to minute, claustrophobic proportions and had led to the elimination of hand basins from this type of house. When the partitioning doors to the bathroom were drawn together, the bathroom also was extremely cramped.

I hated having a bath when I was a girl because when the wooden doors were pulled across it was so small the bathroom, really cramped. The hot water tank was also on the wall in there, and that made it smaller too. Really there wasn't enough room for yourself in there, never mind the tank.⁴²

These dwellings were supposed to provide socially adequate accommodation for a period of 60 years but after only 30 years the standard they afforded was well below that officially deemed acceptable, in the latter half of the twentieth century. By the 1960's Liverpool Housing Committee had already begun to modernize these inferior dwellings by building extensions to the ground floor to accommodate a separate bathroom with handbasin.

The majority of tenants however did not find the downstairs bathroom an inconvenience.

Did we mind the bathroom being downstairs, dearie me no, my girl when you had been used to a tin bath anything was an improvement. In our old house we hadn't hot water and so it was a real treat for us not having to heat water to fill the old tin bath up. These houses were very modern in them days and, oh yes, it was a real luxury to have a proper bathroom and, believe you me, it mattered not at all that it was in the back kitchen.⁴³

Oh no, we didn't mind the bathroom being downstairs. Well all the old families around here had come from downtown and so none of us was used to very much. It was just wonderful to have your own bathroom, a lot of the people around here had used the public bath houses before, so you see these houses were a real step up for us. I remember the day we moved in my feller said how grand it all was. I'll never leave this place, he said, the only way they will get me out is when they carry me out in a box.⁴⁴

Despite the fact that the Tudor Walter's Committee had found that most families wanted houses with parlours, Liverpool's non-parlour tenants also do not appear to have found the lack of this amenity a great inconvenience. A mass observation enquiry conducted immediately before the outbreak of the Second World War to determine

how satisfied families were with their homes had concluded that the lack of parlours in many council houses meant that

"these new houses built between the wars proved themselves much less in accordance with the needs of the people who lived in them than the old housing of the nineteenth century".⁴⁵

However Liverpool tenants appear to have been perfectly happy with their small non-parlour houses, claiming that they afforded adequate accommodation.

Would we have liked a parlour house? Well, I never thought of it really, we were perfectly happy with this one, it was always plenty big enough for us.⁴⁶

I suppose a parlour would have been nice when the children were growing up, but no, I never minded not having one. We had been living in rooms before we got this house, so it always seemed a good sized house to us, lots of space, you know, a good sized kitchen and all. We never bothered applying for a parlour house, the rent would have been too much for us, you know, if I had had to pay the rent of a parlour house we would probably have ended up out on the street.⁴⁷

At a time of acute housing shortage people claim that they were grateful to be offered any kind of house, in any district and they usually accepted the first house offered to them after waiting many years on the housing register.

My girl, mind not having a parlour, not at all, I was just so glad to get a house, they were like gold dust in those days. Everybody was living in rooms, and mind you, they weren't too easy to get either. I remember someone telling me there were two rooms going in a house in Green Lane. Well the rooms we had were terrible and so I dashed down to Green Lane to see what these were like. You might not believe this but there was a queue of about twelve people, all wanting the rooms. An old jeweller, a Jew boy, was letting them and he interviewed us all. Do you know he wanted £15 "key money" you know, you had to give it like a deposit before he gave you the key, mind you, you never got it back. I was the only one in the queue who had the £15 so we got the rooms. It was extortion really, but the landlords could do it because people were so desperate for the rooms. It was a nice house, but the ironic thing was we had only moved in about

four weeks when we got a letter from the Corporation saying we had been given this house. So we had wasted £15, hadn't we, and that⁴⁸ was a lot in those days, nearly five weeks money.

Frequent moves from one set of rooms to another seems to have been common practice.

Oh, I was in so many rooms, I couldn't remember. The first room was a Scotch house, off Scotland Road, bloody terrible it was, filthy like. Christ, some of them were shocking but you had to take them because you was desperate. Sometimes I left because I didn't like a place, but, mind you, I was put out of a few because I hadn't paid the rent. The last room we had was in Burlington Street, just the one room over a Chinese laundry, but I rowed with the old Chinaman and he told us to get out, bloody awful row it was. Well, there was a councillor living just down the road, Councillor Murphy it was, and I told him we was being put out onto the street and he⁴⁹ got us this house because I was having the third kid.

Chamberlain and Wheatley tenants had occupied more rooms in their previous accommoation than Addison tenants, 4.0 rooms compared with 3.1. Nearly all parlour tenants had come from 4 and 5-roomed houses but the majority of non-parlour tenants, about 50% had been living in shared houses. Very few families allocated houses during this period, however had originated from the slums. The majority had come from ordinary working class streets.⁵⁰ It is surprising therefore to find that their previous housing standards had been so low and that many families had suffered years of extreme hardship before acquiring their new council houses.

When we were first married we were lucky enough to get two rooms in a house in St. Domingo Road. It was a big house, three-stories and we had the top flat. There was a grate in the biggest room and I did my cooking on that, just an ordinary fire-grate, so it took ages to cook a proper meal on it and of course there was no water. I had to go down three flights of stairs to the cellar for our drinking water. There was a bathroom and toilet on the second floor which we shared with the other tenants, but it was in a terrible state and it smelt something awful. The toilet was always breaking

down with so many people using it and the landlord took his time in fixing anything, everything was rotten. Mind you, in those days you were glad of somewhere to live, even though it was expensive, 10s. 6d. (50.5p) a week for two rooms. That place nearly killed me though. As you see I'm only little and I had to have my children by Caesarian section and you can imagine what it was like coming out of hospital to face all those stairs so many times each day. I lost the third baby because I was so rundown and the midwife at the hospital told me to get a note from my doctor to take to the Corporation. Well, that's how we got this house on medical grounds, the doctor feared for my health, you see.⁵¹

We lived with my mother when we first got married. It was only a little two-bedroomed terraced house and there was my mother, aunt and cousin in one bedroom and me and my husband and then the baby in the other. Salisbury Street it was, you know, in the old part of Old Swan. It was an old house, very cold and damp and it didn't have any conveniences at all. No water at all in the house, I don't know how we did it but we had to do the washing outside. In January your hands would go blue in the water with the cold and you lost all feeling in them.⁵²

One of the greatest problems people had to contend with was vermin in the old houses.

We had a little parlour house, Hilier Street it was, just an ordinary type of house for them days, you know, tin bath, outside loo with the gas lighting. The house was in pretty good condition but we were overrun with vermin from next door, it was a bakery. A constant battle it was to try and keep them out of the beds. We stripped the wallpaper off and lime-washed the walls but they still came, it was a nightmare.⁵³

Oh yes, there were mice in the house but the main problem was the bugs. They were horrible things and if you stood on them the smell was terrible, terrible. The parlour was walking with them, red they were, bright red. I remember one time when I was working at the Liberal Club and a friend came home to spend the night and she slept in the parlour. I remember coming down for a drink in the night and she was snoring her head off and I went over to shut her up and as I held the candle over her I saw she was covered by a red sheet of bugs, horrible it was. 54

Coming from such appalling housing conditions it is hardly surprising that the tenants were delighted with their new, modern

convenient council houses. After living in old, damp bug-infested houses or in rooms totally unsuited to sub-letting even the smallest, cheapest A620 Wheatley house must have appeared luxurious.

Like the house, of course I did. It was so posh, I couldn't make it all out at first. It was a little palace, a little palace.⁵⁵

The standard of the amenities offered by the new house overwhelmed some tenants.

My old gran who moved with us, just couldn't get used to the electric. She would say to me, Our Dorothea, don't you go touching them lights, just you leave it to your father. It was weeks before she would switch on a light but you know, I don't think she ever really trusted it.⁵⁶

To some even taking a bath proved to be a terrifying experience.

I know it's a terrible thing to admit but before we got the house I'd never had a bath in my life. In our old house there had been just one room for living, cooking and washing and so we didn't even have a tin bath. The first time I got into the bath at the new house I just screamed and screamed as the water came up round me. I know it sounds stupid but I really felt that I was going to drown that's how backward we all were.⁵⁷

One problem that confronted many tenants was the lack of furniture to fill their homes, which frequently were considerably larger than their previous accommodation.

Well, we didn't have much really, what with only living in rooms before. We had a bed, that had been my old bed from home, mother gave it to me, a small table and a couple of chairs and two old second hand armchairs. No carpets in them days, you made do with a bit of lino. When we came here my husband made me like a dressing table out of old orange boxes and he put a bit of cretonne on it, it was lovely, and he made some cupboards for the bedroom and a crib for the baby. You just had to make do till you could afford better.⁵⁸

I was a terrible one always for buying things. As soon as we moved in here I made up my mind to get a three-piece suite, that's what everybody wanted for their new house. At the time we only had bits and pieces and they were all second-hand. Well I got my

suite, £5 it was, and when that was paid off I got the bedroom suite. Mind you, a lot of young girls got themselves into trouble, what with buying things they couldn't afford. It was a terrible temptation mind, because as soon as you moved in you were plagued by representatives from furniture firms knocking at the door and they made it all sound so easy on the hire purchase. Well the young girls wanted nice things for their new homes, didn't they, so they would order three piece suites and bedroom suites and then find they couldn't afford to pay. A lot of stuff was re-possessed in the early days.⁵⁹

The new council houses not only provided families with more space inside their homes but outside as well since each house had a front and back garden, an amenity previously unknown in working class housing. Of course not everybody welcomed the extra work gardens entailed but the majority of families seem to have benefited from the added space out of doors.

Oh yes, the garden, well it gave you a feeling of freedom. I had been so used to doing the washing up and looking out the kitchen window onto a horrible backyard but here I was looking at greenery and trees. It felt like the countryside. That probably sounds silly to you today but after living in town it was lovely to have the grass and trees. And it was so much quieter with the gardens, your neighbours were so far away, and with the front door not opening onto the street you were never bothered by the voices of people walking past your window. It was lovely, you felt people weren't closing in on you all the time.⁶⁰

The garden was a god send to us because it meant we could grow our own veg and, even though you weren't supposed to, we kept chickens, fortunately the Corporation never found us out. Times were really hard in those days and there's no doubt the garden helped to make ends meet. We even had apple trees. Other folk around would grow some lovely flowers but every inch of our garden went for veg, even the front garden. It was necessary but father used to love it as well, said it must have been his Irish blood giving him the love of the soil, he really loved digging up the old potatoes.⁶¹

Chamberlain and Wheatley houses may not have been as generous or as well laid out internally as Addison houses but they seem to have suited the class of tenant they were designed for. To people who

had never had an inside toilet having to carry a chamber pot through a living room was accepted as a matter of course, as was the siting of the bath in the kitchen. Similarly the provision of a cooking range in the living room was not viewed as a retrograde step by families but as a welcome addition to their new homes.

I liked the gas cooker because it was so convenient but there were times, many, many times, when you could afford no more money for the gas meter, and so you were glad to cook on the fire, on the range, like. You know, that range cooked some things a real treat, especially roast potatoes. I used to use the range a lot in the winter because it was so cold out in the back kitchen, oh yes, the range helped with the money.⁶²

The Housing Committee's policy of "building down" to the means of low-paid workers does not therefore appear to have offended tenants, the majority of whom, even when repeatedly asked, could not think of a single thing they did not like about "their lovely little houses".

iii) Houses built after 1934

After 1934 the trend in most other areas in the country was to reduce standards in order to bring council housing within the means of slum dwellers. In Liverpool however the trend was in the other direction and 1934 was in fact the year in which the lowering of standards in this city were halted. By the end of the Wheatley period only small, cheap non-parlour houses were being built in Liverpool but when building began under the 1925 Act in 1934 Keay decided that it was undesirable to segregate one class on large council estates. Consequently 42% of the 2,965 unsubsidized council houses built under this Act contained parlours, being of the B950 type. The size of non-parlour houses was also slightly increased since 50% of non-parlour types on the Longview Estate contained 760 square feet and had upstairs bathrooms. The majority of non-parlour

houses on the Speke Estate were of this size.

When building began under the 1930 Act initially only non-parlour houses were provided but 18% had upstairs bathrooms, being of the A760 type. On the later Woolfall Heath and Woolton Grove Estates however parlour houses accounted for 22% of the total number of houses built while the majority of non-parlour contained 760 square feet.⁶³ By 1939 therefore housing standards had improved somewhat and former slum dwellers were provided with superior dwellings than late Wheatley tenants. The special needs of both small and large families also received more attention during this period. Three-storey, one-bedroomed flats were provided for single people and childless couples which together with the cottage flats built for the elderly accounted for 5% of all dwellings erected. Two-bedroomed A620 units accounted for about 13% of all dwellings while the needs of larger families were catered for by A950 four-bedroomed units and A1115 five-bedroomed units.

In one respect however it can be argued that housing standards were still under attack after 1934 owing to the fact that in an attempt to increase densities in suburban development schemes 396 suburban flats were built. These flats were intended for former slum dwellers who did not wish to move to distant outlying estates. However since 246 similar flats had been built under the Wheatley scheme the 1930 flats cannot be seen as dramatically lowering standards.

In terms of lay-out the cottages built under the 1925 and 1930 Acts were more or less identical with those provided under the Wheatley Act, but slightly more variety was introduced into the post-1934 schemes due to the increased diversification of the

housing stock which provided a greater number of three-storey dwellings. Unlike Addison, Chamberlain and Wheatley houses, which were built from a variety of building materials, all post-1934 houses were built of brick. A number of houses had attractive half-timbered fronts, vaguely reminiscent of romantic, garden-city housing. Unfortunately, as in 1924 schemes, landscaping detail was kept to a minimum and insufficient use was made of trees. Consequently those estates were not as aesthetically pleasing as they might otherwise have been.

Families housed under the 1925 Act had not come from overcrowded conditions, since parlour tenants had previously occupied 5.3 rooms, non-parlour tenants 4.3 rooms. In fact the size of their accommodation fell on the acquisition of a council house from an average of 4.7 rooms to 4.3 rooms. Their new council houses however had larger sized rooms and a much higher level of services and equipment.

We came from an ordinary terrace house, you know, a small parlour, kitchen, back-kitchen and three bedrooms. This house though was much better, even though it didn't have the parlour, because the rooms were bigger and it was much well, brighter somehow. And of course, there was the inside toilet here and a proper bathroom that we hadn't had before. The old house was alright but it was old and we applied for a council house because we wanted a new, modern house, like. My sister had got one up Broadway way and I really liked it what, with the garden and everything. People around here had come from fairly decent property but they just wanted a new house with all mod cons and a garden for the children.⁶⁴

The Housing Committee decided to build under the 1925 Act in order to provide houses for the many families living in overcrowded conditions in 2 or 3 rooms without adequate services or amenities. However, unlike Wheatley tenants, especially non-parlour tenants, very few 1925 families had previously lived in rooms. In order to

ensure that a rate fund contribution would not be necessary for those houses the Housing Committee appears to have selected families who had been used to occupying a whole house of a reasonable standard. Families housed under the 1925 Act had previously paid 13s. 0d. (65.3p) a week in rent compared to only 11s. 1d. (55.7p) a week by Chamberlain and Wheatley tenants.

Families housed under the 1930 Act on the other hand had previously been in acute housing distress. The previous accommodation of many Wheatley tenants may have been poor but it was luxurious compared with the slum property 1930 non-parlour families originated from. As would be expected this group of tenants experienced the greatest improvements in housing standards on acquiring council houses. These families came from property, much of which had been condemned for over 50 years, which was in a deplorable condition.

Well, we came from an old court house, you know, where all the houses were built around a yard. There were only three rooms, one on each floor, and well it was just falling down really. There were holes in the walls, the roof leaked, well it was just a slum. There was no water, you had to get that from a tap in the yard and the toilet was there too. You couldn't describe the filth of the toilet, you see, you had to share with other folk. When you look back you wondered how you survived, mind you, many didn't it was nothing for a woman to lose six or seven kiddies in them days, they died because of the squalor which spread the diseases.⁶⁵

A cellar was still found to be home for a number of families.

They moved us all out together, all from one street, those of us that lived in cellars, like. It was illegal then the cellars, you was only allowed to live in them if you had another room on the ground floor of your house. They didn't like the cellar just to be your home, so of course we all said we rented other rooms upstairs, but we never did. We just had the one room, like, the cellar; did for everything it did, you know, sleeping and living in. It wasn't too bad really, like, it did us.⁶⁶

We had rooms first and then my feller fell out of work and we had to move in with me mam and her lot. You're not going to believe this but she just had the one room, you know, a cellar, and we all squeezed in. I'm just counting up, yes, there was 11 of us in the one room. God, how did we do it? In those days people didn't moan you just got on with things. If one of your own had nowhere to⁶⁷ live you just squeezed up and made room for them.

To such families even gas lighting would have been a luxury never mind electricity.

For lighting, well we only had paraffin oil lamps and my did they stink. More often than not though you couldn't afford the paraffin and so it was just candles. I used to hate coming downstairs on a winter's morning when it was still dark because the staircase was so rotten I was scared of falling with not being able to see properly. You don't know what it was like getting electricity after living like that, in the semi-darkness all the time in winter.⁶⁸

The slum property was not only old and dilapidated, it was also filthy.

When I look back I think, my God, everything and everybody must have smelt to high heaven. Nobody did much housework because the houses couldn't be cleaned, they were so old and filthy, and well there was no hot water. When you've only got a water-tap in the yard you obviously think twice about taking the curtains down to be washed, when every drop of water has to be pumped up and then heated. Even washing the cups and plates was a performance, especially in the summer if the fire wasn't lit to heat the water. And then of course people didn't bother to wash much themselves. Sometimes people would go to the public baths but usually people couldn't afford the few coppers that cost. We must⁶⁹ have smelt terrible. No deodorants in them days.

When the Housing Committee began to re-house slum families on a large scale they were horrified to find that ex-slum families were transferring vermin from their old property to their new council houses. In an attempt to prevent the spread of vermin to council housing it was decided that all furniture coming from slum property had to be fumigated before it was moved to its new home.

Jesus, our old house was in a terrible state, alive with those bloody bugs, horrible it was. There were rats too, they were everywhere. My mother always bothered that they would get at the babies when they were asleep. But the bugs were terrible they smelt something shocking. I remember the day we moved the Council took all our furniture away in one of them fumigating vans. That was at 10 in the morning and I remember the stuff had to stay in the van all day, you couldn't open it till night. They had to make sure all the bugs had been killed. It worked a treat⁷⁰, mother was delighted to have anything free of vermin.

George Orwell in Road to Wigan Pier claims that it was inhuman and degrading to dip people's possessions like sheep but in fact such a practice appears to have been welcomed by former slum dwellers who were only too relieved to get rid of troublesome bugs and lice.⁷¹

The surprising thing to emerge from this study is that despite such appalling living conditions few former slum dwellers had wanted to leave their old homes and only a very few had even bothered to apply for a council house. Some families had not applied for a council house because of the high rent of council property.

Such houses were not for the likes of us. Most of the men round us hadn't had jobs so how could families have afforded it.⁷²

Others simply had not been interested in moving away from such squalor since, before moving to their council housing, they had not realized how poorly they were housed.

Oh, I know things were bad, but that's all we had been used to you know, when you've never had things, you don't know what you're missing. When you've never had proper bedrooms, toilets and the likes, you don't miss them. We never noticed the smell of the mice, or say the overflowing loo, well they had always been there. It was only after we moved in here that we realized how ghastly the slums had been, it's a wonder they didn't kill us all off.⁷³

Liverpool City Council's involvement in the provision of suburban cottages, which began in 1919, consequently had a profound effect on working class housing and living standards between the wars. By the

late 1930's even the poorest in the community were being provided with high quality, modern suburban homes. The houses erected by Liverpool may have tended to be somewhat monotonous lacking in variety and contrast but they were in fact some of the best municipal houses built in this country between the wars. Even George Orwell, who was highly critical of bleak, soulless inter-war municipal estates, grudgingly admitted that Liverpool's suburban council housing was "quite pleasing to the eye".⁷⁴ This was largely due to the work of Keay, undoubtedly one of the most talented municipal architects of the period. One architectural expert, who had studied public housing all over the world, claimed that

"none compared with the housing schemes completed between the wars in Liverpool, where a great housing director, Mr Keay, has produced the most remarkable housing scheme that the world has ever seen and which is absolutely unbeatable."⁷⁵

Liverpool council house tenants may not have been aware that their houses were so highly rated in the architectural world but they did know that they were vastly superior to their old dwellings in terms of lay-out, design, services and equipment.

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CHAPTER V.Suburban Tenants.

[Liverpool City Council's inter-war suburban house building programme provided thousands of high quality, modern houses but for whom? The dwellings were provided under a series of Housing Acts differing, not only, in their financial provision but in ideological and political terms and consequently the population of such housing was unlikely to be homogeneous. This chapter examines the social, economic and familial characteristics of the suburban tenants in order to determine to what extent they varied as a result of changes in housing policy and how effectively the different groups of tenants coped with the financial burden of council house occupancy.

1. Social Class of Original Estate Families.i) Addison houses.

The state intervened in the housing market in 1919 in order to provide decent houses for the working classes but nowhere in the housing legislation of that year is the term "working classes" actually defined. The Social Survey of Merseyside carried out in 1924 estimated that the working class population of Merseyside was 70% of the total¹ and that an income of £5 a week could generally be taken for separating middle- and working classes. A more exact definition was also provided. "Class is to be decided by the occupation of the head of the household and the classes to be omitted are such as the following: professional men, clerks, draughtsmen, managers, insurance and wholesale agents, commercial travellers. Shop assistants are to be ranked as working class

unless their work is managerial or supervisory. A shop keeper is to be included only if he employs no labour and his net proceeds are probably less than £5 a week".² This definition is employed in this study which means that the working class population of Liverpool included shop assistants and all manual workers.

In the course of the household census conducted by the survey staff a random sample was obtained of 4,702 occupied Liverpool male adults, all supposedly belonging to the working classes as middle class families had been excluded from the whole social survey. Based on the occupation of the head of the household, when in employment, the social structure of Liverpool's working class population was as follows:- 25% of the total sampled were graded as skilled manual, 26.5% semi-skilled, 39.5% as unskilled and the remaining 9.5% were allocated to higher non-manual grades.³ These figures show that the household sample was made up broadly, as it was meant to be, of working class families and the fact that nearly 10% of the sample were engaged in non-manual occupations is explained by the fact that grown-up sons of heads of households, if living at home, were included although they might be engaged in non working class occupations. The level of skill among Liverpool's working class population was therefore extremely low, two-thirds of the total being semi-skilled and unskilled.

Since the term "working classes" was never defined in the 1919 housing legislation central government had no control over a local authority's letting policy and Liverpool Housing Committee was free to decide which families were allocated houses from the 1,000's of applications received. Initially the Committee decided to give priority to ex-servicemen who were Liverpool residents with family

responsibilities and although officially the financial stability of applicants was not taken into account till after the industrial slump of 1921 the high rents of Addison houses effected the selection process from the start. Rents ranged from 15s. 11d. (79.5p) to 22s. 6d. (112.5p) a week and this obviously had a bearing on the local interpretation of "working class". Labourers as well as bank clerks were eligible for the new houses but by fixing the rents so high the committee must have assumed that it would be the better-off members of the community rather than the slum dweller who would take advantage of the new houses.

Analysis of the Housing Departments house cards reveals that Addison houses were in fact mainly allocated to members of the middle and lower middle classes and to skilled workers. The house cards also show that the 3s. 7d. (18p) to 6s. 7d. (33p) a week extra charged for parlour houses also had a marked effect on the social class of tenants occupying the different types of houses. Over 12% of employed parlour tenants belonged to the Registrar General's top two classes, as opposed to only 0.5% of non-parlour tenants and whereas the commonest parlour tenants, 48.4% of the total, was a skilled non-manual worker only 25.9% of non-parlour tenants belonged to this class, Class III. The commonest non-parlour tenant 52.0% was a skilled manual worker belonging to Class IV, while only 29.6% of parlour tenants were so classified. Relatively few non-parlour tenants were semi-skilled and unskilled, 11.7% and 9.7% respectively and even fewer parlour tenants, 4.7% and 3.5% respectively. Only one tenant out of 1,183 head of households sampled was unemployed, despite the industrial slump, and even in this case there were two adult children in work. Hundreds of women had been widowed during

the war but only in eight cases, where a widow was head of the household, had a house been allocated. Retired families were also under-represented in both types of houses.

The vast majority of employed Addison tenants, 91.4% of parlour tenants and 78.6% of non-parlour tenants, therefore belonged to what E.D. Simon in How to Abolish the Slums referred to as the clerk-artisan class, those in white collar jobs or skilled trades.⁴ Consequently the level of skill among Addison tenants was considerably higher than that of the working class population of Liverpool as a whole. Only 59.1% of families, 45.4% occupying parlour houses, 84.5% non-parlour houses, could be classified as "working class", and the remainder belonged to the middle and lower middle classes. Consequently nearly half of the houses erected under the 1919 Act were not tenanted by the class for whom they were intended. All of the families allocated houses had come from the waiting list and they had been selected, not because they constituted the group in the most housing need, but because they were most likely to regularly pay the high rent of these houses built during the post-war inflationary period.

ii) Chamberlain and Wheatley houses.

The average level of skill amongst estate tenants allocated Chamberlain and Wheatley flats and houses was considerably below that of Addison tenants since 84.3% of them could be classified as "working class". This was due to the fact that fewer parlour houses were built during this period and also, in an attempt to produce large numbers of houses within the means of working class incomes, smaller, cheaper non-parlour houses were erected. The reduction in

the level of skill was far more pronounced amongst non-parlour tenants. The size of parlour houses had been reduced but rents still ranged from 16s. 6d. (82.5p) to 19s. 6d. (97.5p) a week and such houses were still beyond the means of most ordinary working class families. Over 4% of employed parlour tenants still belonged to the top two social classes, as opposed to less than 1% of non-parlour tenants and whereas 40.7% of parlour families belonged to class III, only 8.9% of non-parlour tenants were skilled non-manual workers. A greater proportion of parlour than non-parlour tenants 38.8% and 29.8%, respectively, belonged to class IV while a greater number of non-parlour tenants 14.9%, than parlour tenants, 9.6%, were semi-skilled. The greatest difference between the two groups of tenants however occurred in class VI for only 5.4% of parlour tenants, compared with 36.3% of non-parlour tenants were employed in unskilled jobs. Nearly twice as many parlour than non-parlour tenants therefore were engaged in skilled occupations and whereas 63.1% of parlour families only could be classified as "working class", nearly all, 96.3% of non-parlour families could be included in this category.

If we look at the total population of these estates it is clear that socially the families allocated houses were, on average, slightly above the average Liverpool working class population since 23.8% of tenants were non-manual workers, 35.1% were skilled, 14.0% semi-skilled and 27.0% were unskilled labourers. However if we look at the population of individual estates we find that over the ten year period, 1924-1934, the level of skill amongst estate tenants declined markedly and by the end of the period the population of new council estates was far more representative of the working class

population of Liverpool as a whole. The Wheatley Act had been designed to bring decent homes within the reach of ordinary working class families. In Liverpool however it was not until parlour houses had been eliminated from schemes and non-parlour houses had been reduced to minute proportions that the ordinary working class population was catered for. For example, the Walton-Clubmoor Estate begun in 1925 housed mainly skilled workers, 61.9%, whereas the last estate to be completed under the Wheatley Act, the Finch House Estate housed far fewer, 36%, skilled workers. The majority of tenants on the Finch House estate were in fact unskilled workers mainly employed in casual jobs, for example 13.5% were dock labourers, 7.5% carters.

Many writers of the inter-war period suggest that Wheatley houses mainly catered for the needs of the better paid artisan and skilled workers, and that council houses went to a limited range of groups,

"small clerks and tradesmen, artisans and the better off semi-skilled workers with average sized families and safe jobs".

In Liverpool this may have been true of the early Wheatley period, but from the late 1920's onwards the Housing Committee pursued a policy of "building down" to its low-skilled working class population with the result that by the early 1930's the commonest estate tenant was not a man in a "safe" job but an unskilled labourer, vulnerable to the vagaries of Liverpool's casual labour market.

By the 1930's the Housing Committee was prepared to house casual dock labourers but they seldom originated from the slums of Liverpool. The fact that 95.7% of houses allocated during this period went to families on the waiting list indicates that the

Committee were still not housing those in the greatest need. During this period only 1-2% of houses went to families in acute housing distress i.e. priority, special and demolition cases, housed owing to overcrowding, health conditions or slum clearance. Interviews with original Wheatley tenants reveal that previously they had lived mainly in small, terraced houses or occupied rooms in larger houses, which although invariably unsuitable for sub-letting did not constitute a slum. This is borne out by the house cards which show that previously roughly a third, 34.5% of tenants had occupied 2 rooms or less but the average number of rooms previously occupied by all tenants had been 4.0. Since the average Wheatley family contained 4.5 people, Wheatley tenants had previously not suffered greatly from overcrowding.

In 1932 new allocation quotas were established to include applicants whose need was the most urgent but these quotas were not fulfilled since only 6.3% of houses on the Finch House estate went to families in this category instead of the proposed 20%. The Committee probably feared that problem families would add to their mounting rent arrears problem and push up maintenance costs. The rent arrears problem was in fact responsible for the large number of transfer cases in the early 1930's. Over the whole Wheatley period 2.9% of houses were allocated as a result of internal transfers. The percentage however was far higher in the early 1930's when a large number of tenants were transferred to cheaper property due to financial difficulties.

The Committee was also reluctant to house unemployed families. No tenancy was offered to any applicant who at the time of qualification for allocation was in receipt of public assistance or

unemployment benefit, without the special authority of the Housing
 [Committee. One tenant, granted a house in 1932 on the Dovecot
 estate recalled how nerve racking gaining "the special authority of
 the Housing Committee" proved to be,

My husband was so nervous about having to appear in front
 of this special board that I went down town with him. Mind
 you, I wasn't allowed to go into the room with him, they
 made me wait outside in the corridor. They asked him all
 sorts of things, you know, like how he managed his money
 and kept asking if he was sure he could manage a council
 rent. Well my husband told them that he was already
 paying 12s. 6d. a week and that was for just two rooms
 out in Wavertree. Well this house was only, let me see,
 about 11s. a week then, so it meant we would be paying
 less. Well, our rent book was all paid up and they must
 have thought we was decent people and so we got this
 house. From what people said you only got given a house
 if you were on the dole if you could show⁶ a clean rent
 book. Thank God we had no debts to show.

In all only 5% of families allocated houses on the Dovecot estate
 were unemployed, and 5.1% on the Huyton Farm estate, at a time when
 over 30% of men were out of work in Liverpool. As unemployment
 reached its peak in 1933 more houses were allocated to unemployed
 families, such families accounting for 9.6% of the total population
 of the Finch House estate. The highest unemployment figure recorded
 among Wheatley tenants was a rate of 10.2% for the Speke Road
 Gardens tenements erected at the end of the Wheatley period. These
 general needs tenements were built to relieve the chronic housing
 shortage in the Garston district and the fact that the tenements
 were reserved for families from this area probably accounts partly
 for the high unemployment level amongst tenants as the area was
 heavily dependent on the depressed dockland.

It is somewhat surprising that the level of unemployment was so
 high amongst late Wheatley tenants in view of the Committee's rigid
 selection process and concern over the ever increasing rent arrears

bill. However unemployed families still had to prove their ability to pay their new council rent and it is possible that the Committee would have experienced problems in letting their new houses if a greater number of unemployed families had not been included since unemployment by this time had reached 33%.

iii) Unsubsidized houses.

┌ The Housing Committee received no subsidy for the 2,965 houses
they built under the 1925 Housing Act to alleviate the continuing
housing shortage in Liverpool in the mid 1930's. The houses were
└ not intended for the poorest in the community. They were designed
to cater for the needs of families living in inadequate
accommodation who were unlikely to be dealt with under a slum
clearance scheme but who were living in 1, 2 or 3 highly rented
rooms lacking modern conveniences. The average number of rooms in
fact previously occupied by 1925 tenants had been 4.7, only 21%
having occupied 2 rooms or less. Since the average sized 1925
estate family consisted of 3.8 persons many may not have enjoyed the
luxury of an inside toilet but they were definitely not suffering
from overcrowding. This was especially true of parlour tenants
whose average family size was 3.6 and the previous number of rooms
occupied had been 5.3.

In order to avoid a call on the rates, special conditions of letting were introduced for these unsubsidized houses. Prospective tenants had to prove ability to pay rent bearing in mind the amount of travelling expenses involved in living on estates miles from the city centre. They also had to display a good standard of cleanliness to ensure that the Committee would not be involved in

heavy maintenance costs. With these special conditions involved in the letting of these houses it is not surprising that the tenants on 1925 estates were socially considerably above those on Chamberlain and Wheatley estates. At the end of the Wheatley period the Committee had only been building small non-parlour houses but when building began under the 1925 scheme Keay, desiring a greater social mix on the estates, once again included parlour houses and slightly larger non-parlour houses with upstairs bathrooms. The ratio of parlour houses to non-parlour was roughly the same, i.e. 1 in 3, for both Wheatley and 1925 estates. However far more 1925 estate tenants were skilled workers than Wheatley tenants, the figures being for skilled workers 73.3% and 59.4% respectively, although on average 1925 tenants were still less skilled than Addison tenants. The ratio of parlour to non-parlour houses on Addison estates had been 2 to 1 and the houses had been larger and more expensive to rent.

The level of skill amongst parlour tenants on Addison, Chamberlain and Wheatley and 1925 estates varied very little since skilled workers accounted for 91.4%, 84.7% and 88.3% respectively of the total populations. However whereas the commonest Addison and Wheatley parlour tenant had been a skilled non manual worker, the commonest 1925 parlour tenant was a skilled manual worker, 53% belonged to this class. This was perhaps partly due to the fact that in the mid-1930's and late 1930's non-manual workers were finding council housing less desirable and were turning to owner-occupation. Also many of the houses allocated under the 1925 scheme were to key workers at Rootes Aircraft Factory who tended to be skilled manual workers. As on the Addison and Wheatley estates

unemployment among parlour tenants was negligible, only 1 tenant out of a total 190 was unemployed at the time of allocation.

It is among non-parlour tenants that changes in housing policy are more clearly reflected, for whereas 78.6% of Addison tenants were skilled, only 43.4% Wheatley tenants were so classified and the figure rose to 61.5% for carefully selected 1925 tenants. The commonest late Wheatley estate tenant had been an unskilled worker but on 1925 estates, as on Addison estates the majority of workers, 40.0%, were in skilled manual jobs, only 20.1% being unskilled. In allocating these unsubsidized houses the Committee had obviously selected tenants in safer, skilled jobs who were less likely to incur high maintenance charges or rent arrears. The vast majority, 81.8%, however of 1925 tenants could be classified as "working class" and consequently these unsubsidized houses were going to the class for whom they were intended.

Only a small proportion of tenants 2.4%, had been unemployed at the time they qualified for allocation but they were mainly necessitous transfer cases being moved to cheaper accommodation. Transfer cases accounted for 4.3% of families allocated 1925 estates; not all of which were rent arrears cases. Families moved from one council property to another for a variety of reasons, e.g. to be nearer work or family or because they wanted a newer council property. Only 62.2% of houses were allocated to families on the waiting list but this certainly does not indicate that the Committee were housing more ex-slum dwellers or priority cases. The Committee were housing more families in the "special" category but they were certainly not special in the sense they were in acute housing distress. Special cases accounted for 32.9% of families allocated

houses but they were key workers needed for the Rootes Aircraft Factory at Speke, who had been designated "special" cases.

iv) 1930 Act Houses.

Before the slum clearance legislation of the 1930's local authorities had no statutory duty to deal with the problem of the slums. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Liverpool Corporation had been responsible for the demolition of 1,000's of slums but after 1919 the shift in emphasis away from inner-city redevelopment to suburban cottage building greatly effected slum clearance operations. Liverpool's slum problem however was so appalling that it could not be ignored totally and between 1920 and 1934 a limited slum clearance programme was adopted. What is clear from this study is that very few families, *dispossessed under slum clearance programmes carried out under the 1923 Housing Act*, were re-housed on suburban council estates. A number of inner-city tenement blocks were built during this period but a recent study suggests that they were not tenanted solely by the people for whom they were intended, i.e. dispossessed families.⁷ Only about 20 or 30% of allocations went to dispossessed families, the remainder going to families on the waiting list and to families who were transferring from inferior pre-war council tenements. Families dispossessed under 1923 Act operations therefore must have been allocated a pre-war council tenement or acquired another private renting.

Under the 1930 Housing Act the Housing Committee were forced for the first time to house the neediest in the community, i.e. the slum dwellers, and since they were so numerous the rehousing programme

included both inner-city tenement building and suburban cottage building. Interviews with suburban tenants rehoused under the 1930 Act show that families were given the choice by the Housing Committee whether they were to be rehoused in the inner-city or the suburbs.

When the Corporation tell us that we were to be rehoused under them we was given the choice of a flat in Myrtle Gardens or a little house here in Sparrow Hall. - Well, my husband wanted to come out here, he always liked the countryside, you know, in them days Sparrow Hall had fields and things all around it, just like the real countryside. They gave all the people the choice of staying in town or moving out here. A lot wanted to stay in town because of the docks and well, if a girl's mam was still alive she wouldn't want to move away from the family and friends, you know. Oh yes, every one was given the choice, they never just moved us out.

Under the 1930 Act therefore those in greatest housing need finally gained access to suburban council housing.

Roughly 13% of houses on 1930 estates contained parlours and these expensive houses were still mainly allocated to selected families from the waiting list. Consequently the tenants of these houses were similar socially to Addison, Wheatley and 1925 tenants, 89.6% being skilled. However in the allocation of non-parlour houses the Committee could no longer carefully select tenants from the waiting list, they had to house demolition cases regardless of their suitability. Over 85% of non-parlour houses went to families dispossessed as a result of slum clearance operations, whilst only 3.8% of houses were allocated to families from the waiting list. A fairly high proportion, 10.1%, of non-parlour houses were allocated to transfer cases, roughly half of whom had transferred from pre-war inner-city council tenements presumably as a result of the Committee's policy to use the housing stock to filter through

ex-slum families. Tenants from pre-war tenements were encouraged to move out to the suburbs to make room for newly dispossessed slum dwellers whose social habits were to be improved by first occupying older, inferior council property.

The number of rooms previously occupied by non-parlour tenants clearly reflect that these families, consisting on average of just over 5 persons, had been in acute housing distress since over two thirds, 68%, had previously been accommodated in 2 rooms or less. The social composition of 1930 estates also reflect the radical change in the Committee's allocation policy. Only just over one third, 36.2%, of employed non-parlour tenants were skilled. The difference in the level of skill between parlour and non-parlour tenants was therefore far more pronounced on the 1930 estates than on other suburban estates. As in the case of 1925 estates the commonest parlour tenant, 59.3% of the total was a skilled manual worker compared with only 16.5% of non-parlour tenants and whereas 34.6% of non-parlour tenants were unskilled a mere 2.1% of parlour tenants fell into this category.

The greatest difference between slum clearance estates and other suburban estates however was the high proportion of unemployed families housed on the former. The level of unemployment amongst Addison, Chamberlain and Wheatley and 1925 tenants had been low or negligible, 0.1%, 4.0% and 2.4% of the total estate populations respectively but on 1930 estates it was far higher, 23.8%. However not a single parlour tenant in this study was registered as unemployed. Unemployment on 1930 estates was confined to non-parlour tenants where it ran at a level of 27.1%, three times higher than on the late Wheatley estate, Finch House.

The slum clearance legislation of the 1930's therefore extended suburban council housing to far more unskilled and unemployed families, the majority of whom the Housing Committee would not have rehoused in the suburbs by choice. Slum clearance legislation also resulted in more families with a widow as head of household being allocated houses. On Addison, Chamberlain and Wheatley and 1925 estates the proportion of houses allocated to widows was 0.7%, 1.9% and 2.1% respectively but on 1930 estates it increased to 5.9% when the Committee had no alternative but to house what it considered a high risk group. Far more retired families were also housed on 1930 estates either in specially designed cottages and flats for the elderly or in ordinary housing; the figures being for Addison, Chamberlain and Wheatley and 1925 estates, 0.2%, 0.8% and 0.5% of the total populations respectively, but 3.0% on 1930 estates.

During the inter-war period therefore changes in housing policy were clearly reflected in the social composition of council estates built under the various Housing Acts. With the exception of unsubsidized houses, the level of skill amongst council house tenants fell continuously throughout the period in response to changes in political bias and subsidy provision and the lowering of housing standards. Addison houses had definitely not been inhabited solely by the class for whom they were intended but this situation was remedied in the Chamberlain and Wheatley period when over 84% of tenants could be classified as "working class". From the mid-1930's onwards the Committee had to rehouse the poorest in the community with the result that over 92.1% of 1930 families could be classified as "working class", the vast majority being unskilled and unemployed workers.

2. The Familial Characteristic of Original Estate Populations.

i) Age composition.

Unfortunately it is impossible to determine the age structure of estate populations from the Housing Department's house cards owing to the fact that the age of the head of household was not recorded and it was only in the later Wheatley period that children's ages were provided. The 1937 study of the Norris Green estate indicates however that people settling down on this vast estate were young families. This study provides information about the ages of married women who had been original tenants on this estate. The majority of these women, 51%, had been under forty at the commencement of their tenancies, while 47% had been under the age of thirty.⁹ The ages of tenant's children also indicate that families on this and other Wheatley estates were in fact young. The Merseyside survey of working class families had found that 23.9% of children were in the age-group 0-4, while 45.6% and 30.5% were in the age groups 5-13 and 14-20 respectively. On Chamberlain and Wheatley estates however the proportion of children falling into the 0-4, 5-13 and 14-20 age groups was 46.2%, 38.1% and 15.7% respectively. Consequently there was an extremely high proportion of children aged 0-4 in Chamberlain and Wheatley families, a smaller proportion than the average in the age group 5-13 and a considerably smaller proportion aged 14-20. The explanation can only be that an abnormally high proportion of Chamberlain and Wheatley tenants were young couples.

Unfortunately, as stated above, no information exists about the ages of Addison children and as a result no indication of parental ages. However the house cards provide information about 1925 and

1930 tenants. Families allocated unsubsidized houses appear to have been older, but only slightly than Chamberlain and Wheatley tenants as the proportion of children in the 0-4, 5-13 and 14-20 age groups was 38.7%, 44.2% and 17.0% respectively. Slum clearance families however appear to have been considerably older as only 20.8% of children were aged 0-4 but 30.2% were aged 14-20, resembling more closely therefore families in the Merseyside survey.

ii) Family size.

The Merseyside survey found a high degree of correlation between occupational grade and family size: family size increased consistently as occupational grade fell. In general two more children were born to the families of unskilled workers than skilled workers.¹⁰ A similar pattern emerges from this study. During the Addison, Chamberlain and Wheatley and slum clearance periods the level of skill amongst council tenants fell but family size increased from 4.0 to 4.5 to 4.9 respectively. Families on 1925 estates however were smaller consisting as they did of 3.8 persons.

The average family size in the Merseyside survey was 4.1 and since the survey was based almost exclusively on working class families it is not surprising that the mainly lower middle class Addison families contained fewer people.¹¹ Chamberlain and Wheatley families socially more closely resembled Merseyside working class families but they were larger presumably because of the very high proportion of young couples of child bearing age living on the estates. The 1925 estates similarly housed many young couples but families were smaller. The Housing Committee in an attempt to keep rent arrears and maintenance costs down in these unsubsidized houses

Table 3. Familial characteristics of new suburban council estates built under the 1919, 1923, 1924, 1925, 1930 and 1935 Housing Acts (1920-1939)

Sample size (household)	Mean household size	% households with children aged 0-4yrs	% households with children aged 5-13yrs	% households with children aged 14-20yrs	% households consisting of 3 persons or less	% households consisting of 7 persons or more
All 1919 Houses						
1183	4.0	NA	NA	NA	43.6	5.6
1919 Parlour Houses						
781	3.9	NA	NA	NA	45.0	5.4
1919 Non-Parlour Houses						
402	4.1	NA	NA	NA	41.0	6.1
All 1923 & 1924 Houses						
4031	4.5	46.2	38.1	15.7	31.6	11.6
1923 & 1924 Parlour Houses						
1481	4.2	43.6	38.1	15.7	43.6	9.4
1923 & 1924 Non-Parlour Houses						
2550	4.7	24.7	17.0	47.8	24.7	12.9
All 1925 Houses						
571	3.8	38.7	44.2	17.0	47.8	3.9
1925 Parlour Houses						
241	3.6	56.0	30.2	13.8	56.0	1.9
1925 Non-Parlour Houses						
330	4.0	41.9	30.2	28.9	41.9	5.4
All 1930 & 1935 Houses						
1007	4.9	20.8	49.0	30.2	22.0	16.5
1930 & 1935 Parlour Houses						
125	3.9	52.8	30.2	17.0	52.8	5.6
1930 & 1935 Non-Parlour Houses						
882	5.1	17.7	49.0	30.2	17.7	18.0

* NA - Not available.

appear to have deliberately chosen small families. Slum clearance families tended to be older than Chamberlain and Wheatley and 1925 families but their family size was much larger than even Chamberlain and Wheatley families presumably because they contained a very high proportion of unskilled workers.

As with occupational grades the differences between council tenants housed under the various Housing Acts is far more pronounced in non-parlour families than parlour families. The average family size of parlour tenants housed on Addison, Chamberlain and Wheatley, 1925 and 1930 estates was 3.9, 4.2, 3.6 and 3.9 respectively. Parlour houses therefore appear to have been restricted to families with few dependants presumably because they were more likely to be able to bear the financial burden of these expensive houses. The average sized non-parlour family however was larger, 4.1, 4.7, 4.0 and 5.1 on Addison Chamberlain and Wheatley, 1925 and 1930 estates respectively. On slum clearance estates therefore non-parlour families contained on average over one person per family more than parlour families.

The Housing Department's tenants house cards only provide information about the size of families at the time they were allocated houses. However the fact that 10.3% of suburban council houses were found to be overcrowded in 1936 suggests that many families expanded as more children were born, often to the extent that severe overcrowding resulted. Interviews with council tenants support this fact since these non-parlour Wheatley families expanded on average from 4.1 to 5.5, slum clearance families from 5.1 to 6.7.

Parlour families, initially smaller than non-parlour families, 3.9, only increased to 4.3.

Well, we were all young girls when we moved in here, most of us only had the one or maybe two children but there was no birth control in those days, not like today, and girls went on to have large families. Only had the two children myself when we first come here, but before we knew it another four arrived, my fella said he only had to look at me and I was pregnant. My God, I wish they had had that birth pill in¹² my day, the difference it would have made to my life.

Many tenants recalled that they lived in constant dread of the Housing Department finding out how many children were in the family in case they were forced to move. One family living on the Sparrow Hall estate had five children when they were allocated their house in 1937 but by 1946 an additional five children had been born.

As you see this is only a small kitchen house and for a time there was 12 living here, my God, when I think of it now. The girls, there was 7 of them, slept in one room, the boys in the other, all top to tail they was in the beds. I was terrified the Housing would find out about us and put us out. I remember one lady having to go. I don't know where they put her but she had been living in one of them two bedroom houses and she had gone on to have seven kids, I remember they was all boys. She was a nice little soul. I remember her when she moved in, only had the one kiddie then and she was such a handsome women but after all them kids, well a woman's looks soon go. All of the young ones round here went on to have a house full of kids, well we was all Catholics you know, so we just had to accept the kids coming along. I think the Housing mostly just had to turn a blind eye to it, well where else could they put us. Them houses over the way there, were bigger, had another bedroom but there's only a few of them, not enough for¹³ all of us who needed them, and they cost too much anyway.

The Housing Committee not only failed to provide sufficient 4- and 5-bedroomed houses for expanding families but by not implementing a rent rebate scheme many larger families were denied access to more spacious parlour houses. A situation thereby existed in which many houses were chronically over-occupied, while others had one or two bedrooms to spare. At the time of allocation parlour houses accommodated more small families and fewer larger families. On Addison estates parlour and non-parlour families were roughly the

same size but on Wheatley estates whereas 43.6% of parlour families consisted of 3 persons or less only 24.7% of non-parlour families were of this size but a greater proportion of non-parlour families 12.9% compared with 9.4% of parlour families consisted of 7 persons or more. On 1925 estates 56% of parlour families consisted of 3 persons or less, the figure being 41.9% for non-parlour families while the proportion of families containing 7 persons or more was 1.9% and 5.4% respectively. The carefully selected tenants of unsubsidized houses therefore contained far more smaller and fewer larger families than other general needs housing. This was certainly not the case for slum clearance non-parlour families since, only 17.7% contained 3 persons or less but 18% 7 persons or more. On the other hand 52.8% of parlour families consisted of 3 persons or more but only 5.6% were large being made up of 7 persons or more.

The familial characteristics of council tenants therefore also reflect changes in housing policy both at the central and local level. As the level of skill amongst council tenants declined in the 1920's family size increased. Unfortunately this increase was accompanied by a lowering of housing standards which meant that larger families were being accommodated in smaller and smaller non-parlour houses. The result was that frequently these larger families outgrew their small, 710 or 620 square feet non-parlour houses and poverty prevented them from acquiring a larger parlour house. The reluctance of the Housing Committee to introduce a rent rebate or child allowance scheme meant that the housing stock was never efficiently utilised and consequently many houses were either over or under-occupied.

3. Economic Characteristics of Original Estate Families.

i) The amount and range of tenants incomes.

Although it is not always the case, generally there is a close relationship between the social class and economic position of a family and since the level of skill amongst council tenants varied under the different Housing Acts we would expect to see such variations reflected in income level. This in fact occurred on Addison, Chamberlain and Wheatley and 1930 estates for as the level of skill dropped so did the income of the head of the household from £4 2s. 6½d., (£4.13p), to £3 6s. 8d., (£3.33p), to £2 4s. 8½d., (£2.23p), respectively. However despite the fact that socially 1925 estate tenants were above Chamberlain and Wheatley tenants the mean income of 1925 tenants was lower, being £3 3s. 11d., (£3.19p). On Chamberlain and Wheatley estates there were far more unskilled workers, many of whom were employed casually. Such workers had violently fluctuating incomes and probably when they applied for a council house they tended to state their maximum earning potential in their anxiety to prove their ability to pay. The higher skilled 1925 estate tenants probably could not earn as much as, for example, fully employed dock labourers but at least their wages tended to be regular and they did not suffer periods of enforced idleness. In allocating unsubsidized houses the Housing Committee selected tenants in safe jobs who were least likely to place a burden on the rates through rent arrears.

In the Merseyside survey the average income of Liverpool working class families was found to be £3 2s. 6d., (£3.12p.).¹⁴ This represented the gross income from all sources except public

assistance. When the gross family income was calculated for Addison, Chamberlain and Wheatley, 1925 and 1930 and 1935 families the totals were £4 6s. 4½d., (£4.32p), £3 13s. 4d., (£3.66p), £3 9s. 8d., (£3.49p) and £2 12s. 8½d., (£2.63p) respectively. The family income was made up from the income of the head of the household, unemployment benefit and public assistance being included under this heading, the income of any subsidiary earners and any income derived from pensions of any kind. The decision was taken to include public assistance as income in order to give a clearer indication of a family's standard of living, which means that incomes recorded for late Wheatley tenants and non-parlour 1930 tenants cannot be compared directly with the average Merseyside income, since they include public assistance cases. Prior to the late Wheatley period people in receipt of public assistance did not tend to be allocated council houses and families in this category were also excluded from 1925 estates.

The majority of council houses contained only one adult earner for the income of the head of the household accounted for 95.5%, 90.8%, 91.4% and 84.8% of the gross family income among Addison, Chamberlain and Wheatley, 1925 and 1930 tenants, respectively. The reason why the income of the head of the household accounted for less of the family income in 1930 families was not because there were more subsidiary earners but because of the presence of a high number of old people on 1930 estates. The Housing Department did not classify the old age pension as income and old age pensioners were recorded as having zero income under "head of household" heading.

Addison estates mainly catered for middle and lower middle class

families and skilled workers and not surprisingly both parlour and non-parlour families, on average, had family incomes higher than the average working class income of £3 2s. 6d., (£3.12p). The average family income of parlour tenants was £4 11s. 4d., (£4.57p), non-parlour £3 16s. 6d., (£3.83p). Only 12.0% of parlour tenants and 49.3% of non-parlour tenants had incomes less than £3 2s. 6d. a week (£3.12p), while 65.5% of parlour and 49.9% of non-parlour earned between £3 2s. 7d., (£3.13p) and £5 5s. 0d. a week (£5.75p). The proportion of parlour families earning between £5 5s. 1d., (£5.26p) and £7 10s. 0d. a week, (£7.50p) was 19.7% but only 0.8% of all non-parlour families earned this amount. Not a single non-parlour family had an income greater than £7 10s. 0d., (£7.50p) but 2.8% of parlour did; 0.5% even had incomes higher than £10 a week. Two tenants renting parlour houses on the Larkhill Estate had incomes as high as £11 a week. One of them was a single lady with a living-in maid, who lived by "private means".

The average income of Chamberlain and Wheatley parlour families was similiarly well above the average Liverpool working class family income, £4 8s. 8d., (£4.43p). A small proportion of families, 14.1% had incomes of less than £3 2s. 6d., (£3.12p), while 68.1% earned between £3 2s. 7d., (£3.13p) and £5 5s. 0d., (£5.25p), 17.7% between £5 5s. 1d., (£5.26p) and £7 10s. 0d. a week (£7.50p). Only 0.1% earned more than £7 10s. 0d., (£7.50p). Non-parlour incomes were, on average, £1 4s. 0d., (£1.20p) lower than parlour family incomes, the average non-parlour income being £3 4s. 8½d., (£3.24p). The vast majority of families, 79.5%, earned less than £3 2s. 6d. a week (£3.12p), of whom 37% earned less than £2 12s. 0d., (£2.60p). The number of non-parlour families earning between £3 2s. 7d., (£3.13p)

Table 4. Economic characteristics of new suburban council estates built under the 1919, 1923, 1924, 1925, 1930 and 1935 Housing Acts (1920-1939)

	Sample size (households)	Mean income of household head (£-p)	Mean total income of household (£-p)	Household head income as % of total income	% households earning less than £1.50p	% households earning between £1.50p and £2.60p	% households earning between £2.61p and £3.12p	% households earning between £3.13p and £5.25p	% households earning between £5.26p and £7.50p	% households earning more than £7.50p
All 1919 Houses	1183	4.13	4.32	95.5	-	1.7	22.9	60.2	13.3	1.8
1919 Parlour Houses	781	4.38	4.57	95.8	-	-	12.0	65.5	19.7	2.8
1919 Non-Parlour Houses	402	3.66	3.84	95.3	-	5.0	44.3	49.9	0.8	-
All 1923 & 1924 Houses	4031	3.34	3.68	90.8	2.2	21.2	32.1	37.8	6.6	0.1
1923 & 1924 Parlour Houses	1481	4.01	4.44	90.3	-	-	14.1	68.1	17.7	0.1
1923 & 1924 Non-Parlour Houses	2550	2.96	3.24	91.3	3.5	33.5	42.5	20.2	0.3	-
All 1925 Houses	571	3.19	3.49	91.4	1.2	27.5	40.5	26.5	3.8	-
1925 Parlour Houses	241	3.87	4.16	93.0	-	5.1	42.9	42.9	9.1	-
1925 Non-Parlour Houses	330	2.70	3.00	90.0	2.0	44.0	39.0	14.7	0.3	-
All 1930 & 1935 Houses	1007	2.22	2.62	84.8	11.0	43.3	35.6	9.8	0.2	-
1930 & 1935 Parlour Houses	125	3.45	3.63	95.0	-	14.7	32.4	51.1	1.8	-
1930 & 1935 Non-Parlour Houses	882	2.05	2.48	82.6	12.6	47.4	36.1	3.9	-	-

and £5 5s. 0d., (£5.25p) was 20.2% and only 0.3% had incomes greater than £5 5s. 0d. (£5.25p) a week.

Non-parlour Chamberlain and Wheatley families therefore had incomes only slightly above the average Liverpool working class income. By the end of the Wheatley period however when the level of skill amongst tenants had fallen to such an extent that the majority of tenants were casual, unskilled labourers family income was well below the average for Liverpool. On the Finch House Estate the average family income was £2 13s. 4½d., (£2.67p) a week. By 1934 therefore The Housing Committee certainly could not be criticized for housing only the more affluent members of the working classes. Late Wheatley houses were tenanted by poor families whose incomes were well below the average Liverpool working class income, despite the fact that they had been inflated slightly by the inclusion of public assistance.

The families housed in non-parlour dwellings on 1925 estates had incomes higher than late Wheatley tenants but still slightly below the average Liverpool working class income, the average being £3 0s 0½d., (£3.00p). Only 15% of families earned more than £3 2s. 6d. a week (£3.12p). Nearly half, 46% had incomes of less than £2 12s. 0d., (£2.60p) a week, while the number earning between £3 2s. 7d., (£3.13p) and £5 5s. 0d., (£5.25p) a week was 14.7% and only 0.3% earned more than £5 5s. 0d., (£5.25p) a week. As on earlier estates parlour families had considerably higher incomes to service their higher rents. The average parlour family income was £4 3s. 2½d., (£4.16p) a week. Just over half of the families earned more than £3 2s. 6d.. (£3.12p) a week. 42.9% had incomes between £3 2s. 7d., (£3.13p) and £5 5s. 0d., (£5.25p) a week, 9.1% between £5 5s. 1d.,

(£5.26p) and £7 10s. 0d. (£7.50p) a week. Despite the fact that the level of skill of 1925 parlour tenants was slightly higher than that of Chamberlain and Wheatley families, they earned less. This was probably due to the fact that there was a greater number of skilled manual workers on the 1925 estates who probably earned less than the skilled non-manual workers who dominated Addison and Chamberlain and Wheatley parlour houses.

The average income of parlour families on 1930 estates was even lower, £3 12s. 6½d., (£3.63p) a week, i.e. almost a £1 less than the average Addison parlour family income. Compared with parlour families on other estates far more 1930 families fell into the lower income ranges, fewer into the upper ranges. Nearly half of the parlour families, 47.1%, earned less than £3 2s. 6d., (£3.12p) a week. The proportion of families earning between £3 2s. 7d., (£3.13p) and £5 5s. 0d., (£5.25p) a week was 51.1% and only 1.8% earned more than £5 5s. 0d., (£5.25p) a week. This marked decline in income level probably stems from the fact that more affluent families were likely to be deterred from accepting parlour houses on these estates which were to be largely inhabited by *ex-slum* families.

The fact that the majority of non-parlour families had originated from the slums accounts for the extremely low incomes recorded for this group of tenants. The average 1930 non-parlour family income was £2 9s. 6d., (£2.48p), i.e. over 12s. 0d. a week (60p) lower than the average Liverpool working class income, which had not been accredited with public assistance payments. Non-parlour families on these estates were poor, very poor. Only 3.9% of them had incomes greater than £3 2s. 6d., (£3.12p) a week. Well over half of the

families earned less than £2 12s. 0d., (£2.60p) a week, 12.6% of whom earned less than £1 10s. 0d., (£1.50p). This was due to the low wage-earning capacity of these families, the increased provision made for old age pensioners on these estates and the high level of male unemployment recorded. Nearly one third of all non-parlour families were unemployed at the time they qualified for houses and they were living off unemployment benefit or public assistance. If public assistance had been excluded from family incomes the average family income of this group of tenants would have fallen to £2 0s. 7d., (£2.03p) a week.

The fall in the level of skill amongst council tenants, which followed changes in housing policy during the inter-war period had consequently been accompanied by a corresponding decline in family income levels. At the beginning of the period the Housing Committee had mainly housed affluent non-manual and manual skilled workers but by 1939 they were housing *the very poorest in the community, the impoverished slum dweller.*

ii) The standard of living of original estate families.

Figures of family income alone tell us little about the actual standard of living of estate families. To present a clearer picture family income had to be related to the number of persons it had to maintain. Average income per head fell from £1 0s. 8d., (£1.03p) on Addison estates to 16s. 3d., (81.7p) on Chamberlain and Wheatley estates. It increased on 1925 estates to 18s. 3d. (91.8p) but fell dramatically on 1930 estates to 10s. 7d. (53p). Throughout the period parlour families, on average, had larger incomes and smaller families than non-parlour families and consequently a greater income

per head. The income per head on Addison estates for parlour and non-parlour families was £1 3s. 4d. (£1.17) and 18s. 6d. (93p), respectively, £1 1s 0½d., (£1.05p) and 13s. 6d. (68p), respectively, on Chamberlain and Wheatley estates, £1 3s. 0d., (£1.15p) and 15s. 0d. (75p) on 1925 estates. While on 1930 estates the income per head of parlour families was 18s. 6d., (93p), i.e. nearly double that of non-parlour families who had an average of 9s. 6d., (48p). When it was reckoned that it cost at least 10s. 0d., (50p) a week to keep one person in food alone in a middle class family it is obvious that many slum families were living in extreme poverty.

The fact however that in the early 1920's, many families experienced difficulties in meeting their rent bills shows that even the affluent Addison tenants sometimes found the economic burden of council house occupation uncomfortably high. It simply cost a lot more to live in the suburbs. The new suburbanites generally had to pay about 2 shillings a week (10p) extra on transport to work. The expense of furnishing and heating a new and frequently larger house had to be met and higher prices also had to be paid in the suburban shops. It was estimated that families moving to new estates had to be prepared to pay at least 6s. 0d., (30p) a week more on their transport and food. Also council rents in Liverpool were high, the average rent of an Addison house being 18s. 4d. (92.4p) a week, which was, on average, 3s. 8d., (19p) a week higher than the rent of accommodation previously inhabited by Addison families. Suburban living therefore placed a strain on the family budget and if several more children were born to a family, reducing the income per head dramatically, financial problems could result. Furthermore during the early 1920's the industrial slump put many men, including

white-collar workers, out of work or on short time and if they had just moved into a new, expensive council house, families could find themselves in desperate circumstances. Over 17% of Addison tenants in fact left their new houses within two years of taking up their tenancies.

In the post-Addison period the rent of council houses was cheaper, the average rent of Chamberlain and Wheatley houses being 13s. 3½d., (66.7p), only 2s. 2d., (11p) more than tenants had paid for their previous housing, while the rent for 1925 houses was 14s. 0½d. (70.2p), 9d. (4.9p) more than had previously been spent on previous accommodation. Houses on slum clearance estates were cheapest of all, the average rent being 10s. 9d., (54.9p) but since the majority of tenants had originated from low-rented slum property their new rent was considerably more than they had previously had to spend on rent, 3s. 3½d., (16.8p) more a week. Rent levels were lower than in the Addison period but so were family incomes which meant that reduced income per head made suburban living even more precarious for these lower income families.

During the post-Addison period the Housing Committee was faced with an ever increasing rent arrears problem as more and more families experienced difficulties in meeting their rent payments. Liverpool's failure to implement a rent rebate scheme meant not only that those in greatest housing need were ignored until the late 1930's but also that those who had been lucky enough to be allocated a council house received no help with their rent if their financial circumstances took a turn for the worse. In Leeds, for example, the addition of another child to a family meant a reduction in rent in many cases where the family income was below a certain level. Some

Table 6. The stability of new inter-war suburban council estates

Sample size (households)	% households removing within 2 years	% households removing within 5 years	% households removing within 10 years	
1183	17.0	28.8	54.5	All 1919 Houses
781	14.8	30.7	54.1	1919 Parlour Houses
402	21.3	25.4	55.5	1919 Non-Parlour Houses
4031	13.6	33.7	51.6	All 1923 & 1924 Houses
1481	14.9	38.4	57.1	1923 & 1924 Parlour Houses
2550	12.8	31.0	48.4	1923 & 1924 Non-Parlour Houses
571	21.5	28.0	45.3	All 1925 Houses
241	25.4	28.0	43.0	1925 Parlour Houses
330	18.7	28.0	47.0	1925 Non-Parlour Houses
1007	17.0	24.4	30.9	All 1930 & 1935 Houses
125	22.4	34.6	44.4	1930 & 1935 Parlour Houses
882	16.7	23.0	29.0	1930 & 1935 Non-Parlour Houses

families with low incomes and large families were fortunate enough to live rent free.¹⁵ In Liverpool, however, an increase in family size had the reverse effect, it merely placed a greater strain on the family income, as income per head fell. Similarly if a man was out of work in Leeds as a result of ill-health or unemployment his financial situation was greatly relieved by not having to pay rent but in Liverpool it meant economic disaster for the rent still had to be paid out of the meagre public assistance or unemployment benefit.

Many tenants tell of the grinding poverty of the inter-war years. Families who had just been able to cope on their low incomes when their families had been small found it more and more difficult to manage as family size increased.

The council rents were always high, even in them days and we had a struggle to manage right from the start, but it got worse with me going on to have the six children. I had been brought up to think that paying your rent was the most important thing, not to be able to pay was a disgrace, so the rent was always paid. Many a time the children only had bread and jam for their tea, they often cried because they were so hungry, my heart used to bleed for them but well, we survived. Others round here preferred to buy food than pay their rent but I wasn't like that. I remember one young girl down the road, she had a house full of kids and her husband was taken young with the cancer, well she used to say the Housing could sing for their rent because her kids weren't going hungry. The boss from the Housing caught her one day coming back from the shops and you know she was evicted because she had a pram full of food and they said she should have been spending her parish money on the rent.¹⁶

A spirit of comaraderie existed amongst tenants regarding representatives from the rent arrears office.

I owed plenty of rent in those days, mind you they all did round here. You hid from the rent collector but you knew if you went a few weeks over they would send the head man from the Municipal Buildings. When us girls saw him coming we would run like bloody hell. It was a bit

of a giggle really because we would tip one another off¹⁷ that he was on his way, it was like the bush telegraph.

One of the primary causes of poverty amongst council tenants was a family of young children together with low income. Another cause was casual, irregular earnings. From the late 1920's onwards more and more casual workers were allocated Wheatley houses and these workers were in constant danger of falling below the poverty line.

Well, when my husband had work we managed alright, mind you it was never easy, there was never anything to spare. Because there was nothing to spare we had nothing to fall back on when he was laid off and that happened a lot, him being a docker. When there was no money coming in we just did without. We couldn't afford coal, we would burn old boots, anything to get a bit of heat in the winter, couldn't afford the electric, just had candles and well food, if they wouldn't give you credit at the shops, you had to do without that too, and I'm ashamed to tell you this but sometimes the rent wasn't paid. The dockers had to have worked so many consecutive days before they got the dole and so if they had worked too few days there was no dole and you was expected to manage a week on say half a day's pay. If it hadn't have been for my mother helping out I swear I would have been forced onto the parish sometimes. She would buy clothes for the children but more important of all she used to bring a basket full of food.¹⁸

In the 1930's however unemployment was probably the major cause of poverty amongst council tenants. Very few unemployed families were allocated houses before 1930 but as unemployment soared in the early 1930's many council tenants found themselves thrown out of work. On the Norris Green estate for example only 0.6% of families had been unemployed at the time they qualified for allocation but by 1930 9% of families were unemployed and the figure had risen to 22% by 1937.¹⁹ The Merseyside survey found a high degree of correlation between occupational grade and unemployment: unemployment consistently rose as occupational grade fell.²⁰ The commonest Wheatley estate non-parlour tenant had been an unskilled

worker, the very class most vulnerable therefore to industrial depression and the least likely to have any means of supplementing their meagre dole. In the early 1930's unemployment benefit amounted to only 28s. 0d., (£1.40p), for man, wife and one infant, 32s. 0d., (£1.60p) for a man, wife and two school children, a mere 36s. 0d., (£1.80p), a week for man, wife, two infants and three school children. For those not eligible for unemployment benefit poor relief had to be claimed at the even lower rate of 22s. 0d., (£1.10p), 29s. 0d., (£1.45p) and 35s. 0d., (£1.75p) a week, respectively.²¹ It is not surprising therefore that the authors of Men Without Work estimated that 76% of unemployed council tenants were living in poverty and that 44% of these were living in "deep" poverty.²²

Unemployed council tenants consequently had been well housed but they were ill-fed and ill-clothed.

It was a constant battle in them days to feed the children but they never had enough to eat, the little ones used to cry because of the hunger pains in their stomachs. We only really had one meal a day, usually a pan of blind stew, done on the fire, that was like scouse, you know but with no meat. The children were always ill with colds and bad chests. You couldn't afford no decent clothes, you see, and the longer my husband was out of work the worse it got. Well the clothes wore out and you couldn't afford to replace them. And, oh yes, the boots they were the bane of my husband's life, him having to repair them, like. Sometimes there wasn't any leather and the children had to go to school with newspaper stuffed in their boots.²³ My God, no wonder their noses were always running.

One tenant recalls with acute embarrassment that at one time when her husband had been unemployed for a long spell, none of her children had any underwear.

I remember once, and you know it still makes me want to cry to think of it, my eldest lad came home from school one day sobbing his heart out because well, he had torn his trousers in school and the other kids had laughed at

him because you see, he wasn't wearing any underpants.²⁴

Not all inter-war council tenants, of course, lived in such dire poverty. Many families in regular employment with decent incomes enjoyed a good standard of living in their new suburban homes.

Oh no, I wouldn't say I found it difficult to manage in those days. You see, my dear, my husband was one of the lucky ones and he always had a good, steady wage with being a shipping clerk. Mind you, wages were on the low side in those days but we always managed to live quite well. We could always afford decent food and I liked to dress well. I was always nipping down to town, to the Bon Marche, it's called George Henry Lees today, for a new hat or dress. Oh yes, I always had money to spend on myself and every year we had a good holiday away.²⁵

Yes, I suppose it had been more expensive living out here. Our rent was higher and bus fares were more expensive but it was never a struggle. My husband always held a good position and so, yes, you could say we had a very comfortable life. We had a holiday every year in Wales and my husband liked a game of golf at the week-ends and oh yes, we both belonged to a bowling club.²⁶

Family incomes were so high in some cases to allow children to be sent to private schools.

Well, it was different in those days, these houses housed a very different class of tenant. People who lived in these houses when they were first built were well-off, some very well-off indeed. My father, for example, was a managing director of a furniture company and a chauffeur driven car would pick him up every morning to take him to work. You see we were very comfortably placed. My father always paid for my education, first infants, then juniors and when I was eleven he paid for me to go to Holly Lodge and that was a school for real ladies in those days.²⁷

Other families had sufficient incomes to buy motor cars which were very expensive items in the inter-war period.

I must have travelled to town by bus when I first moved in here but I had bought a car by the time the war broke out in '39. A few around here had cars, well, you see, these were the expensive houses, almost a £1 a week for rent, and so they only gave them to people who were comfortably off with good jobs. A lot of the men worked in shipping offices, like me, down town and there were a lot of school teachers on this road. I suppose you could say it was a

high class area then with all the men going to work in suits, some in bowler hats even.²⁸

High income families, usually those occupying parlour houses, were obviously able to take full advantage of their new suburban life style. It was the poorer families inhabiting non-parlour houses who suffered the hardship and deprivation of those years for, although the Housing Committee had provided smaller and cheaper houses throughout the Wheatley period, the rents were still too high for their low-skilled tenants, many of whom were employed on a casual basis. The Housing Committee had provided good quality working class houses but unfortunately nothing was done to ensure that tenants could afford to live in them. The extent of poverty among these tenants was appalling and the only way many of them could afford to pay their rent was if they cut down on food, frequently to the extent that they were severely malnourished.

I remember, I must have been about sixteen at the time, and my mother was always fainting, she would just fall to the floor. She would tell us kids not to worry, that it was just her age. But, you know, years later she admitted to me it was because she had been starving herself. There had been all those nine children to feed and so little money and she would just do without herself, feed my father and the children but have nothing herself. She must have been so under nourished and having all those children too draining her health. Mind you I say she would feed us kids before herself but we never got much either. When I was fourteen I went to work at a little shop at the back of us and it was like paradise to me, all the food and sweets. And the woman in the shop was so kind to me, she let me have the broken biscuits and things. You know it was the first time in my life that I had enough to eat and it²⁹ was strange, I suddenly found I had so much more energy.

Many tenants who experienced difficulties in feeding and clothing their families also found it impossible to keep their new homes warm in winter. The old terraced houses packed tightly together in narrow streets were warmer than the new spaciouly laid out suburban

houses; the adoption of semi-detached lay-out exposed one more wall to the elements. Unfortunately many families could not afford the additional fuel to warm their new houses, although many ingenious devices were adopted in an attempt to save coal.

I would fill a condensed milk tin with ashes and put it in the middle of the fire and it would go very red and burn ³⁰right through and that would save a few pieces of coal.

Children were sent out to scavenge for bits of wood to burn.

Seeing as we were one of the first on this estate there was building going on around here for, let me see, two or three years. Well, when the builders had gone home at night my brothers would go round picking up bits of wood they had finished with because more often than not we were short of coal. The builders used to go mad because wood would go missing that hadn't been finished with. I know it was stealing but it was a really bad winter and the people were freezing. They were big houses to try and keep warm, and people didn't have the money for the coal, it was the depression remember. The duck boards from our street even got pinched, you know, they were the planks the builders put down before the roads were made up for us to walk on out of the mud. One morning they had gone missing, there was such an uproar and well, I suppose they had been taken for fire wood.³¹

The new council houses had provided families with modern amenities but many simply could not afford to take advantage of them.

I only allowed myself one shilling a week for electricity and when it ran out I never had another shilling to put in the meter. Everybody was the same mind, by the end of the week all the houses around here ³²used to be in the dark with everybody using candles.

The electricity was seldom used in our house because of the cost. There was only one light bulb in the house, in the living room, none of the bedrooms had bulbs in them and we just made do with candles. It was the same with the gas it was never used much, everything was cooked on the range. We were poor, really poor. When I look back on the thirties all I ³³remember is being cold and hungry; what years they were.

The Housing Committee had provided families with up-to-date houses but unfortunately nothing was done to ensure that the people could

afford to live in them. Despite deputations and petitions from tenants complaining about the plight of impoverished families the Housing Committee's only response was to reduce rents very slightly in the early 1930's when far more dramatic measures were called for such as the introduction of a rent rebate scheme.

The plight of ex-slum families was even worse, for as the house cards have revealed these tenants, with their extremely low incomes, were even less able to cope with their new suburban life style. In order to bring council house rents within the means of ex-slum dwellers the 1930 legislation had recommended that differential renting should be introduced. No differential renting scheme was introduced in Liverpool and 1930 rents were comparable with 1924 rents despite the fact that the Housing Committee were housing a much poorer class of tenant.

You know nobody cared about us. The Corporation thought they were giving the likes of us the world, getting us out of the slums but they didn't care that none of us could afford the bloody houses. They dumped us out here and then forgot about us. The only people who gave us any help was the priests. They would collect old clothes for us and bits of furniture. Nobody else gave us any help at all, we were starving but nobody cared, no wonder there is them militants today, the way folk were treated in the past. Mind you, we never went³⁴ on the parish and none of my children wore police clothes.

One of the most formidable problems which confronted the new tenants was furniture. On average their previous accommodation had far fewer rooms and consequently there had been little room for furniture. In Leeds a scheme was developed for assisting tenants to acquire more furniture and in Birmingham the Citizen Society had a scheme for collecting unwanted furniture to help people going into new houses.³⁵ In Liverpool tenants were left to fend for themselves until the Personal Social Service started a second hand

furniture shop in 1938.

Furniture, well we didn't have any really. You might not believe this but we used to sit on orange boxes in those days. And beds, we didn't have any beds, just mattresses and old clothes on the floor. I remember the van coming from the Corporation to stove our furniture before we moved, and me saying to the men, you'll be lucky I haven't got any furniture. Well, we were living off public assistance so I don't know how they expected us to pay the rent, let alone furnish a house of this size. I think the Corporation should have given us an allowance, ³⁶like, to buy furniture, seeing as how they moved us out.

Liverpool's rent policy was such a muddle that families on public assistance were called upon to pay nearly 10s. 0d., (50p) a week in rent. A man, woman and two children, for example, on the Sparrow Hall Estate received 25s. 6d., (£1.27p), a week public assistance and they were expected to pay 9s. 10d. a week, (49p), for a three-bedroomed, non-parlour house, roughly 3s. 0d., (15p) a week more than they had paid for their previous accommodation. When all their expenses had been paid they were left with 6s. 2d., (31p) a week for food, or 1s. 6½d., (7.5p) per head.

By moving families out of the slums the Housing Committee had drastically improved their physical environment but greatly added to their economic problems. The ex-slum families not only had larger families to support on lower incomes than "general needs" tenants but the majority of them were re-housed on remote estates, lying up to 7 miles from the city centre, despite the fact that the majority earned their livelihood from the docks. The very families least able to afford the expenses of suburban living were in houses on the remotest estates, furthest away from their main source of employment. Families barely able to afford to feed themselves found it impossible to pay the tram fare into town.

There was hardly any work on the docks in them days but

my husband still had to go down to sign on every day. You couldn't afford the bus fare so you just had to walk. More often than not he was in his bare feet; my husband. Can you imagine the young ones of today doing that, walking all the way to town with no shoes on. They just stay in bed today and get their giro's sent to them. In our day you had to just get₃ up and look for work or there was no dole, nothing.

Other local authorities gave special consideration to rents on remote housing estates, bearing in mind the extra travelling expenses involved. Manchester compensated for the high cost of transport on its Wythenshawe Estate by placing the rent of these houses on a lower scale. Blackpool charged 9d., (7.5p) less for A3 houses over three miles from the city centre, while at Beddington[?] the rents of A3 houses were as follows, near centre, 10s. 0d., (50p), further out, 9s. 3d., (46.5p), remote from transport and shopping centre, 8s. 0d., (40p), a week.³⁸ Liverpool however made no concession to tenants on remote housing estates despite the fact that as travelling expenses rose, the margin of income available to pay them had fallen.

Prior to housing slum-clearance families the Housing Committee had been able to carefully select tenants and, although it was not specifically stated in their allocation policy until 1929, the main criterion for selection right from the start appears to have been a tenant's ability to pay rent. However many tenants still found the burden of council house tenancy much too heavy. Three-quarters of Addison tenants earned more than £3 2s. 6d., (£3.15p) a week but many were forced to sub-let their property to pay their rent or give their houses up altogether. The rent of new houses fell in the post-Addison period but the families accommodated were even less able to afford their new council house rents since they tended to

have lower incomes and larger families than Addison tenants. During the 1930's the economic problems of the casual, low-paid workers were greatly added to by the high level of unemployment suffered by Liverpool and in the absence of adequate welfare provision many council tenants suffered extreme hardship and deprivation. The burden of council house occupancy however, fell heaviest on ex-slum families who were totally ill-equipped financially to cope with suburban life. Without the intervention of the Second World War there is little doubt that the financial problems of these tenants would have reached such proportions that the Housing Committee would have been forced to review their rent policy.

Between the wars Liverpool City Council provided high quality housing for its working class population but unfortunately by not introducing a rent rebate scheme they failed to ensure that the houses provided were not beyond the means of many of their tenants.

4) Characteristics of Replacement Families.

During the inter-war period the population of the various estates was constantly changing as families gave up their tenancies for a variety of reasons. To what extent therefore did the replacement families resemble the original tenants in their social, familial and economic characteristics? On the later estates built under the 1925 Act and the 1930 Act replacement tenants more or less resembled original tenants socially and economically while family sizes were almost identical. The average replacement 1925 estate tenant was a skilled manual worker, with a family income of £3 5s. 6d., (£3.27p), supporting a family consisting of 3.90 persons, while the average replacement 1930 estate tenant was an unskilled labourer with a

family income of £2 11s. 8½d., (£2.58p) a week, supporting a family of 4.8 persons. The majority of 1925 houses were still allocated from the waiting list as were 1930 parlour houses, while the vast majority 82%, of 1930 non-parlour houses went to families dispossessed as a result of slum clearance operations.

However on the earlier housing estates built under the 1919 Housing Act and the Chamberlain and Wheatley Acts replacement tenants differed markedly from original tenants. Socially, replacement tenants were lower than original tenants. On Addison estates far fewer replacement tenants were employed in white collar jobs, only 16.7% compared with 49% of original tenants and consequently whereas the commonest original Addison tenant had belonged to non-manual class III, the commonest replacement Addison tenant belonged to class IV i.e. he was a skilled manual worker. Over 63% of all Addison tenants belonged to this class. Very few unskilled workers were allocated houses on Addison estates, the figure being of 6.9% and unemployed families were still largely denied access to these estates since only 0.7% of replacement tenants were without work. Overall 87.5% of replacement Addison tenants were skilled, 90.9% of parlour families and 81.6% of non-parlour families. As was the case among original families parlour tenants tended to be more highly skilled than non-parlour families but among replacement families the difference between the two groups was not as pronounced.

A similar lowering of skill also occurred amongst replacement Chamberlain and Wheatley tenants but the difference between parlour and non-parlour tenants was as pronounced as amongst original tenants. Overall 51.8% of Chamberlain and Wheatley tenants were

Table 7. Characteristics of replacement tenants housed on suburban council estates built between the wars (up to 1939)

Sample size (households)	144	96	48	627	277	350	72	30	42	125	8	117
Mean household size	3.9	3.8	4.1	4.0	4.1	4.0	3.9	3.6	4.1	4.8	3.9	4.9
% households in social class 1	0.7	-	2.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
% households in social class II	2.8	3.1	2.0	1.9	3.6	0.6	2.6	3.3	2.4	0.8	-	0.8
% households in social class III	13.2	10.4	18.8	14.5	22.7	8.0	19.3	26.6	14.1	5.6	12.5	5.1
% households in social class IV	63.9	69.8	52.2	25.8	38.6	15.7	46.9	55.9	40.4	20.0	75.0	16.3
% households in social class V	4.1	4.2	4.0	19.3	19.4	19.1	10.7	6.6	14.3	5.6	12.5	5.1
% households in social class VI	6.9	4.2	12.5	20.1	11.6	26.8	13.2	6.6	19.1	32.8	-	35.0
% households heads widows	6.2	7.3	4.0	8.1	2.5	12.6	2.3	-	2.4	5.6	-	5.9
% households heads retired	1.4	1.0	2.0	1.3	1.1	1.4	0.8	-	2.4	2.4	-	2.6
Mean income of head of household (£-p)	3.41	3.58	3.09	2.77	3.46	2.24	2.95	4.4	2.61	2.14	3.02	2.09
Mean total household income (£-p)	4.00	4.25	3.5	3.47	4.19	2.91	3.27	4.4	2.76	2.58	3.6	2.54
% householders allocated from waiting list	35.5	42.1	22.6	52.3	81.9	28.8	59.7	56.6	62.1	8.8	87.5	3.4
% households moved due to demolition	3.5	3.1	4.4	8.7	0.7	15.1	1.3	3.3	-	76.8	-	82.0
% households housed as priority cases	3.5	1.0	8.3	7.5	0.3	13.1	-	-	-	0.8	-	0.9
% households housed as special cases	2.1	3.1	-	2.1	2.9	1.4	31.9	33.3	30.9	0.8	-	0.9
% households housed as transfer cases	35.6	44.2	18.7	13.0	8.3	16.8	5.5	3.3	7.0	12.0	12.5	11.9
% households housed as exchange cases	19.5	6.3	45.8	16.3	5.8	24.7	1.3	3.3	-	-	-	-
% households moved due to over crowding	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.8	-	0.9
% skilled employed household heads	87.5	90.9	81.6	51.8	67.7	34.5	72.1	88.1	61.9	90.6	84.2	90.5
	All 1919 Houses	1919 Parlour Houses	1919 Non-Parlour Houses	All 1923 & 1924 Houses	1923 & 1924 Parlour Houses	1923 & 1924 Non-Parlour Houses	All 1925 Houses	1925 Parlour Houses	1925 Non-Parlour Houses	All 1930 & 1935 Houses	1930 & 1935 Parlour Houses	1930 & 1935 Non-Parlour Houses

skilled, 67.7% of parlour families and 34.5% of non-parlour families. The figures for original tenants had been 58.9%, 85.2% and 43.4% respectively. There were fewer skilled workers therefore but more semi-skilled workers, 19.3% of replacement families compared with 13.1% of original families. Retired families and families where the head of the household was a widow were also more numerous amongst replacement families, the figures being 1.3% and 8.1% of the total number of families respectively. However there were fewer unskilled families, only 26.8% of non-parlour and 11.6% of parlour replacement families were so classified, the figures had been 36.3% and 5.37% respectively for original families but a far greater proportion of families were unemployed at the time of allocation, whereas 6.2% of original non-parlour families and 0.1% of parlour families had been unemployed the figures amongst replacement families were 15.1% and 0.7% respectively. As unemployment increased during the late 1920's and early 1930's the Housing Committee obviously had been forced to house more and more unemployed families. If they had not many of their houses may have remained untenanted, losing vital housing revenue. The level of unemployment had been highest amongst original tenants housed on later Wheatley estates, containing mainly non-parlour houses and a similar situation is found amongst replacement tenants. The proportion of unemployed replacement tenants allocated houses on the Walton-Clubmoor estate, built during the early Wheatley period, was 8.3% of the total number of tenants, but on the late Wheatley, Finch House estate 35.3% of tenants were unemployed at the time of allocation. The proportion of unskilled families housed on these two estates also differed markedly, with 12.5% of families being so

classified in Walton-Clubmoor, 29.4% on the Finch House estate. Recent studies have shown that local authorities grade tenants and allocate their best houses on their most pleasant estates to the most desirable/responsible tenants. The fact that lower status families were consistently allocated houses on less desirable estates, i.e. those estates composed totally of non-parlour houses, suggests that such a policy of selecting desirable and not so desirable tenants was operating in the inter-war years also.

The lowering of skill amongst replacement tenants was accompanied by a corresponding lowering of income levels. Whereas the average original, Addison parlour family income had been £4 11s. 4d., (£4.57p), £3 16s. 6d., (£3.83p) for non-parlour families, the average family income for replacement tenants was £4 5s. 0½d., (£4.25p) and £3 10s. 0d., (£3.50p) respectively. Similarly Chamberlain and Wheatley family incomes for parlour and non-parlour families fell to £4 3s. 8d., (£4.19p) and £2 18s. 2½d., (£2.91p) respectively for replacement families. The fall in family income however was also accompanied by a fall in family size and as a result income per head was very similar to that found among original tenants. Presumably the Housing Committee thought that lower income families would be better able to cope with council rents if there were a minimum of dependants.

There are several reasons why replacement tenants differed from original tenants. One is that since the rents of Addison, Chamberlain and Wheatley houses were reduced in the 1930's and this enabled lower income groups to acquire council housing. Another reason for the changing composition could be that suburban council housing was increasingly used to house families in acute housing

distress. This was especially true of non-parlour houses owing to the fact that nearly 30% of Chamberlain and Wheatley replacement tenants and 12.7% of Addison families had either been dispossessed by slum clearance or were priority or special cases. Fewer parlour families however fell into these categories for only 7.3% Addison and 3.9% Chamberlain and Wheatley families had previously been in great housing need. As the Housing Committee's slum clearance programme gathered pace in the 1930's the urgent need for alternative accommodation for dispossessed slum dwellers forced the Committee to allocate more and more older, suburban housing to ex-slum families. The majority of replacement families however continued to be allocated housing from the waiting list or as a result of movements within the housing stock as council tenants exchanged properties or transferred to alternative properties. Finally the composition of estates probably changed because of the growth in owner-occupation which provided a more desirable form of tenure for higher status groups. Gradually in the late 1920's and 1930's council housing had acquired a negative image as the Housing Committee concentrated more on housing poorer families and those dispossessed under slum clearance schemes. Lower middle class families and the more affluent members of the working classes therefore abandoned this low-status form of housing for the more socially acceptable private estates.

The population of Liverpool's inter-war council house certainly was far from homogeneous and the characteristics of original tenants had varied considerably under each policy phase. Such distinctions were similarly found in replacement tenants with Addison houses being allocated to higher status, more affluent families than those

families allocated Chamberlain and Wheatley houses. Liverpool's council tenants therefore were arranged by housing management so that desirable tenants were allocated the best houses on pleasant estates. This unfortunate practice is still continued today and had led to the creation of difficult-to-let estates, usually composed almost entirely of non-parlour houses, where less desirable families are dumped. The concentration of disadvantaged families on certain estates only leads to further management and maintenance problems which in the long run make the estates even more unattractive to ordinary families.

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 25. Interview No. 24. Appendix 13.,p.478
 26. Interview No. 9. Appendix 13.,p.418
 27. Interview No. 4. Appendix 13.,p.394
 28. Interview No. 39. Appendix 13.,p.538
 29. Interview No. 31. Appendix 13.,p.505
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CHAPTER VI.Suburban Life

The inter-war suburban house building programme carried out by Liverpool City Council resulted in roughly 140,000 Liverpudlians being moved into new houses. Removal on so large a scale, involving so high a proportion of the population, had never taken place before in the whole course of the city's history.¹ It led to the creation of new residential districts on the urban fringe, districts which differed markedly from the old, crowded residential areas of Liverpool with their distinctive sense of community and neighbourliness. This chapter examines how these highly urbanised families perceived their new suburban environment and how they adjusted to life on the remote new estates which frequently lacked the most basic of amenities for a number of years.

The Movement to Suburbia.

In the fast growing eighteenth century British towns rich and poor lived in close proximity to one another due to the lack of transport which meant that tradesmen, artisans and labourers had to live close to the gentry whom they served.² While the poor crowded together in mean courts and alleys, beautifully designed Georgian terraced housing was built for the wealthy members of society, much of which was arranged around elegant squares with formal gardens. Their dignified grace and urbanity may be regarded as a fine English achievement in the art of town planning.

By the early nineteenth century however British towns had become extremely unhealthy places in which to live owing to the squalor of

the overcrowded working class districts and the pollution created by industrialization. The rich therefore began to abandon their elegant Georgian town houses for villas situated in more rural surroundings. As early as 1795 the middle class flight to the suburbs was commented upon and in 1804 it was observed that in Manchester,

"Many persons whose business is carried on in the town reside some little way from it that the pure breath of heaven may blow freely upon them".³

As the nineteenth century progressed more and more people escaped to the quasi-rural suburbs aided by private carriageways, omnibuses, trams and suburban railways. The noxious, unhealthy inner-city areas were left to the operatives, publicans, mendicants, prostitutes and thieves.⁴ Social differences and social distance between employers and workers had become translated into spatial differentiation of residential areas. The increasingly isolated working class ghettos were regarded as places of degradation, immorality and disease, sinful and depraved alternatives to desirable, salubrious suburbia.

The age of housing in Liverpool clearly demonstrates the growth of the town and the movement to the suburbs by the richer members of the community. During the Georgian period thousands of low-cost houses for the working class were thrown up, particularly in the dockside area, while elegant terraces were provided for the wealthy in Rodney Street, Mount Pleasant, Abercromby Square and the Upper Parliament district. By 1855 however many of the wealthier citizens had already left their Georgian town houses for enormous mansions in Allerton, Mossley Hill and Sefton, Cressington and Princes residential parks. The mansions were usually three stories high

plus cellar, set in their own gardens to secure a semi-rural privacy and sheltered behind high sandstone walls. From the 1860's onwards large semi-detached villas were also built, providing a cheaper compromise which became the standard middle class dwelling.

Continued population growth in the middle of the nineteenth century led to the migration out of the inner residential zone into the "working class suburbs" of the less wealthy members of the community, the tradesmen, clerk, shopkeeper, and better-paid artisan. As we have seen above however the houses provided for this section of the community were not set in spacious gardens surrounded by hedges and trees. They were ugly and drab, built in monotonous ranks at 40 or more to the acre. First Everton, Kirkdale and Toxteth, then Anfield, Tuebrook, Farifield, Old Swan and West Derby, and finally Wavertree and the area around Sefton Park, were submerged by the "advancing sea of streets".⁵ This movement away from the inner residential zone had only been possible because of shorter working hours and the transport revolution, which by the beginning of the twentieth century had completely changed the habits and mobility of the working classes.

By 1914 the built-up area was still fairly compact and Liverpool was largely confined within the line of the ring road, Queens Drive.

Within Liverpool itself district zones could be recognized- the central area, including the dockside and industrial areas, the business, shopping and entertainment sectors and the inner residential area. The continuous built-up central area in turn was surrounded by a zone of bye-law terraced housing built between 1875 and 1914 which threatened to overwhelm even the areas of splendid mansions such as Cressington Park and Grassendale Park.⁶

The inter-war period witnessed a massive expansion of the built-up area and the creation of the present outer residential zone. Such an expansion was made possible by improved road and rail transport services and the increase in private motor vehicles.

Private developers invaded the once peripheral areas of Mossley Hill, West Derby, Childwall, Allerton and Knotty Ash to build thousands of detached and semi-detached houses for the middle classes. More importantly however to this study the, local authority laid out vast suburban low-density housing estates. The old town of Liverpool had suddenly given birth to numerous new housing estates which clustered around it. A new pattern of life therefore was created for thousands of families since suburban living invariably meant a geographical separation of home from work and necessitated an adaption to a new environment and changed life style.

The Size and Location of Municipal Estates.

By 1939 Liverpool City Council had built 31 "council estates", ranging in size from 14 to 7,689 dwellings. Nine of the estates, Wavertree, Garston, Ronald Street, Chesterton Street and the majority of the estates which had been partly developed by private enterprise, Stalmine Road, Elm Vale, Field House, Park Road and Woodlands, had less than 100 dwellings and were effectively enclaves of council housing within much larger residential areas. The two remaining private enterprise estates and ten other estates, Elm House, Edge Lane Drive, Highfield, Knotty Ash, Pinehurst, Speke Road Gardens, Woolton, Longview, Sparrow Hall and St. Oswald, all had between 100 and 1,000 dwellings. The remaining ten estates,

Larkhill, Fazakerley, Walton-Clubmoor, Springwood, Dovecot, Huyton Farm, Finch House, Norris Green, Speke and Woolfall Heath, had more than 1,000 dwellings. This final group accounted for 70% of all council building between the wars and for 82% of suburban council development. The estates were scattered throughout the outer residential zone, between 2½ to 5½ miles from the city centre. Four of the estates, Huyton Farm, Finch House, Longview and Woolfall Heath were 6 to 7 miles from the city centre, *lying outside the city boundary.*

The New Suburban Environment.

By the outbreak of the Second World War 15% of Liverpool's population had been re-housed on outlying council estates. Highly urbanised families had been transferred from the congested districts of the old town to new suburban estates devoid of slum property. The new estates may have been monotonous and somewhat drab but they were a vast improvement on the old working class districts.

When we moved out here it was like a different world. It was chalk and cheese. You can't imagine today what it had been like living down by the docks. We lived right by Cazneau Street market and, well in the summer the smell from it was something awful. Downtown there was incessant dirt and dust and we moved here from that to Anfield, where we had an avenue of trees in the road and you opened the back door to your own garden. Well, the difference between Anfield and Scotty Road. In Scotty Road you led like a tribal existence but in Anfield you were more of an individual. Scotland Road was so dirty, noisy and overcrowded. You know in the 1920's it was supposed to be the most densely populated area in the world, and it effected people, being so close together. You never went farther than a few streets from your house. If you did you got duffed up. There were always fights, especially in the summer, between the Orangemen and the Catholics. I think it was because we were all so close together and the heat in the summer seemed to send folk mad. Moving to Anfield was like moving to another country, no smells or dirt, just grass and trees and lovely and quiet.

Tenants had a great deal of pride in their new estates and time and again the contrast was made, even by those re-housed under slum clearance legislation, between the roughness and squalor of present day estates and their respectability in the inter-war period.

When I moved in here in 1929 you needed a letter almost from the Holy Ghost himself to get a council house. You had to show your birth certificate, marriage lines, rent books, everything. You see they had to make sure you were decent. It used to be a lovely estate, had a really good class of tenant. Nowadays they only seem to give the houses to layabouts and ex-jailbirds.

People, appear to have been proud to be council tenants in the 20's and 30's, proud that they had passed through a tough selection process and had been allocated a house. Only about 1 out of 4 applications for council houses was granted, and the successful applicant felt that he had really achieved something. Today renting a council house is frequently seen as the lowest rung on the housing tenure ladder but in the inter-war period it appears to have conferred a degree of status on tenants. Over and over again people said the same things.

"The Council was very select in those days and so the estates were decent, with a nice type of person".⁹

"Now they house the lowest of the low not like before the war then you had to be decent to get a council house. Respectable, people were respectable".¹⁰

Reference is made to families from poorer districts trying to elevate themselves in order to fit in with their new environment.

My next door neighbour was a lovely person. She came from Great Homer Street and when I first saw her I thought, oh dear, what is she going to be like. She was wearing a shawl, you see. But she tried to improve herself by asking me how to say certain words and I remember when she bought her first coat, she was so proud she ran in to show me. She never wore the shawl again after that.¹¹

Some people wore shawls when they first came out here.

But it was the policy of the Corporation then that people should better themselves by example and, you know it happened. They soon started wearing coats and yes, hats. In them days a woman wasn't thought decent without a hat.¹²

Some estates were definitely regarded as being more respectable than others. Right from the start the estates built under the 1930 Act acquired a negative image, not because the estates were physically inferior to earlier developments but because they housed ex-slum dwellers.

They first offered me a house out Huyton way but I said no. I might not have been much meself but I wasn't going to live amongst the types they were housing from the slums. Terrible types, you would have been scared of living next door to them, with the bugs and things. No, I said and so they gave me ¹³this house. It was decent then, Norris Green, decent types.

When I first decided to go in for a *council house* I wanted a parlour house but it had to be in a nice district. They said I could have one on the *East Lancs Road, Sparrow Hall*. Well I thought, no fear, I wouldn't go on that estate for a big clock. It was for people from the docks, from the slums. No fear. So they gave me this one in Springwood. I said yes right off because it was such a lovely estate, one of the ¹⁴first built and the Corporation had kept it very select.

The Addison estates were regarded as being more refined, "posher" than later council estates. One tenant, who transferred from an Addison house to a house in Norris Green because of rent arrears, describes the difference between the two estates as follows,

Clubmoor was quiet, really quiet, they didn't even let the kids play out in the street. It was so posh. Our next door neighbour used to have tea on the grass, the lawn they used to call it. Some of them even had cars even in them days, and yes, a number used to have cleaning ladies to do for them. We never fitted in but Norris Green, well I loved that right off. Everybody was just ordinary working class, like. It was busier, noisier, lots of kids running around and getting hammered by their mam's, that sort of thing.¹⁵

Other tenants however enjoyed the refined atmosphere of the Addison

estates.

When we first came here professional people lived in the houses, it was lovely, a really select estate. There were a lot of school teachers, around here, I had teachers both sides of me. I'll tell you how posh it was, some of the women even had dailies and, well, people used to come out from town to beg around the roads because the tenants were so rich. Women in shawls, carrying babies, would walk up and down the roads singing hoping that we would give them a few coppers. Terrible it was to see them looking half starved and dressed in rags. I'm only telling you this to show how different these estates were when they were first built. Nowadays it would be the equivalent of the women in shawls who would be getting these houses, not the type of person at all who lived here in the early days, not comfortable professional people.¹⁶

The fact that the Housing Committee continued to allocate their best houses to more affluent families ensured that the reputations gained by the various estates in the inter-war period persisted until recent years. Addison estates were perceived to be the most desirable and respectable, with the estates built in the early Wheatley period, for example, Highfield and Knotty Ash, coming next. The later Wheatley estates which contained fewer or no parlour houses were regarded as being infinitely less desirable, while, slum clearance estates were labelled "rough and common" and were to be avoided at all cost by decent families.

The above tenant who transferred to Norris Green, had come from one of the very old districts of Liverpool, Tawson Street, right in the heart of the city and it was clear that some degree of social maladjustment was experienced by the family on its removal to the outlying districts of Clubmoor. The problems associated with transferring highly urbanised families to remote estates has in fact received a great deal of attention. Studies carried out in the inter-war years and the post-war period emphasize that new housing

estates differed from old nineteenth century districts in two ways.¹⁷ Generally in the old areas people were more friendly to their fellow residents and secondly they had a greater sense of belonging to the neighbourhood.¹⁸ This is hardly surprising when people lived so close to one another in congested streets which contained a host of small corner shops and public houses. Their places of work were mingled in with their houses or were close by. Such closeness was re-inforced by the effects of long residence and stable populations, which meant that most people had relatives close at hand. Kinship played an important part in people's lives providing as it did that first line of defence in sickness, emergency and old age.¹⁹ Another consequence of the stability of the old districts was that local residents had known each other all their lives and such ties with the past promoted a spirit of "friendliness and neighbourliness" in the community. People knew one another from the frequent casual meetings in local shops, pubs, and markets, and in the streets themselves and if anybody was in trouble they would not be ignored, neighbours would rally round to help.²⁰

In our area, Great Howard Street, nobody would go hungry, might only be a cob or something but you'd give it to someone in real need. I remember, well my last little girl was hard to rear, she was sick all the time, and a woman in the street next to ours stopped me and gave me 2s. 6d for a doctor because the baby was so poorly. That was the type they were, friendly.²¹

Everybody was in the same boat. We were all poor and so you just helped one another. Might only be a few coppers or the loan of a bundle of clothes for the pawnshop but you gave it to someone to tie them over. Then they would do the same for you when your man fell out of work or was sick.²²

The tenants of the new estates, by contrast were drawn from the

four quarters of the town and consequently were usually complete strangers to one another. Family and friends were left behind in the old familiar districts and new friendships were difficult to establish because housing was more spread out and there was less opportunity for casual meetings in corner shops and local pubs.

"For the immigrants it was like being in a foreign country,²³ with new friends to make and new difficulties to overcome".

Surveys of housing estates between the wars tell of social isolation loneliness and a trend in the direction of increasing reserve with families defensively "turning in on themselves". Liverpool tenants invariably described their neighbours as being friendly but not "too familiar".

People were friendly and you got to know them slowly but only just to say hello to,²⁴ nothing more. I liked to keep myself to myself.

Of course people were neighbourly but they liked to keep to themselves. My next door neighbour came from the rough part of town where they all kept their doors open all the time. She didn't like me keeping the door closed but you had to. You didn't want people getting²⁵ to know all your business, you know, too familiar like.

People insisted that they were always willing to help neighbours in times of sickness and distress but it is clear that definite boundaries to neighbourliness existed. They suffered from a complaint attributed to the inhabitants of Dagenham in the 1960's - surbanitis, a withdrawing, a shutting of the door.²⁶ In attempting to adapt to a strange new environment a new style of neighbourliness was established by the suburban tenants, less intimate and matey than that found in the old community. People did get to know one another but slowly, barriers usually being broken down by children playing together.

None of us knew each other at first and, well, I would

only let the children play in the garden. Well, you didn't know what the neighbours were going to be like. But it didn't take the children long to get together and soon they were playing football in the road. In the summer they played cricket, and the men would join in. My husband liked to play.²⁷

I remember the first year we moved here all the children in the street decided to have a bonfire and so all us neighbours clubbed together to buy them fireworks. It was marvellous we all sat around the bonfire for hours.²⁸

Many families found it too difficult to adjust to their new surrounding because they were so different from their old community.

Oh yes, people did go because they couldn't settle. The young girl next door to me at No. 10, had two little children and her husband at sea. She hated it here. She was always crying saying she wanted to get back to Stanley Road, she was so lonely. Well she was only here 2 or 3 months and she got a transfer to Owen House, back down town.²⁹

The population of the various estates in their early years was very unstable and undoubtedly one of the major reasons why the estates lost so many of their original tenants by migration was because families could not adjust to their strange new surroundings. In the first two years the annual average of original tenants removing from Addison estates was roughly 8.5% of the total number of tenancies, while 6.8% of original tenants left Wheatley estates, 10.7% left 1925 Act estates and 8.5% left estates built under slum clearance legislation.³⁰ The rate of removal however slowed down and after ten years the annual average of original tenants leaving Addison, Wheatley, 1925 Act and 1930 Act estates was 5.4%, 5.2%, 4.5% and 3.0% respectively.³¹

Families housed by the Corporation under general needs legislation may have found it difficult to adjust to their new environment but at least they had chosen to move away from their old communities. Suburbanization however was forced upon 1,000's of

families re-housed under slum clearance legislation. The Housing Committee, aware that problems of adaptation would be even more acute among such families, pursued a policy of re-housing neighbours in clearance areas close together on the new estates in order to maintain valuable friendship groups. Consequently when such tenants were asked if they had suffered from loneliness on their new suburban estates the majority replied that they had missed the bustle of the old slum areas but,

God, how could you be lonely the whole street was moved out together to here. They were all your old mates,³² I even had my mother-in-law living right opposite me.

One ex-slum dweller in fact complained that it was too much like "home from home".

Really I would have liked to get away from them all. They all knew your business and well I felt I could have bettered myself away from them all.³³

Despite the Corporation's policy of housing old neighbours close to one another many of these tenants stated that they would have returned to town if they could have found alternative accommodation.

One tenant claimed that his wife hated living out on the Woolfall Heath Estate so much that for the first two years they hardly lived in the house, preferring ,

to squeeze in with her mother's lot down Great Homer Street. I remember going out to visit the house once in winter and it was flooded, there had been a burst. We only really started³⁴ living in the house when the air raids became real bad.

The outbreak of the Second World War in fact appears to have helped many slum dwellers accept their enforced suburbanization. Once the air raids started they were relieved that they lived in the relative safety of the suburbs. They found themselves inundated with requests from relatives and friends to put them up for the duration

of the war.

We took in me mother and her sister, me brothers, cousins. The lot, you name it we put them up. They slept on the floor in the living room. Even strangers sometimes. They would knock in the middle of the night, saying they were too scared to stay ³⁵ in town with all the bombs. You never turned nobody away.

Without the war the rate of removal from these outlying estates would probably have been higher.

Financially it is beneficial for a local authority to have long term tenants as a high removal rate effects rent receipts, roughly a loss of £2 per vacancy was accrued during this period.³⁶ The emergence of an estate as a integrated social unit is also greatly assisted if its population is relatively stable. Initially the new estates were merely a collection of streets and houses inhabited, except in the case of ex-slum dwellers, by strangers. Gradually as families got to know one another a sense of neighbourhood developed but to what extent had these estates emerged as communities in their own right by 1939?

The Social Aspect of Housing.

The pioneer tenants faced considerable difficulties especially when their estate was still being built. Many of the houses were tenanted before electric cables had been completed and tenants had to rely on candles for lighting. Frequently roads were unfinished and the first inhabitants had to walk through streets of mud to

reach their houses, in some cases for as long as two years,

When we came here, we were the third in the road to arrive. The roads weren't made up and the removal vans couldn't come down to the houses. They stopped at the top of the estate, by Lower Lane. Well, the people had to hike all over the estate in the mud, mangles, ³⁷ settees, pianos, the lot had to be carried to the houses.

When we first moved in there weren't any pavements, only cinder paths and the children had sore knees all the time from falling on them. In the winter, you were never out of your wellies because of the mud.³⁸

Most estates however in their early years lacked far more than just pavements. The Tudor Walter's Report had stressed that new outlying council estates should be adequately provided with transport facilities and that the social, educational and recreational needs of tenants should be provided for but such amenities were lacking on Liverpool council estates and their absence certainly did not help people cope with the problems of adapting to a new, strange environment. When the housing question was first tackled by the local authority the general opinion seems to have been that all that was necessary was to transfer families from unsuitable dwellings in unhealthy surroundings to new estates where they could live in labour saving houses and spend their leisure in adjoining gardens.³⁹ In the first instance only essential public services, such as schools, were added while sites were left for churches and shops, most of which had to be provided by private enterprise. Nearly everything else that contributed to the well-being of a normal town e.g. cinemas, libraries, pubs, theatres, welfare centres, were conspicuously absent. When the estates were small and close to the city centre the disadvantages were not so great but on large estates 2, 3 or 4 miles from the city centre it soon became apparent that something more than houses were necessary.

The new council estates formed a type of town growth quite unlike anything in the past. This new unit of social life, the new estate, had been "newly created, all together and all at once, by an act of

immediate total erection".⁴⁰ It differed from the old established urban districts which had developed slowly with building and services being provided when appropriate. Similarly the garden cities, although planned, resembled the old naturally growing towns since houses and other buildings were only added when required. For example, whereas the population of Letchworth reached 15,000 within a space of 30 years, that of Norris Green exceeded 25,000 within one tenth of that time.⁴¹ Five years after its commencement Norris Green had a population greater than that of Shrewsbury, 37,500. This phenomenal rate of growth was at the root of many problems associated with the new estates because the provision of amenities did not keep pace with their rapid development. The estates were "dormitories" and having few amenities of their own people felt the depressing effect of being at a distance from the centre of their parent town.

Schools.

Tenants suffered in all sorts of ways from the lag between house building and the provision of local amenities. One of the worst problems was education. The acute problem of school accommodation on the new estates resulted directly from the policy of the Housing Committee but it was left to the Education Committee to solve. Houses can be built more quickly than schools with the result that the Education Authority found it difficult to keep pace with the Housing Authority.

The layout plan submitted by the Director of Housing to the Housing Committee in August 1919 for the development of the Lisburn Farm and Larkhill estates included the provision of three schools to

meet the needs of that locality.⁴² However the proposed school at Lisburn Lane was not opened until 1925. The one at New Hall Lane until 1926, while the third near Walton Hall Avenue, the Florence Melly school was not opened until 1927.⁴³ Similarly school sites were allocated on the Springwood and Edge Lane Drive Estates in 1921 but these schools also were not opened until six years later.

Consequently there were simply no schools for the children to go to on these early estates. On one estate, Larkhill, temporary school accommodation for 120 mixed scholars over the age of 6 was provided from October 1922 in rooms on the old mansion house of the estate, Larkhill House.⁴⁴ Fortunately these early estates were fairly close to older established districts such as Tuebrook, West Derby, Garston and, although inconvenient, school facilities were available within a reasonable distance from the new houses.

We just had to walk to the school in the village, West Derby village. It was a trek, but we all walked everywhere in those days. It was a relief though when they opened our school, Roscoe Ballantyre. My boy⁴⁵ was about 9 then, it must have been around 1925 or 1926.

Even when the schools were opened however the accommodation was far from adequate and parents were frequently told that the schools were full up.

When my daughter was five we were told there was no place for her, the school she should have gone to, Roscoe, was simply full up. Well she had to go to school somewhere, so we sent her to a small private school in Tuebrook. She stayed there until she was eight when she was finally awarded her place in Roscoe.⁴⁶

The urgent need for school places on the rapidly developing estates forced the Education Committee to open some schools before they were completed, the Florence Melly school in Clubmoor for example, being opened when only two thirds of it had been

completed.⁴⁷ Although this school was built to accommodate 800 children 1700 applications were received and consequently Mr. Clarke, the headmaster, took in 1,100 children.⁴⁸ When asked how he was going to squeeze in the extra children, he replied,

"We are putting the extra 300 wherever we can, in the central hall, and in the teacher's rooms".⁴⁹

Since demand for places far outstripped supply the decision was taken to exclude all children under the age of 7 for the present. An additional school in Leamington Road was opened in March 1928 to cope with the continuing demand for school places on the Clubmoor estate. Originally this scheme was intended to provide 600 school places but by 1929 it had been extended to give an additional 400 places. A school in Springwood originally intended to cater for 400 children was extended similarly to accommodate still another 800 children.⁵⁰

In March and April 1928 the Education Committee also opened three schools on the vast Norris Green estate to accommodate 1,800 children. Unfortunately these schools were opened almost two years after the first houses were built, and consequently the children of many pioneer tenants simply *did not attend school during this* period. This large outlying estate had little school facilities within reasonable distance from the new houses. A few infants travelled the long distance to a school in West Derby Village but this soon became full. In the absence of adequate transport facilities parents could not send their children to schools further afield and so hundreds of children just had to wait for schools on [the estate to be opened.

The children around here had to go without schooling for a time, mind you it didn't bother them. My brother was

nine when we moved and he ⁵¹ was made up that he got out of school for a few years.

A survey carried out on the estate found that even in 1930 the provision of school accommodation was still hopelessly inadequate since there were at that time 7,000 children of school age on the estate yet the number attending Norris Green schools was only 5,156.

Such a situation had a disastrous effect on many children. Many left school at 14 unable to read because they had not received the statutory period of schooling, either by not gaining admission until the age of 7 or by experiencing a gap in their schooling of anything up to 3 years.⁵² Large classes of between 54 and 58 also meant that teachers could not give the necessary attention to pupils who had suffered delayed or interrupted schooling. Brighter children especially suffered as a result of being denied admission at the age of 5. Cases of children who had attended school for only 4 years sitting for Junior City Scholarships were quite common. These children were severely handicapped when competing with children who had attended school for 6 years.

Despite the fact that many of the tenants housed on this estate were Catholic, no Roman Catholic infants school was provided until 1933, 7 years after the estate had commenced.

They built six council schools on this estate, six and no Catholic school. We had to wait a long time for our school. I took my eldest lad to St. Cecilia's at Tuebrook, he started there, by Green Lane. He didn't stay school dinners, I took him 4 times a day down there. We had to walk to Muirhead Avenue by the bridge and then get the tram down Green Lane. Then thank God, they built the infant's school at St. Therasas.⁵³

From late 1928 the Education Committee issued free bus and tram tickets to children on the new estates to enable them to attend the nearest denominational school, provided the schools were over a mile

away in the case of children under 9, or $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles for children over 9.⁵⁴ Many Catholic parents however chose to send their children to council schools rather than inflict long tram journeys on them. Such a course of action was strongly condemned by the Church.

They were in the pulpit every week to get them out the Godless council schools because they weren't getting any religion. None of mine went to council schools. I was lucky I knew the head at St. Paul's, in West Derby village and I managed to get my lads in there before it was full. Many though did send their children to the council schools but they transferred right away when our school was opened.⁵⁵

Delays over finding a suitable site for the erection of a school for junior and senior children resulted in a petition being sent to the Board of Education in which parents threatened to remove their children from council schools if action was not taken. A scheme for a mixed Catholic junior and senior school was submitted in March 1931 but amended plans were only finally approved in August 1933, by which time it was estimated 700 Catholic children attended council schools and 300 went to Catholic schools in other areas.⁵⁶

A similar pattern emerges for other estates built in the late 1920's and 1930's. Initially only council schools were provided opening one to two years after the estates were begun. The delay being most acutely felt in those estates built 6 and 7 miles from the city centre. Children on these estates were forced to travel long distances back to schools in their old areas.

Only the older ones went to school back down town. It was too much for the little ones, us mothers just kept⁵⁷ them at home and tried to teach them a bit ourselves.

The provision of Catholic schools usually followed sometime behind that of the Council schools, and Church of England schools despite the high Catholic population of many estates, especially those built

under the 1930 Housing Act. On the Sparrow Hall estate for example a Protestant school was provided for infants and juniors at a cost of £23,000, although the estate population was almost 100% Catholic.⁵⁸ Consequently the school was almost empty, which of course angered Catholic parents who were having to send their children back to town for schooling.

The parents created such a stink that the school was taken over by the Catholic church and we got our school, St. Philomena's. The Church of England, you see, rented the school to the Catholic church and they still pay rent on it today.⁵⁹

The delay in the provision of Catholic school places may have angered pioneer families on the new estates but it probably had a long term beneficial effect since it forced children of different religions to mix together thereby reducing prejudice and bigotry.

Where we came from, down Scotland Road way, Catholics and Protestants only came together to fight. The Catholics lived in certain street, Protestants in others and no one mixed. Out here though the Corporation forced us all to mix because all the children at first had to go to Council schools. Well, when people start to mix a lot of the old hatreds start to go and out here the Orangemen and Catholics never fought like back down town.⁶⁰

Transport.

The second major problem on the new estates was transport, all the more important because there was so little local employment. In Liverpool the docks and the commercial and manufacturing sectors were still highly centralised geographically which meant that the new estates, especially the far outlying ones, were a long way from the place of work. In 1927, with a view to decentralising industry and providing work for residents near their homes, the Housing Committee had approved the policy of setting aside space for factories on new estates, such factories only being used for

inoffensive processes. However small factories were only provided on one estate, Norris Green, before the Second World War, apart from the self-contained community at Speke. Sites for industrial purposes were set outside on the Knowsley estate but they were not developed before 1939. Even the factories on the Norris Green estate did not create many jobs for local men as they mainly employed young girls and women.

The lack of decentralisation of industry before 1939 placed a great strain on the transport services as 1,000's of families were transferred to developing suburban areas. The Merseyside Survey in the early 1930's found that well over one-third of all suburban council tenants worked in the city centre, some 3 to 5 miles from the estates.⁶¹ Only 8% worked in the east part of the city, the area in which the housing estates lay. If the survey had been repeated in the late 1930's the proportion of tenants working in the city centre would have been considerably higher since the vast majority of ex-slum dwellers re-housed under the 1930 Act were casually employed on the docks.

It must have been extremely difficult for the pioneer tenants on outlying estates to get to work since the development of estates invariably preceded the provision of transport services. The roads were not made up and frequently the tram terminus was quite a distance from the estate boundary. A few men travelled to work by bike but the majority used public transport, inconvenient and inadequate though it was. By the beginning of 1928 the Tramways Committee was coming under mounting pressure to improve methods of transport in order that those situated in the outer districts may have better transport facilities between their homes and places of

work.⁶² Suburban Liverpool was growing at a rate of 5,000 houses a year and the transport services were becoming more and more strained.

On some of the routes city workers living some distance short of the termini have to wait at stopping points while car after car goes by with the chain on. That is no joke on a bitterley cold morning, nor is it pleasant to be greeted with "late again" when ariving at the office or shop.⁶³

To cope with the growing transport problem the Tramways Committee decided to increase the fleet of tramcars and also to develop the bus service to outlying districts. By the 1930's buses were used increasingly to link up the outskirts with the tram routes but such improvements did not occur quick enough to cope with the growing suburban traffic. In 1934 Springwood and Allerton Tenants Association were still complaining that transport facilities in their areas were deplorable since it still took over 1½ hours to make a return journey to town.⁶⁴ Norris Green Tenants Association similarly petitioned the Tramways Committee regarding the inadequate transport service on their estate.⁶⁵ It was not until 1938, twelve years after the commencement of this estate that the tram track was extended along the four main roads.

In the early years, as one tenant from Norris Green points out, the inadequate transport service deterred families from accepting houses on the estate.

I was one of the first in, in this road, and it was lonely at first because the houses only filled up very slowly. Nobody wanted the houses because there was no trams and it was miles to the nearest tram stop, up Tuebrook way. The men you see, wouldn't come down from town. My husband had a bike so it was no bother for him. But it put folks off, there not being any trams, in the early days.⁶⁶

The lack of transport provision was one of the reasons for the high

rate of removals in the early life of outlying estates.

People used to moan about the poor tram service at first. It wasn't just the men, it was the women also because there weren't any shops at first and without trams the women had to walk miles to the shops. It wasn't so bad going but coming back loaded up like a donkey wasn't any joke, especially in winter. You see, there wasn't any doctors, clinics or anything at first so it meant you had to travel for everything but the problem was there wasn't any trams to take you. It got a lot of people down and they didn't stick it. They liked Fazakerley but if they got the offer of a place back town they went. A lot left because of that. They were stupid really because they brought the tram down to the Coplehouse in the end for us.

The high cost of travel was also blamed for people leaving the estates.

When people had lived down town they would have walked to work or it would have only cost coppers a week on the tram. When they moved out here to Norris Green people were paying 2 shillings, sometimes 3 shillings a week to get to work. Well many of them couldn't afford it. If a man was only earning £2 to £3 a week 2 shillings extra on trams was no joke. Some bought bikes, but well they cost money as well and if folks were poor they couldn't afford the higher purchase on a bike. I remember a lot going from our road back to town because of the cost of the trams.

The economic burden of increased travel costs fell heaviest on those tenants living on estates, 6 to 7 miles from the city centre.

Before tenants were allocated houses built under the 1925 Act at Longview they were interviewed by the Housing Department to make sure they were aware that their travelling expenses were likely to increase considerably. Nobody however appears to have been concerned about the effect of high travel costs of those tenants, housed on estates the farthest away from the city centre, who were in fact the least able to bear the burden of increased cost of living, the ex-slum dwellers.

We were just dumped out here. Nobody cared if we could afford the rent or anything. My fella worked down on the docks and he had to report twice a day for work. Well,

with all the unemployment in them days you couldn't afford bus fares. He many a time had to walk to the docks because we couldn't afford the fares. Can you imagine them doing that today 7 miles there and 7 miles back, sometimes in pouring rain and he never had an overcoat even, couln't afford one. More often than not he never even had soles in his shoes, they would be stuffed with paper, that's all. They should have given us poor people passes or something for the buses when they dumped us out here but we were just forgotten. They thought it was enough to get us out of the slums, then they just left us to get on with it.

Shops.

Inadequate and inconvenient transport services added greatly to the problems created by the lack of amenities on the estates, such as shops. In the old established districts women had been surrounded by markets, fish and chip stalls, numerous friendly shops where credit might be obtained, all within easy walking distance from their homes. However pioneer tenants on council estates in the 1920's usually found that their nearest shop was a distance away. Sites for shops were included in the lay out plans for Larkhill, Edge Lane Drive and Springwood estates in 1919 and 1920 but the first shops were not opened until 1923.

You had no alternative but to walk to the nearest shops, in my case that was to Tuebrook about a mile away. The people complained but we had to put up with it. The men would bring things from town and there was always vans and carts going round the roads selling things.

On these estates the usual method for the building of shops had been to lease the land to private builders but such a policy, according to the Housing Committee, did not always result in the construction of architecturally suitable buildings. In 1927 therefore the Committee decided that in the future, in order to preserve the architectural amenities of the new estates, they would build the shops themselves and let them to traders in approved

commodities.⁷¹

The first shops to be built by the Housing Committee were a crescent of shops on the Norris Green Estate called Broadway, but unfortunately they were not opened until 1929, three years after the estates commencement. Such a delay provoked endless complaints from tenants and so the Housing Committee decided that in future shops and other incidental buildings should be erected simultaneously with the construction of houses.⁷² When shops were opened at the Dovecot, Huyton Farm, and Longview estates however it was the shopkeepers' turn to complain since they found it impossible to make a living on the partly developed estates. The Housing Committee were therefore forced to reduce their rents for 3 to 6 months until the estates were better developed.⁷³

The Housing Committee was eager to have shops opened as quickly as possible on the new estates, not only out of consideration for their tenants, but for its own benefit as well. The scarcity of shops had given rise to numerous illegal shops being opened by enterprising tenants in their front rooms.

With the shops being so far away it was natural that people would start selling things themselves. A woman a few doors away from me sold cigarettes and sweets, and another person down the road had a grocery shop in her front room. She sold everything, the room was⁷⁴ piled high from floor to ceiling with boxes of stuff.

Tenants found using their houses for trading purposes were warned to stop and if they persisted they were evicted.⁷⁵

I remember quite a few round here getting put out for selling things. When they were put out you should have seen how much stuff they had, enough to stock the Co-op.⁷⁶

Fear of eviction however did not seem to deter many traders who ran lucrative businesses for years.

A number of them made a few bob out of their shops. I remember two women around here made enough⁷⁷ to buy houses, big, decent houses in West Derby.

At one time in the 1930's it was estimated that there were around 150 illegal stores trading on the Norris Green estate alone.⁷⁸

The number and type of shops on the estate was rigidly controlled by the Housing Committee. Fish and chip shops were banned until the late 1930's.

We all missed our fish and chip shops when we came out here. Down town there had been any number of them. Mind you we didn't have to do without them for long because a few women around here turned their kitchens into fish and chip shops. They used the gas boiler to cook them in and sold them at the back door. I remember one woman doing it, and you know she was filthy and the house was so filthy, crawling it was but people still bought chips from her. She fell out with a neighbour who reported her in the end and I believe the Health people went mad when they saw the state of the house and her selling food.⁷⁹

The limited range of goods sold in the shops also led to flourishing roundsmen's trade. Vegetables, fish, clothes, hardware were all sold in the streets, or from door to door. Many tenants complained not only about the limited range of goods for sale in the estate shops, but also about the price of many basic items.

Down town there had been so many shops that all the prices had to be competitive. If you thought a shop was too expensive there was always another on the next corner. Here they had like a monopoly. There weren't any other shops around so they charged what they liked.⁸⁰

The majority of tenants interviewed claimed the shops were more expensive on the new estates than in their old districts. Some who could afford the fare, and the time, supplemented their shopping on the estates by a weekly visit to the shops and the markets in town, usually on a Friday night or Saturday. However the return fare to town was 4d. for estates situated up to 5 miles from the city centre and this of course added to the cost of the shopping. Some families

returned to town to shop not merely because it was cheaper but because they found it enjoyable.

Once you'd paid the tram fares you never saved much shopping down town but we liked to go because it was interesting like, gave us a bit of excitement after being down here. It was nice to be back among all the noise and hustle and bustle, well it was so familiar to us.⁸¹

Health and Welfare Provision.

Sites for doctors' residencies were provided on the new estates but like all the other amenities medical provision lagged a few years behind housing provision. Similarly, despite the very high infant and child populations on the estates, school and child welfare clinics were only provided long after the estates' commencements. The provision of a school and child welfare clinic was only sanctioned in 1929 on the Norris Green estate, and the Walton/Clubmoor estate, 1933 in Dovecot, 1936 in Fazakerley and 1937 in Woolfall Heath.⁸² Inadequate transport facilities in the early life of the estates must have created many problems in times of sickness and distress before the necessary medical services were provided, especially before telephone kiosks were provided from which a doctor could be summoned. The absence of clinics in the early life of estates resulted in many infants not being immunised against diphtheria and scarlet fever and defects such as rickets, along with numerous orthopaedic, eye, dental and aural problems went undetected.

Voluntary and charitable organizations were quick to respond to the problems of impoverished families on the new estates. In 1934 Liverpool Dispensaries rented a house on the Huyton Farm Estate, in order to provide medical facilities to those unable to pay doctors

bills.⁸³ This house was shared by representatives of the Child Welfare Association and Liverpool Personal Service Society, organizations who also had rooms in the community hall at Norris Green and the Salvation Army Hall at Dovecot. They were inundated with requests for help from families who were living in dire poverty. The Child Welfare Association did valuable work in providing surgical appliances, such as boots, for poor children, cod liver oil and extra milk for children suffering from malnutrition and arranging for sick children to stay at convalescent homes. The Liverpool Personal Service Society organized a boot club in which second hand boots were sold cheaply. In one year 1934-1935, 1,024 pairs of boots were sold by the society from their three offices.⁸⁴ Realizing the difficulty many poor families had in finding furniture for their new homes this Society also launched an appeal in the local press for second hand furniture to be donated for needy families.

This study has revealed that many tenants on new council estates experienced extreme hardship and deprivation *in the inter-war years*. In pre-welfare state days the only help impoverished families received was from voluntary or charitable organizations and in Liverpool these organizations were quick to realize that the economic and social problems of low-paid families would be greatly accentuated when they transferred to suburban estates. They did valuable work but their lack of resources meant they could only touch the tip of the problem and many estate families remained under-nourished and ill-clothed.

Churches.

Catholics and Protestants alike had to wait several years before churches were provided for them on the new estates. This situation caused a great deal of distress among church going families.

Well, we were a good Catholic family and imagine how we felt without a church or a priest. It was sinful not to build a church for people at the same time as they built the houses. We needed communion and the confessional just as much as a roof over our heads. We just had to travel back down town to our old parish, St. Augustus, until they gave us our own church here but it was all money, you know, and sometimes my wife couldn't come too because one of the kiddies was ill. It was all wrong really. The church should have been there waiting for us when we moved out here. Nowadays folk don't bother with churches quite so much but years ago they played a really major part in people's lives. It's a shame things have changed so.⁸⁵

On some estates wooden huts were erected until permanent structures were provided by the Catholic church. Many Catholic families however preferred to travel back to their old districts until "proper" churches were provided.

In an attempt to speed up the provision of Anglican churches tenants on the Fazakerley Hall, Springwood and Norris Green estates, organized public subscriptions. Tenants donated one penny a week to buy a brick to go towards the building of their church and church hall.

Talk about public spirit, on our estate the money flooded in for the church. They were doing this thing all over the country but our estate, Norris Green, raised the biggest subscription of anywhere in the country. Now that was something to be proud of, wasn't it?⁸⁶

The fact that these subscriptions were started, and the amount of money they raised clearly indicates the part the church played in people's lives at this time. Families needed the churches for their spiritual needs but they were far more than just places of worship. They provided a focal point in a community, a place where people could meet and get to know their neighbours and through their church

halls they provided valuable social and recreational facilities. The absence of churches in the early life of council estates therefore hindered the development of community spirit and made the new estates appear more remote and alien places in which to live.

Social and Recreational Facilities.

The increasing scale, of council house building in Liverpool in the late 1920's and early 1930's led to growing criticism about the inadequate social amenities on remote estates miles away from the city's entertainment centre. There were certainly grounds for complaint. Before 1939 no public houses were allowed on council estates despite the fact that many of the larger estates were small townships. The sale of land for the erection of licensed premises was prohibited by the City Council in 1926. It was thought that such a move would restrict and therefore limit the consumption of intoxicating liquor on the housing estates.⁸⁷ This however was seriously frustrated by the existence of agencies for the delivery of drink to tenants in their own homes and the fact that numerous pubs were built on the fringe of most council estates. The ban of pubs therefore did little for the sobriety of the estates. Instead the presence of pubs outside the estates had a detrimental effect in that it impaired the development of the communities as social units. Other authorities, for example, Birmingham and the LCC, conformed to the Ministry of Health's recommendation that in order to achieve good town planning licensed premises must form part of the amenities of residential areas. However right up to 1939, despite appeals and petitions from tenants, Liverpool City Council remained unconvinced of the need for this most important of amenities.

I remember the men around here getting up a petition for a pub. Well, the people had been used to having a pub on every street corner and working men like a drink, don't they? The men used to complain that the pubs were so far away that by the time they had walked home they had sobered up. They had to face the wife's nagging then on a clear head.⁸⁸

It seems somewhat strange that a city council, so concerned over their tenants moral welfare had not ensured that churches were provided right from the commencement of every estate.

Tenants also petitioned the Housing Committee for other [amenities, such as libraries. Despite the fact that a library site was provided in the lay-out scheme for Larkhill in 1919 a temporary library was only provided in Larkhill Mansions in 1924 and children of the estate had to wait another ten years before a library was provided for them. When this library was opened in December 1934 300 children queued up to enrol.⁸⁹ The provision of libraries on other estates preceeded equally slowly. In December 1929 the Libraries and Reading Rooms Sub-Committee agreed to erect a temporary library at Norris Green but it was another six years before the decision was finally taken to build a permanent library on this estate of over 30,000 people. A library was provided on the Fazakerley Hall Estate in 1933, seven years after its commencement and during the first two days of opening 1,300 readers registered of whom 700 were juveniles.⁹⁰ In 1933 a library was also opened in Springwood Mansion following complaints from the Springwood Tenants Association that they had been waiting over twelve years for library facilities. In the 1930's the Housing Committee's revised policy to provide amenity buildings simultaneously with houses meant that Dovecot library was opened in 1933. Unfortunately, tenants on the other remote estates developed in the 1930's were not so fortunate

as their estates lay outside the city boundary and the involvement of a second authority delayed progress.⁹¹ Few amenities were provided on these estates before 1939.

Much of the criticism about the lack of social and recreational facilities on the new estates came from tenants associations. Larkhill and the North-East Liverpool Tenants Association was the first to be formed in 1921.⁹² It's first meetings were held in houses of the members but later a room was obtained in Larkhill Mansion, where light was provided by candles in bottles. Then came the East Liverpool Association whose first meeting was held under a lamp post on the then partly developed Edge Lane Drive Estate. The Springwood Tenants Association was formed in 1925 and was housed in Springwood Mansion and the Fazakerley Association began in 1929 in a member's house. Dovecot tenants formed an Association in 1933 and two further Associations, The Fincham and Woolfall Heath and the Huyton and Districts, were formed in the late 1930's.⁹³ The creation of these associations indicates the need people felt to join together in order to cope with the problems of new estate life.

Increasingly during the 1930's the tenants associations petitioned the Housing Committee about their under-resourced estates, complaining that, apart from essential public services, their estates lacked everything else that contributed to the well-being of a community. The 1930's was the golden age of cinema but cinemas were only provided on the Norris Green, Fazakerley and Dovecot estates in the late 1930's following protests and petitions from their tenants associations. The economic crisis of 1931 meant that the Housing Committee did not put into effect schemes for other recreational facilities and this similarly provoked an angry

[response from the tenants associations. Pressure from the tenants associations finally resulted in playing fields, children's playgrounds and bowling greens being provided on the Norris Green and Dovecot estates in 1933 and 1934 but tenants had to wait until] the late 1930's before swimming baths were provided.

In the 1930's the tenants associations also launched valuable schemes to develop social work in their areas. In 1934 the East Liverpool Tenants Association, for example, obtained the services of a lawyer for one hour a week to give tenants free legal advice. It also launched a scheme whereby tenants could obtain goods at a reduced rate similar to a trading guild which obtained almost 10% reductions on goods to its members. Such a scheme was thought essential at a time of such high unemployment.⁹⁴ A bureau was also set up to help tenants obtain transfers to cheaper properties or properties nearer to work places.⁹⁵ The difficulties of unemployed tenants in the Dovecot and Huyton areas were also brought to the attention of the unemployment authorities by the Dovecot Tenants Association. These tenants had to travel 7 miles to St. Helens to report any changes in their circumstances. The unemployed families could not afford the necessary tram fare and so the tenants associations pressurized the authorities into allowing people to register any changes by post.⁹⁶

The tenants associations however were also involved in much lighter issues, such as organizing horticultural shows, beauty competitions, rose queen festivals, dances, lectures and whist drives and as membership increased so did their demand for suitable meeting places. On the smaller estates developed immediately after the war no provision whatsoever had been made for any hall in which

meetings might be held. When developing the Norris Green estate the Housing Committee built its first shopping centre and erected its first public hall. Provision for public halls was also made in the shopping centres of the Fazakerley Hall, Dovecot and Longview estates. These halls however failed to meet the demands of certain organizations working among tenants and throughout the 1930's the Housing Committee was inundated with requests from tenant associations for additional community halls.⁹⁷ No permanent community hall however was built in Liverpool before 1939 despite the fact that from 1934 onwards the Ministry of Health criticized Liverpool, along with other authorities, for its failure to meet the recreational and social needs on housing estates by the provision of adequate premises to be used as community centres.⁹⁸ The Housing Committee had powers to provide such centres under the 1925 Housing Act,⁹⁹ but opposition from religious bodies that such halls would interfere with the letting of church halls delayed action. The Housing Committee also feared that tenants on the estates would be unable to afford to manage the centres since it was estimated that each tenant would have to contribute tuppence a week for the running of such centres.¹⁰⁰

A temporary community centre however was erected on the Norris Green estate in 1930 by unemployed boys belonging to the Norris Green Community Association. Community Associations were set up on a large number of estates in the 1930's in order to foster the growth of the various tenants into a social unit by providing for tenants, and their community the services which the neighbourhood required. The Norris Green Association was possibly the first community association in the country to be formed, being inaugurated

in 1930 as a purely voluntary effort. A grant from the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust enabled the association to pay the salary of a full-time organizer and it was hoped that some financial help may have been forthcoming from the local authorities but unfortunately it was not, and consequently from 1934 the Association was entirely dependent on its own resources.

In 1934 the Community Associations, the tenants associations the major youth organizations and representatives from many central organizations such as the Personal Service Society and the Child Welfare Association came together to form the Liverpool New Estates Council of Social Welfare, a democratic body specifically designed to deal with the needs of the new communities.¹⁰¹ This council repeatedly advocated to the Housing Committee the urgent need for community centres, particularly juvenile social centres on the estates. In 1937 it published an impressive piece of work entitled Time on Their Hands which had been carried out at the request of the Juvenile Organization Committee. It followed the Board of Education's Juvenile Organization Committee Report of 1935 "on the need for youth community centres on new housing estates". The New Estates Council found that, based on the 1931 census, there were approximately 14,000 juveniles aged between 10 and 18 living on the new estates which had few social centres and no leisure activities for them except those provided by the local churches in their halls. The lack of recreational facilities for young people was seen as one of the biggest problems of the new estates and was viewed as contributing to the increase of juvenile crime. Juvenile social centres were consequently urgently recommended, whose ideal would be "to gather together the life of the neighbourhood, make

it conscious of itself and out of it create a new spirit of friendliness, usefulness, and co-operation in all the concerns of the community".¹⁰²

Unfortunately by 1939 the Housing Community was still debating the need for such centres.

The new estates undoubtedly suffered from a neglect of the social environment in their planning, all suffering to some degree from the rawness of an artificially created community with inadequate services and amenities. In their early years the estates were bleak utilitarian dormitories, lacking the facilities which were required to foster a new community. In terms of design the major criticism of Liverpool suburban house building programme was undoubtedly the lack of attention given to the provision of amenities. However it was perhaps inevitable that an authority embarking on an ambitious housebuilding programme for the first time would make mistakes and Liverpool City Council did make a huge mistake in thinking that services and amenities were really only "optional extras" which could be provided at a later date. If the Housing Committee had paid more attention to the social needs of the people in the early days there is little doubt that the number of removals would have been much lower.

Despite the lack of facilities the majority of families remained on the bleak, new estates becoming long-term tenants. The high quality of the council houses appears to have more than compensated tenants for the rawness of the new estates.

Oh, I know there were problems living out here in the early days but we got over them and we knew that they would give us trams, shops and things eventually. And well the little houses were so nice and none of us would have wanted to go back to our old areas, even if they did have shops on every corner. No, I never minded having to traipse miles to the shops as long as I had my little

house to come back to.¹⁰³

Families who had moved from one set of rented rooms to another in search of reasonable accommodation were only too relieved to finally have acquired decent housing which they could live in for the rest of their lives.

All the old neighbours are gone now. On our block we had all known each other for years because we had all moved in when the houses were built in 1928. We all stayed put, like. The old neighbours have all died, one by one and I'm the only one left and oh, it's so terribly lonely not knowing anybody. The people who have moved in are just not the same as the old neighbours and none of them wants to bother with an old lady like me.¹⁰⁴

Over the years people had got to know one another and by 1939 a sense of community had developed on the estates, despite the lack of facilities. The new communities may not have been as close or as friendly as those of the older districts but gradually over a number of years families began to indentify with their new estates and a sense of belonging developed.

Unfortunately however the new estates were never allowed to develop into balanced communities owing to the fact that young couples were forced to leave their estates when they got married. The Housing Committee did not provide council houses for newly married couples and consequently they had to leave the estates when they married. Many young couples in fact had no alternative but to return to the very slum districts from which their parents had originated. A number of tenancies were passed from parents to children but the majority of young people left the estates on marriage and consequently the estates never displayed the characteristics of a naturally developing district. This situation was blamed by a number of tenants for the deterioration in the

quality of estate tenants and the lack of community spirit which existed on the estates today.

As you can see I live alone and there are a lot like me around here. One of my daughters lives out in Skelmersdale and the other has a house in Speke, both council. They would both have liked to have stayed around here but the Council wouldn't give them the houses. When they got married they would have liked to have stayed around here, well, they had their church and well, they had to leave their parish. It was very sad. If they had been allowed to stay here, I would have had the comfort of them near me now, but as it is I'm lonely here on my own and there's our Jean lonely out in that terrible Skem. And, you know, if they had given the young ones houses on their own estates, the estates wouldn't be like they are today getting rougher and rougher. It's not like it used to be around here. You don't know anybody when you go to the church or the shops, all the old neighbours have died and well, the road is full of strangers. Terrible types some of the new ones are, the lowest of the low. I was broken into a while back and I know it was a lad that has just moved in a few doors away. I get so scared.¹⁰⁵

The new estates consequently never acquired the same stability as old working class communities. Kinship groups were never allowed to develop and valuable friendship ties were broken when people were dispersed on marriage. This must be seen as a major fault in management policy. Liverpool, like all other authorities, had been merely concerned with getting as many houses built as quickly as possible and very little attention was paid to the social needs of the new residential districts that had been created. As a result the remote estates had been chronically under-resourced with regards to services and amenities. More importantly, however, the new estates were denied the opportunity to develop into stable working class communities because accommodation was never provided for young married couples who wished to remain on their own estates. The fact that the second generation were denied access to accommodation in

their old areas probably further accelerated the movement towards owner-occupation. Second generation council tenants had grown up in modern decent houses and therefore their expectations extended further than sub-let rooms in the inner-city. Many young couples therefore who were denied access to council housing turned to owner-occupation as the only viable alternative.

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11. Interview No.13. Appendix 13.,p.434
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 22. Interview No.52. Appendix 13.,p.585
 23. Durant, op.cit.,p.21.
 24. Interview No.24. Appendix 13.,p.480
 25. Interview No.15. Appendix 13.,p.443
 26. Wilmott, op.cit., p.67.
 27. Interview No.12. Appendix 13.,p.432
 28. Interview No.13. Appendix 13.,p.434
 29. Interview No.34. Appendix 13.,p.521
 30. Liverpool Housing Department house cards; Liverpool Street Directories, 1920-1941.
 31. ibid, 1920-1950
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 33. Interview No.51. Appendix 13.,p.583
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46. Interview No.1. Appendix 13.,p384
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Conclusion.

There can be little doubt from this study that the housing policies pursued by Liverpool City Council between the wars dramatically raised working class housing standards and,

"institutionalized for the working classes the process of suburbanization which the middle classes had followed since at least the middle of the nineteenth century".¹

Liverpool's achievements during this period were impressive. A total of 38,611 dwellings had been provided, the vast majority of which, 85%, had been built in the suburbs. By the outbreak of the Second World War council dwellings made up one sixth of Liverpool's total housing stock, compared with less than one tenth in England and Wales as a whole. Apart from Birmingham, no other provincial city built more council houses than Liverpool: Manchester built 27,447 houses, Leeds 20,000, Bristol 14,610 and Newcastle 12,7100.²

All the evidence of this work has shown that, while a local authority may act within the framework of national housing policy, the way it does so depends very much on local influences and conditions. Liverpool responded so well to the inter-war housing legislation, mainly because the sheer size of its housing problem demanded drastic action. The city contained the worst slums in the country and overcrowding was so severe that over 11,000 families were forced to live in one-roomed dwellings. Housing had played a major part in local politics of this city well before 1919 and politicians from all parties were aware that continued working class support depended to a large extent on housing progress. Consequently, despite the fact that the council was ruled by the Conservatives throughout the inter-war

period, a vigorous house-building programme had been adopted and the council was responsible for 60% of inter-war building as opposed to a public sector tally of 28% nationally. There had been a strong Liberal presence and a growing body of vociferous Labour councillors in the Council Chamber who also advocated housing reform on humanitarian grounds and they constantly reminded the Conservative leadership of the appalling housing conditions which prevailed in the city.

It is also apparent that key individuals played a decisive role in determining how enthusiastically central initiatives were implemented at the local level. The Conservative Chairman of the Housing Committee, Councillor White, had energetically committed himself to the suburban house-building programme and in 1925 Liverpool had been extremely fortunate to acquire the services of Lancelot Keay, who proved to be an imaginative and dedicated Director of Housing. Apart from the disastrous Garston Scandal, which halted housing provision for a while, Liverpool had been very well served by its elected council and permanent officials who enthusiastically implemented an extensive suburban development programme.

The Housing Situation in 1939.

Despite the massive growth of council housing between the wars the housing market in Liverpool in 1939 was still dominated by private letting and continued to be so until the late 1960's. There are no exact figures for the city but on the evidence of private enterprise building it seems likely that not much less than 70% of all dwellings

were still rented privately in 1939. However, this study confirms that the private sector did undergo major structural changes in the inter-war years, that the private rented sector declined and owner-occupation experienced rapid growth. The housing market consequently at the outbreak of the Second World War was considerably more complicated than that of 1914, when a single form of tenure, private letting, had dominated.

Nationally private enterprise building greatly overshadowed the public sector during this period but this study has shown that this definitely had not been the case in Liverpool. Whereas 72% of new houses built in England and Wales were provided by the private sector, mainly for owner-occupation, during these two decades, the figure for Liverpool was only 40%. We can conclude from this work that the private sector was relatively inactive in Liverpool owing to the fact that the majority of the city's population was low-skilled and poorly-paid. The economic life of the city was still dominated by the port and much of the working class population was employed on a casual, irregular basis. The economic problems created by the casual labour system were aggravated during this period when Britain's old export industries suffered a dramatic decline. Liverpool, being the major port of the old industrial areas consequently suffered extremely high levels of unemployment, not only in the 1930's, but throughout the whole of the inter-war period. Depressed Liverpool therefore had been a very poor market for building for sale for owner-occupiers, while the low irregular earnings of the working class population made it impossible for private enterprise to build new houses to let at profitable rents.

Faced with the severe housing problems of an old industrial city and an inactive private sector it had fallen to the local authority to improve the quantity and quality of working class housing. However, what emerges from this study is that, despite the fact that Liverpool built far more council houses than most other authorities, it did not build sufficient to supply demand. In 1939 there were still 30,000 unsatisfied applicants on the city's housing register. After twenty years of subsidized house-building Liverpool still had a chronic housing shortage. This study confirms most definitely that the "general needs" Wheatley subsidy was withdrawn prematurely when there was still a vast demand for council houses. After 1934 the housing needs of Liverpool's ordinary working class population had simply not been met. The private sector had remained reluctant to provide cheap housing for rent and the local authority could not withdraw totally from the provision of "general needs" housing provision and 2,965 unsubsidized council houses had been erected in an attempt to relieve the situation. Such a number had obviously been totally inadequate but the valuable work done by the local authority in clearing away thousands of appalling slum dwellings had commanded the vast majority of the resources available to the Housing Committee.

Housing Standards.

Liverpool may have failed to build houses in sufficient numbers but a major fact that has been stressed in this work is that the type of council housing provided was vastly superior to the accommodation previously occupied by the new council tenants. It is clear that

housing standards in Liverpool had been extremely low. Thousands of people still occupied insanitary court houses and cellars which had been condemned over fifty years previously, while the majority of working class families lived in old, densely packed terraced housing which generally lacked even the most basic of amenities. In comparison Liverpool's council houses were built to low densities, each containing a bathroom, inside toilet, airing cupboard, gas cooker and wash boiler and, with the exception of houses on the Elm House estate, electricity. As would be expected the families who had been re-housed under the 1930 slum-clearance legislation had experienced the greatest improvements in housing standards on acquiring a new suburban home. It has been shown just how appalling conditions had been in the slum areas of Liverpool as families crowded together in insanitary courts and cellars. These families had been in acute housing distress and it is easy to see why death rates had been so high in areas of such squalor. Despite such appalling conditions, it was surprising to find that virtually no ex-slum families had applied for a council house and when the opportunity of superior council housing was offered to them under slum clearance schemes, most had been reluctant to leave their old substandard property. It was only after the ex-slum dwellers had been re-housed on their new suburban estates that they realized just how badly they had been accommodated before and a high level of satisfaction was expressed with their vastly improved council property.

A major fact to emerge from this work is that Liverpool failed to house those families in greatest need until it was compelled to do so under the 1930 Act, and very few ex-slum dwellers had been allocated

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houses on suburban estates before 1934. However, despite the fact that very few families housed under "general needs" provision had originated from the slums the standard of their previous accommodation had also been generally very low. The housing shortage had apparently been so acute that even well-to-do families had been forced to rent rooms in multi-occupied houses which were usually totally unsuitable for sub-letting. It would seem that families tended to move from one set of rooms to another in a constant search for decent accommodation. Even if families were fortunate enough to find a small house to rent this frequently turned out to be cockroach or bug-infested. Some of the more affluent tenants had previously lived in superior terraced property with luxuries such as bathrooms and inside toilets. The vast majority of Liverpool council tenants however had come from ordinary working class streets of substandard terraced housing. What emerges from this study is just how hard life was, especially for the women in such inferior accommodation which frequently lacked even cold running water. It is clear that families housed prior to 1934 may not have been those in the greatest need, but in Liverpool they most definitely had been "in need".

The new council tenants had obviously been delighted with their modern, convenient homes and it frequently took them quite a while to adjust to modern amenities such as baths, electricity and gardens. When families had first moved into their new council houses they had considered them to be "real little palaces", and this was true even of the small, cheap non-parlour houses which incorporated the bathroom in the scullery. Families who had previously had to use the public baths or a tin bath considered a bathroom of any kind to be a luxury, even

if it was situated in the scullery. This study has shown that housing standards declined in Liverpool after the Addison period but that the lower quality housing provided by the Council was still considered to be of extremely high standard and very desirable by its recipients.

In Liverpool local conditions had apparently had a profound effect on housing standards. Many other local authorities, for example Manchester, managed to resist governmental pressure to lower housing standards until after the economic crisis of 1931 but as early as 1926 Liverpool had decided to build smaller inferior houses with downstairs bathrooms. The economic and social structures of the city had led to such a decision. What emerges time and time again in this study is the poverty of Liverpool's working class population. In 1926 the majority of families on the Council's waiting list earned between £2 and £3 a week and consequently were unlikely to be able to afford the 13s. 3d. (66.5p) rent for a non-parlour house. Opposition councillors, most notably Councillor Eleanor Rathbone had advocated the introduction of a rent rebate scheme which would enable families, regardless of their means, to be housed in the kind of dwelling most suitable to their size. The Tory philosophy however rejected the idea that the same quality of dwellings should be provided for every tenant and instead advocated that poorer families should be accommodated in inferior dwellings. Consequently the Tory controlled Council in Liverpool decided that size of house should be related only to income and that "building down" was the only way to accommodate its ordinary working class population.

Housing standards had fallen in the immediate post-Addison period in response to changes in subsidy provision but parlour houses had

still been provided in large numbers and the non-parlour houses provided had still only been slightly smaller than those built under the 1919 scheme. After 1926 the fall in standards had been far more dramatic. The policy of "building down" included not only the provision of smaller, inferior non-parlour houses but also a limitation on the provision of parlour houses. Unfortunately the class of tenant for whom the smaller non-parlour houses were provided tended to have a greater number of children than earlier council tenants. Consequently "building down" had led to a situation whereby the very families who needed the most space ended up with the least.

The greatest decline in housing standards had come towards the end of the Wheatley period when the Council had limited its activities to providing only small non-parlour houses in response to the governments appeal for economy. However soon after building had begun under the 1930 Housing Act it is clear that a reversal in policy had taken place. The decision was taken to once again include parlour houses in schemes in an attempt to achieve a greater social mix on estates. It was hoped that higher status parlour tenants would bring about an improvement in the social habits of poorer families who had little idea of how to manage or maintain a new, modern home. After 1934 the size of non-parlour houses had also increased and more and more were once again provided with an upstairs bathroom. In Liverpool therefore the period 1934-1939 had been one of slight improvement in housing standards. In most other areas the reverse had occurred and authorities had reduced standards after 1933, in order to accommodate slum families. The poverty of Liverpool's working class population accounts for the difference in timing.

Council Tenants.

As housing standards altered in response to changes in policy and subsidy provision so did the social composition of the new suburban estates. Since the houses had been built under a series of Housing Acts designed to cater for very different sections of the community it was anticipated that the 33,010 tenants would not display the same characteristics. This most definitely proved to be the case but the surprising thing to emerge from the analysis of the characteristics of the council tenants is the extent to which they varied, the differences between Addison and Chamberlain and Wheatley tenants being far greater than expected. The Addison houses had been built in the post-war inflationary period and the high rents demanded by the Ministry of Health obviously meant that only the more affluent groups in the community benefited from the introduction of housing subsidies. Over 40% of Addison tenants could not even be classified as belonging to the "working classes", while the remainder were mainly well paid skilled workers in regular employment. As would be expected there was a clear distinction between families occupying parlour and non-parlour houses, with the more expensive parlour houses attracting the highest income groups. It is surprising to discover that some of the original Addison parlour tenants had been extremely affluent being employed in high status jobs, for example, solicitor, architect, bank manager which commanded salaries of over £10 a week in 1920.

The differentiation between parlour and non-parlour families continued throughout the inter-war period with the Housing Committee restricting parlour houses to more affluent workers employed in

regular jobs. Whereas two out of three Addison houses had contained parlours, only one out of three Chamberlain and Wheatley houses contained such an amenity and this is one reason why Chamberlain and Wheatley tenants were socially and economically below Addison tenants. Another reason is that smaller and cheaper non-parlour houses were built after 1926 which brought council housing within the reach of more low paid workers. The continued predominance of parlour houses on early Wheatley estates had ensured that the majority of council tenants still belonged to the clerk-artisan class but after 1926 a Liverpool council tenant was more and more likely to be an unskilled worker. In the late Wheatley period when parlour houses were excluded from schemes the average council tenant had in fact been an unskilled labourer, usually employed on a casual basis. It is generally assumed that Wheatley houses catered mainly for the needs of the more affluent members of the working classes. This study however has shown that this most definitely was not the case in Liverpool. The extremely low wage-earning capacity of Liverpool's working class population had necessitated the provision of cheap housing which, the Council had met through a policy of "building down". The lowering of housing standards in the later Wheatley period accounts for the fact that the average Liverpool tenant was considerably less skilled than his counterpart in other parts of the country. From 1926 onwards Liverpool had concentrated on housing its ordinary working class population which was low-skilled and low-paid and that is why there had been such a lowering of skill amongst council tenants in the post-Addison period. Only the lower middle classes and the more affluent members of the working classes had been allocated spacious,

highly rented Addison houses but the provision of cheaper smaller houses in the late Wheatley period had brought suburban council housing within the means of ordinary, poor Liverpool families.

Between 1934 and 1939 Liverpool had provided council houses under the 1925 and 1930 Housing Acts, two Acts designed to meet the housing needs of very different sections of the community. The houses provided under the 1925 Act had been slightly more expensive to rent than Wheatley houses and had not been intended for very poor families. Families allocated these unsubsidized houses had undergone more rigid screening to ensure that they could afford the higher rents and would be unlikely to place a burden on the rates through high rent arrears or maintenance costs. This more rigid selection process clearly effected the composition of 1925 estates for estate families were socially and economically well above late Wheatley tenants. By comparison families housed under the 1930 Act were socially and economically well below even late Wheatley tenants. This time the fall in status was not due to a decline in housing standards but to the fact that Liverpool, like all other cities, had been finally forced to house those in greatest need, the slum dwellers. Nearly one quarter of families housed under slum clearance schemes had been unemployed, living off unemployment benefit or public assistance and their extremely low incomes had to support families which tended to be larger than those of other council tenants. This study has shown that families in the late Wheatley period had been poor but that those housed under slum clearance schemes had been very poor.

We can conclude that changes in housing policy at the central and local level had a profound effect on the social composition of the

various council estates built under different policy phases. It is also clear that government subsidies had been used to provide houses for a wide range of tenants from extremely affluent, non-manual Addison families to destitute, unemployed slum clearance families. Until building began under the 1930 Act subsidies had definitely not gone where they were needed most and if we judge Liverpool's achievements by this criterion they are not very great. It is true that in the Addison period and even in the early Wheatley period many houses had been allocated to middle and lower-middle class families i.e. not to the class for whom they were intended. However it is also true that in Liverpool from 1926 onwards subsidies had in fact been used more and more to house families who were poor and who had previously occupied extremely substandard accommodation. Many tenants housed under the Wheatley Act had lived in conditions little better than those found in the slums. Liverpool therefore cannot be accused of catering only for the better-off members of the working classes before 1934 since very valuable work had been done in housing the needy long before this date. Subsidies may not have gone to those in most need till ater 1934 but from 1926 they had been used increasingly to house those "in need".

Rent Policy.

Liverpool however can be criticized for failing to introduce a comprehensive rent policy which fixed rents in relation to family size and income. Throughout the inter-war period the Tory controlled Council adopted a totally pragmatic approach to the rent question.

Rent levels were determined by building costs and subsidy provision and houses were uneconomically subsidized at a flat rate without reference to the financial circumstances of the occupants. The 1930 Act had encouraged local authorities to introduce rent relief in order to assist impoverished ex-slum dwellers with their rent bills and the 1935 Act had allowed the principle of rent relief to be extended to cover all subsidies under all previous Housing Acts but still Liverpool failed to adopt a more humanitarian approach to the rent question.

Liverpool's rent policy appears to have been based on a desire for easy administration and not on the welfare of tenants. Constant pressure from the opposition in the Council Chamber for the introduction of some form of rent relief was counteracted by the Conservatives by claims that it would be too time consuming to administer, owing to the fact that any scheme which sought to adjust rent in relation to both family size and income required some kind of means testing. It is more likely however that rent relief was not introduced because it simply ran counter to Tory philosophy with its emphasis on self-help and self-reliance. Laissez-faire principles still lingered on and it must be remembered that the welfare state was still only in its embryonic stage in the inter-war period. The role of the state had increased considerably following the first World War but welfare provision was still of a very limited nature and poor families were still left to fend for themselves with very little assistance from the state. The Tory controlled Council in Liverpool in these pre-welfare state days probably felt that the granting of rent relief to impoverished council tenants would turn council housing

into an extension of the Poor Law system.

The Tory controlled Council therefore deliberately chose as its main criterion for the selection of tenants, the ability to pay rent. Rents were set out at a fixed level and only those tenants who could afford the rents were allocated houses. This selection process however obviously failed to ensure that council rents were within the means of all tenants since Liverpool had been confronted by a massive, and ever-increasing rent arrears bill throughout the period under review. Rents had simply been too high. Liverpool had responded to its rent arrears problem by allowing tenants to sub-let their property, slightly reducing rents in the early 1930's when building costs fell, permitting them to pay off arrears in small weekly payments or by transferring them to cheaper property. Such measures were mere palliatives and throughout the period Liverpool failed to acknowledge that poverty was at the root of its rent problem and that what was needed was an elastic system of rent rebates to assist struggling tenants. The rent of every council dwelling should have been fixed at the full municipal economic rent, that is, at a weekly sum which represented the actual cost of building and maintenance. If a tenant could afford the full economic rent he should have been called upon to pay it. If not rent relief should have been granted to him, according to his need.

By 1938 more than 100 local authorities in England and Wales operated some kind of rent rebate scheme, although they were generally limited to tenants rehoused under slum clearance legislation. Only one local authority, Leeds, really attempted to tackle the rent question during this period by including its entire housing stock in

its rent rebate scheme and by uniquely allowing families who fell below a given subsistence level to live rent free. All other rent rebate schemes demanded that tenants had to pay a minimum rent at least. The enlightened leader of Leed's Labour controlled Council had decided that "we shall not begin to talk about rent until there is sufficient money in the household to provide the family with the necessities of life".³ Such a scheme would have been ideally suited to Liverpool's low-paid working class population and this is probably one of the major reasons why nothing similar had been introduced. The low wage earning capacity of Liverpool's council tenants meant that there would have been too few richer tenants able to afford economic rents to finance the rebates for the needy. The cost of granting rent relief consequently would have fallen upon the rates which would have been politically unacceptable to the Tories. Another factor which deterred action on the rent question was the high level of inner-city tenement building which took place in Liverpool in the second half of the 1930's. In other areas rent rebate schemes for 1930 housing stock had been financed by surpluses accruing on 1924 and 1930 Housing Act accounts, following reductions in building costs and interest rates. In Liverpool any surplus was used to subsidize high cost tenement building and consequently rent rebates had not even been available for slum clearance families.

What emerges from this study is just how badly rent rebates had been needed in Liverpool. It is clear that many tenants, especially those living in parlour houses could easily have afforded to pay an economic rent; as evidenced by the fact that many could afford to pay to have their children educated privately, pursue expensive hobbies,

such as golf, and buy motor cars. The level of affluence among some tenants was surprisingly high and they were able to live very, very comfortable lives in their new suburban environment. On the other hand it is obvious that many tenants even before 1934 found their rents unbearably high and desperately needed some assistance. Many had lived in the most dire poverty. In the mid-1930's the Medical Officer of Health for Huyton-with-Roby had found that numerous tenants on the Huyton Farm estate were suffering from severe malnutrition. This study has shown that a similar situation had existed on all other Liverpool estates. The fact that Liverpool housed so many low paid, precariously employed, unskilled workers from 1926 onwards accounts for the extreme poverty and deprivation revealed in this study. In the post-Addison period the average council tenant was low-paid and it apparently only needed the addition of an extra child, or a spell of sickness or unemployment to plunge him below the poverty line. The extent of poverty among Wheatley tenants was alarming and this study has shown the hardship of life for ordinary working class people in depressed inter-war Liverpool.

As would be expected, however, the burden of council house occupancy fell heaviest on the ex-slum dwellers. In Liverpool the decision to charge comparable rents for 1924 and 1930 Act houses had been based on the claim that many slum families had incomes similar to other council tenants and that the 1930 houses would not necessarily be tenanted by ex-slum families. This however proved not to be the case. The vast majority of 1930 houses had been allocated to ex-slum families with incomes lower than even late Wheatley tenants. In the 1930's available sites had become more remote and consequently a

situation had arisen whereby the poorest families, the ex-slum dwellers, had been housed on the remotest estates. All the economic problems associated with council house occupancy were aggravated for these families who were confronted by expensive travelling costs. Without the intervention of the Second World War Liverpool would probably have been forced to tackle its rent problem because the families it was housing in the immediate pre-war period would have created even graver rent arrears problems than impoverished Wheatley tenants. The war intervened before the full effect of Liverpool's rent policy for ex-slum dwellers was felt.

There can be little doubt that the development of suburban council estates greatly raised working class housing standards but Liverpool's failure to relate rents to family size and income meant that many families simply could not take full advantage of their improved housing conditions. It is one thing to have electricity for the first time, quite another to be able to afford to use it. It is clear that the tenants loved their "little palaces" but rents had been much too high and many tenants had been forced to do without the necessities of life. Suburban council housing is seen as a "major gain" in the inter-war years for the working classes but the fact that so many council tenants lived in such dire poverty suggests that such a gain should perhaps not be over-estimated in Liverpool.

Liverpool's failure to implement a rent rebate scheme also meant that the housing stock was never efficiently utilised during this period. Theoretically the largest type of house, the parlour house, should have been allocated to the largest families but it is clear from this study that the reverse occurred. Parlour houses went to the

most affluent families, the very families who tended to have smaller families. Non-parlour houses were reserved for the less affluent. Analysis of the characteristics of tenants has shown that as the social and economic status of tenants had fallen family size increased but unfortunately this increase in family size had been accompanied in the 20's and 30's by a lowering of housing standards. The Tories emphasis on ability to pay rent and not on need resulted in a situation whereby smaller and smaller houses were provided for larger and larger families. The problem was compounded by the fact that the majority of couples tended to be quite young when they took up their tenancies and frequently went on to have several more children thereby placing a greater and greater strain on their accommodation. Family size in Liverpool tended to be larger than in other areas owing to the city's high Catholic populaion which stemmed from the vast migration from Ireland to Liverpool in the 1840's. Large, poor families had been denied access to more spacious parlour houses because they could not afford the additional rent and although a number of 4- and 5- bedroomed non-parlour houses were built they were not built in sufficient numbers to meet the demand for large accommodation. As a result by 1936 10% of council tenants had been living in overcrowded conditions. If Liverpool had adopted a policy of rent relief instead of one of "building down" larger families could have been provided with spacious parlour accommodation instead of reduced cramped non-parlour houses and the situation would not have arisen whereby many houses were chronically over-occupied, while others were similarly under-occupied. Liverpool had built new, modern houses to improve the housing conditions of its working class population. By

the middle of the 1930's many of these houses had been in danger of deteriorating into slums due to the Tories insistence that houses had to be allocated according to means and not to need. The Tories, led by Councillor White may have pursued an energetic house-building programme during the inter-war period but the benefits accruing to the new council tenants were severely limited by the Council's deliberate rent policy.

The Provision of Amenities and the Development of Community Spirit.

As the study progressed it became more and more apparent that despite Liverpool's considerable achievements serious errors had also been made in the planning of the new suburbia. However as Rosamund Jevons and John Madge concluded in 1946, following their study of Bristol council estates, perhaps it was inevitable

"that any authority which embarks for the first time on an ambitious housing programme will make mistakes. Mistakes did occur in most areas between the wars, when, for the first time in our history, local authorities undertook the great social task of housing the people".¹⁴

Liverpool failed to realize, like all other authorities, that people need more than mere houses. They needed important services such as schools and transport and amenities such as shops, pubs, churches and dance-halls to help develop a sense of community in the new residential districts. Most council tenants had come from the old crowded districts of Liverpool where there had been close contact with relatives and the sense of belonging within a neighbourhood where few were strangers. This sense of community had been reinforced by close contact with neighbours through friendly corner shops and pubs. The

suburbanites had been transferred to a very different, alien environment which lacked even the most basic of amenities. The new, bleak utilitarian estates had been isolated from employment centres, shops, schools and recreational facilities and all the evidence of this study has shown just how hard life had been for the pioneer tenants.

The most serious omission of the new estates undoubtedly had been the failure to provide schools at the same time as the houses. Women frequently had to walk miles to take their children to the nearest school, often on muddy, unmade roads. Some children had travelled back to their old areas to go to school but when this proved to be too difficult parents simply kept their children at home until schools were provided on their estates. Such an interruption in schooling obviously had disastrous consequences for many young lives, as important school years were missed. Even when the schools were finally built parents still often had to wait to get their children accepted because of the pressure for school places. Despite the high Catholic population in Liverpool the Education Committee also failed to provide Catholic schools at the same time as Council schools, much to the annoyance of Catholic parents who had to decide whether to risk the wrath of the priest by sending their children to non-Catholic schools.

The absence of shops also created many problems for the women who missed the convenience of the corner shop. They missed being able to "pop across the road to the shop" if they ran out of bread or other necessities. This study has shown that a large number of council tenants in fact opened up their kitchens and front rooms as illegal

shops. Although condemned by the Housing Committee these illegal shops had obviously provided a valuable service in the early life of estates and helped people to get to know their new neighbours. The most serious problem for the menfolk however, had been how to get to work when no buses or trams ran to their new estates. It is clear that it was many years before these outlying estates were supplied with adequate transport facilities. The lack of transport had created many problems for people who had to travel long distances to the nearest school, shop, library, pub, doctor. All that was necessary for the well-being of a new community was missing on the isolated dormitories.

The increasing scale of suburban house building in Liverpool in the late 1920's however apparently led to a growing concern about the inadequate amenities on the estates, as evidenced by the fact that in 1930 the Council had decided that in future shops, schools, public halls and libraries should be built at the same time as houses. The situation therefore had improved in the 1930's but delays still occurred owing to the fact that there was little formal contact between the various Council Committees about the provision and co-ordination of facilities. This problem of course still bedevils the local government system today. However only the most essential services and amenities were provided and the recreational needs of tenants were still largely ignored. By 1939 pubs were still excluded from the estates, only a handful of cinemas had been provided, two swimming baths, four public halls and despite endless petitions from tenants for the need for more meeting places, only one community centre at Norris Green. If we take Norris Green as an example we can

see just how badly the social needs of tenants had been served. This estate had the same population as the town of Shrewsbury but whereas Shrewsbury had 30 churches, 20 halls and two libraries, Norris Green had 2 churches, 2 halls and 1 library.

Liverpool's suburban house-building programme had in fact placed a great strain on the city's transport system which was called upon to carry 1,000's of people daily to and from the city centre. The decision in the mid-1930's to build Speke as a self-contained community consequently had been partly due to the recognition that a community needed more than mere houses but also as a means of relieving the city's future traffic problem. In future the houses would have to go where the factories were.

Studies of inter-war estates in Leeds, Bristol, Manchester, Birmingham, Dagenham and Watling show that Liverpool had certainly not been the only authority to give insufficient attention to the provision of amenities and the development of a sense of community on its new council estates. All local authorities tended to see amenities as "optional extras" which could be provided at a later date when they should have been regarded as essentials for well-functioning estates. If local authorities had paid more attention to the social needs of the new suburban families far fewer would probably have left the estate in their early days.

What is clear from this study is that many pioneer families did give up their tenancies presumably preferring to return to their old districts. Families had felt lonely and isolated on moving out to the suburbs and there can be little doubt that their sense of isolation had been aggravated by the lack of amenities. The evidence suggests

that nearly all families suffered some degree of social maladjustment on transferring to the suburbs, especially ex-slum families whose suburbanization had been enforced. Without the intervention of the Second World War probably many more ex-slum dwellers, rehoused in Knowsley, would have returned to the old districts. As it was the danger of the air raids convinced people that, although their new estates were lonely places at least they were relatively safe.

Despite the Council's lack of attention however to the wider issues involved in the creating of new residential districts it is clear from this study that a sense of neighbourhood had developed among the new suburbanites. In the absence of friendly corner shops, pubs and churches people did not meet very often but gradually they had come to get to know one another. However it was a new style of neighbourliness decidedly less intimate than that found in the traditional working class communities. The fact that people no longer lived physically so close together appears to have produced more reserved relationships and friendships. Unfortunately however the estates were never allowed to develop into stable communities like those found in the old working class districts of Liverpool. Over the years the estates have been mainly tenanted by a succession of one-generation families owing to the fact that tenant's children were forced off the estates on marriage. The Council's allocation policy prevented young married couples from acquiring a council house and consequently the estates were never allowed to grow into settled old style communities. Kinship groups were never allowed to establish and valuable friendship ties were broken when people were dispersed on marriage.

The failure to provide for the second generation was one of the greatest, if not the greatest, failure of Liverpool's inter-war suburban house-building programme. This study has shown that whereas some couples were glad to leave the estates on marriage many would have welcomed the opportunity to remain close to their family and friends. If this had been allowed to happen we would not have had the situation which frequently exists today where hundreds of elderly, frail people live on their own, dependant on social services and isolated from their families who have been forced to live elsewhere. The local authority therefore played a major, and unfortunante role in the breakdown of the extended family which has occurred over the past few decades. In the old style working class communities families had lived close together and the tie between mother and daughter, in particular, had been the axis of the family system. The mother had played a vital role in the rearing of grandchildren, providing valuable advice and a place to retreat to in times of stress, while the daughter in her turn provided companionship and support in times of illness and increasing frailty. Today this network of support has broken down and people live more isolated lives in their nuclear families. As a result many old people are condemned to a lonely existence and many young people are left to cope with child-rearing, often under very stressful conditions and often with the most disastrous of consequences.

During the inter-war period the Council clearly had paid no attention to the housing needs of the second generation. It had been merely concerned with getting as many houses built as quickly as possible and failed to provide for the natural expansion of the

estates populations. This could have been done by planning in advance for enough houses and for houses of differing sizes but unfortunately a long-term solution was never sought to the housing needs of the second generation. It is clear that in some cases tenancies had been passed on to sons and daughters but the majority of young people had left the estates on marriage and consequently the new estates, to their detriment, were never allowed to develop naturally.

The Changing Face of Suburban council Estates.

The fact that young couples were forced off the estates on marriage was blamed by tenants for the deterioration in the quality of estate life which they claim has occurred in recent years. Time and time again the point was made that originally the council estates had been decent, respectable places in which to live, very much conforming to the early twentieth century garden city ideal of neat houses and well kept gardens. Today, however the estates were described as dirty and squalid, housing a very different type of tenant, "the lowest of the low". It is obvious that the character of Addison, Chamberlain and Wheatley and 1925 estates have altered dramatically since the inter-war period. However a major conclusion to be drawn from this study is that the status of these estates had already begun to decline in the 1930's. Analysis of the characteristics of tenants has shown that as the original tenants left they were replaced by families who were socially and economically their inferiors. This trend continued after the Second World War, quickening in pace in the 1960's, as lower and lower status families were allocated suburban council housing on

estates built under general needs provision. Today these suburban estates house a very high percentage of severely disadvantaged families and this has created chronic management and maintenance problems for the present Housing Committee. The garden city estates of the inter-war period are fast becoming working class ghettos and an alternative approach to managing and controlling them is urgently required. The estates are large and need intensive managing which cannot be done under a highly centralised system. The first step in tackling the problems of these vast estates therefore must be greater decentralisation of management and an attempt made to get tenants involved in the running of their estates. Perhaps if measures such as these are implemented the estates could be restored to their original standards.

Why then does council housing occupy such a different place in society today than it did in the inter-war period? It is mainly due to the consensus which emerged in the 1930's between the Tories and the right wing of the Labour Party and which, apart from a brief spell after 1945, has dominated the development of council housing to this day. Slum clearance, rather than the provision of housing for general needs, was to be the primary focus of local authority work. Council housing consequently acquired a very negative image as it became linked with slum clearance and its image became more tarnished in the late 1950's and 1960's by the disastrous high-rise tenement building programme which made council housing even less desirable. After 1933 the growth of socialised housing was contained and from then on owner-occupation was promoted as a more desirable form of tenure. The rise in owner-occupation since the Second World War has been

spectacular, especially since the 1960's. In 1939 31% of the population of Great Britain were owner-occupiers but the figure had risen to 50% by 1970 and today stands at around 60%. Every encouragement has been given to people to become property owners, probably the greatest being the lack of investment in public sector housing which has forced families to seek alternative forms of housing. Council tenants and housing association tenants have been given the right to buy their property and now by promoting shared-ownership schemes the present government hopes eventually to turn 75% of the population into property owners. Warning bells however are already beginning to ring. The alarming increase in the number of house repossessions made by building societies as a result of mortgage arrears clearly indicate that there are dangers in pushing property owning further and further down the socio-economic scale. Property owning is a burden many low-income families simply cannot cope with. Over the past twenty years therefore more and more families have opted for owner-occupation and council housing has been downgraded to a subsidiary form of tenure for those unable or unwilling to compete in the free market. This study has shown that during the 1920's and 1930's bank managers, master mariners, clerks, artisans, factory workers had chosen to live on Addison, Chamberlain and Wheatley and 1925 estates. Today's these estates are viewed as being distinctly down market and such families would automatically buy their own property. The council estates today are left for the unemployed, the single parent families, the homeless and that is why their character is so different from the inter-war years.

For a brief spell in the inter-war period a real attempt had been made to provide decent housing for the masses. Local authorities had become major suppliers of new housing and working class housing and living standards had been greatly improved by the creation of low-density, suburban council estates. By 1939 even the poorest in the community had gained access to modern, convenient housing far removed from unhealthy, over-crowded inner-city areas. Unfortunately however even during this period the growth of public housing had begun to be curtailed and since then apart from a brief spell under Beavan in the 1940's, local authorities have never been encouraged to pursue the provision of good quality housing with any vigour. Today political support for continued public housing has reached an all time low with the result that many working class families in this country are living in appalling conditions. Perhaps what is needed is another Tudor Walter's Report to highlight the extent of Britain's current housing problem and to stimulate, yet again, the production of high quality family houses for those unable to compete in the free market.

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3. Finnigan, op.cit., p.128.
4. Jevons and Madge, op.cit., p.87.

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