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Slum Clearance, Privatization and Residualization: the Practices and Politics of Council Housing in Mid-twentieth-century England

Abstract

This article contributes to a growing literature on working-class suburbanization by arguing that both the residualization and privatization of council housing need to be properly historicized. This case study of housing policy in the borough of Brighton demonstrates that council house sales between the 1950s and 1970s were important in the residualization of inter-war estates well before the 'right to buy' legislation of the 1980s. Concerns about excessively affluent tenants can also be traced to the inter-war period, although it was not until the late 1950s that local Conservatives sought to push affluent council tenants into owner occupation via capping incomes and encouraging council house sales. The article shows that slum clearance had long been central to the local council's provision of municipal housing and that apart from two short periods following the First and Second World Wars, council housing was conceived of primarily as a residual tenure by those in control of policy implementation. It further demonstrates that slum clearance between the 1920s and 1960s altered the social constituency for council housing and, combined with selective privatization, specific allocation policies and disinvestment, led to the stigmatization of certain inter-war estates. The article suggests that further case studies are needed in order to test the wider applicability of these arguments during the middle years of the twentieth century.

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I

This article seeks to contribute to debates about the effects of slum clearance, council housing and home ownership on working-class neighbourhoods over the middle years of the twentieth century (here conceived as the period *c.*1925–75). To do so, I use a case study of Brighton to explore an under-researched element in the story of the mid-twentieth-century working class: the simultaneous privatization and residualization of council estates. Residualization implies a process whereby the provision of a particular tenure (in this case council housing) is targeted at poorer households, rather than catering for the general housing needs of the wider population. Potentially hugely significant in its implications for socio-spatial polarization and working-class fragmentation, residualization has been notable in the historiography of council housing only in its virtual absence from the literature.¹ In the 1980s historians focused on the emergence of municipal housing in the aftermath of the First World War. Here the debate was between those who believed that the private-dominated Edwardian system collapsed through its own intrinsic weaknesses and others who saw the wartime emergency as a crucial determinant in the emergence of municipal housing.² The latter interpretation is probably dominant yet disagreements remain between scholars such as Byrne, Damer, Melling and Swenarton who view rent controls and council housing as a victory for working-class action and Daunton who sees the introduction of subsidized housing as an *ad-hoc* solution to the failure of the market and the subsequent reluctance to de-control rents as indicative of the political isolation of private landlords.³ The 1990s and 2000s saw historians analyse the social history of suburbanization more broadly with the inter-war period garnering particular attention. Issues of local politics and civic culture have been explored in studies of

¹ The pioneering account of socio-tenurial polarization came from a sociologist; see Chris Hamnett, 'Housing the two nations: socio-tenurial polarization in England and Wales, 1961–81', *Urban Studies*, 21 (1984), 389–405.

² For the former view see Marian Bowley, *Housing and the State, 1919–1944* (London, 1945); Avner Offer, *Property and Politics, 1870–1914: Landownership, Law, Ideology and Urban Development in England* (Cambridge, 1981). For advocates of the latter see footnote 3.

³ David Byrne and Sean Damer, 'The state, the balance of class forces and early working class housing legislation', in Political Economy of Housing Workshop of the Conference of Socialist Economists, *Housing, Construction and the State* (London, 1980) 63–70; Joseph Melling, 'Clydeside housing and the evolution of state rent control, 1900–1939', in Joseph Melling (ed.), *Housing, Social Policy and the State* (London, 1980) 139–167; Mark Swenarton, *Homes Fit for Heroes: The Politics and Architecture of Early State Housing in Britain* (London, 1981); David Englander, *Landlord and Tenant in Urban Britain, 1838–1918* (Oxford, 1983); Martin Daunton, 'Introduction', in Martin Daunton (ed.), *Councillors and Tenants: Local Authority Housing in English Cities, 1919–1939* (Leicester, 1984) 1–38; Martin Daunton, *A Property-owning Democracy? Housing in Britain* (London, 1987).

Coventry, Nottingham, Sheffield and Manchester,⁴ while McKenna, Hughes and Hunt and Olechnowicz have written detailed studies of the building, settlement and occupation of inter-war estates in Liverpool, Wythenshawe (Manchester) and east London.⁵ Recent revisionist work by Scott and Speight has overturned the established view that working-class owner occupation was insignificant in the 1930s.⁶ Work on the post-war period has been limited, however, while few studies have encompassed the mid-century period as a whole. Ravetz took the story of council housing from its nineteenth-century origins to the end of the twentieth century, while Muthesius and Glendinning's magisterial *Tower block* (1994) provided the definitive account of municipal high-rise housing.⁷ Clapson has produced a significant body of work in which he has sought to rescue Britain's post-war new towns and suburbs from the enormous condescension of posterity, while Yelling singlehandedly narrated the story of slum clearance from the 1930s to the 1980s.⁸

Important attempts have been made by Giles and Langhamer to trace the aspirations for modern domesticity and chart the shifting material realities and meanings of home across the middle years of the

⁴ Nick Tiratsoo, *Reconstruction, Affluence and Labour Politics: Coventry, 1945–1960* (London, 1990); Nick Hayes, 'Civic perceptions: housing and local decision making in English cities in the 1920s', *Urban History*, 27 (2000), 211–33; Andrzej Olechnowicz, 'Civic leadership and education for democracy: the Simons and the Wythenshawe estate', *Contemporary British History*, 14 (2000), 3–26; Peter Shapely, Duncan Tanner and Andrew Walling, 'Civic culture and housing policy in Manchester, 1945–79', *Twentieth Century British History*, 15 (2004), 410–34.

⁵ Madeline McKenna, 'The suburbanization of the working class population of Liverpool between the wars', *Social History*, 16 (1991), 173–89; Anne Hughes and Karen Hunt, 'A culture transformed? Women's lives in Wythenshawe in the 1930s', in Andy Davies and Steven Fielding (eds), *Worker's Worlds* (Manchester, 1992), 74–101; Andrzej Olechnowicz, *Working Class Housing in England Between the Wars: The Becontree Estate* (Oxford, 1997).

⁶ Peter Scott, 'Marketing mass home ownership and the creation of the modern working class consumer in inter-war Britain', *Business History*, 50 (2008), 4–25; Peter Scott, 'Did owner-occupation lead to smaller families for inter-war working class households', *Economic History Review*, 61 (2008), 99–124; George Speight, 'Who bought the interwar semi? The socio-economic characteristics of new house buyers in the 1930s', University of Oxford Discussion Papers in Economic and Social History 38 (2000) <http://www.nuffield.ox.ac.uk/economics/history/>. For earlier conservative estimates of the extent of working-class owner occupation, see Mark Swenarton and Sandra Taylor, 'The scale and nature of the growth of owner-occupation in Britain between the wars', *Economic History Review*, 38 (1985), 373–92.

⁷ Alison Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture: The History of a Social Experiment* (London, 2001); Miles Glendinning and Stefan Muthesius, *Tower Block: Modern Public Housing in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland* (London, 1994).

⁸ Mark Clapson, *Invincible Green Suburbs, Brave New Towns* (Manchester, 1998); Mark Clapson, 'The suburban aspiration in England since 1919', *Contemporary British History*, 14 (2000), 151–74; Mark Clapson, *Suburban Century: Social Change and Urban Growth in England and the USA* (Oxford, 2003); Jim Yelling, *Slums and Redevelopment* (London, 1992); Jim Yelling, 'The incidence of slum clearance in England and Wales, 1955–85', *Urban History*, 27 (2000), 234–54.

twentieth century; however, the wider cultural and political significance of the massive transformations in working-class life wrought by slum clearance and suburbanization has barely begun to be explored.⁹ Until very recently, for example, there were (besides Yelling's work on London) no local studies of slum clearance and its relationship to council housing; this is now rectified by monographs by Shapely on Manchester and Rogaly and Taylor on Norwich.¹⁰ Shapely provides a valuable local study of slum clearance and tenant action in the face of inadequate council housing in the post-war period. Rogaly and Taylor, building on earlier work by Mayne and Doyle on the cultural representation of working-class neighbourhoods, explore how the myths of slum clearance informed official and popular discourses which shaped residents' experiences of class and place.¹¹ Crucially, both studies encompass the middle years of the twentieth century, allowing for the production of nuanced accounts of the continuities and changes in policies, practices and experiences, a periodization adopted in this article. Slum clearance is hugely significant in any discussion of residualization as much for the changes in the cultural representation of council estates it signalled as for the shift in the socio-economic profiles of tenants which it occasioned.

The second key factor in explaining residualization is council house sales. Here sociologists have been much better than historians in charting the impact of sales for residualization and socio-spatial polarization. A large body of work has been produced which has explored the ongoing residualization of social housing at regional and national levels in the UK.¹² However, most of this has focused on the period since the 1980s and on the impact of 'right to buy' legislation in particular. Only a tiny amount of work has identified council house sales as an element in residualization prior to the 1980s, and this largely in terms of national housing policy and aggregate trends.¹³ Among historical accounts of, for example, Conservative housing policy in the 1950s and 1960s, one will search in vain for any more than a passing

⁹ Claire Langhamer, 'The meanings of home in postwar Britain', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 40 (2005), 341–62; Judy Giles, *The Parlour and the Suburb: Domestic Identities, Class, Femininity and Modernity* (Oxford, 2004).

¹⁰ Peter Shapely, *The Politics of Housing: Power, Consumers and Urban Culture* (Manchester, 2007); Ben Rogaly and Becky Taylor, *Moving Histories of Class and Community: Identity, Place and Belonging in Contemporary England* (London, 2009).

¹¹ See Rogaly and Taylor, *Moving Histories*, 38–50; Alan Mayne, *The Imagined Slum: Newspaper Representation in Three Cities, 1870–1914* (Leicester, 1993); Barry Doyle, 'Mapping slums in a historic city: representing working class communities in Edwardian Norwich', *Planning Perspectives*, 16 (2001), 47–65.

¹² For example, Ray Forrest and Alan Murie, *Selling the Welfare State* (London, 1988); Roger Burrows, 'Residential mobility and residualisation in social housing in England', *Journal of Social Policy*, 28 (1999), 27–52.

¹³ Forrest and Murie, *Selling the Welfare State*, 15–64.

mention of council house sales or residualization.¹⁴ Local sociological studies of sales in Bristol, Stevenage and Worcester were published in 1980; however, only the Bristol account explored the policy from 1960 and there was no attempt to relate this to the inter-war period.¹⁵ This absence of properly historicized accounts from both historians and sociologists is something which this article seeks to redress. In particular, I argue that a mid-century periodization (c.1925–75) allows the *longue durée* of slum clearance, sales and residualization to be properly comprehended. In this article I demonstrate that in Brighton the residualization of certain housing estates can be traced to the implementation of specific allocations and council house sales policies in the 1950s and 1960s. Moreover, these can be linked to changes in the cultural representation of estates and their tenants, which in turn can be traced to the rehousing of tenants from slum clearance areas in the 1930s. The question of whether the periodization of residualization in Brighton was unusual or not can only be answered by work on other localities across the same period: currently no comparative work exists.¹⁶

The article draws upon the records of Brighton council, reports of the medical officer of health and the housing manager to explore how council housing and slum clearance were implemented. For data on how housing policies were experienced and how representations of council estates and their tenants changed over the period I have drawn on the local press, autobiography and contemporary social surveys. The local press is an especially rich resource through which the social and cultural effects of suburbanization can be profitably viewed. These sources are interrogated in order to shape interlocking arguments about slum clearance, allocations, residualization and spatial polarization. First, I demonstrate that early council housing was largely confined to the middle class and affluent working class. I show that by the later

¹⁴ Only Jones alludes to the debate about sales but does not link this to residualization, see Helen Jones, ‘“This is magnificent!”: 300,000 houses a year and the Tory revival after 1945’, *Contemporary British History*, 14 (2000), 104–6; Peter Weiler, ‘The rise and fall of the Conservatives’ grand design for housing, 1951–64’, *Contemporary British History*, 14 (2000), 122–50; Peter Weiler, ‘The Conservatives’ search for a middle way in housing, 1951–64’, *Twentieth Century British History*, 14 (2003), 360–90; Alan Simmonds, ‘Conservative governments and the new town housing question in the 1950s’, *Urban History*, 28 (2001), 65–83.

¹⁵ See Keith Bassett, ‘Council sales in Bristol, 1960–1979’, *Policy and Politics*, 8 (1980), 324–33; Patricia Richmond, ‘The sale of council houses in Worcester’, *Politics and Policy*, 8 (1980), 316–7; David Truesdale, ‘House sales and owner occupation in Stevenage new town’, *Policy and Politics*, 8 (1980), 318–23.

¹⁶ Brighton and Bristol were by no means the only councils to sell houses prior to the mid-1970s. Birmingham sold 3,604 houses between the wars while Nottingham sold 8,000 in the 1970s alone: see Forrest and Murie, *Selling the Welfare State*, 43; Ken Coates and Richard Silburn, *Beyond the Bulldozer* (Nottingham, 1980), 118–19. Aggregate data demonstrate that hundreds of authorities sold houses. However, detailed local studies are needed to assess the extent and impact of these sales, particularly in relation to slum clearance, allocations and residualization.

1930s, significant divisions were emerging between affluent and poorer tenants, particularly following the resettlement of families from slum clearance areas. In this section I draw upon fresh archival data and contemporary survey evidence to analyse the impact of suburbanization on tenants' living standards and chart the divisions between households in terms of class, status and income. In the second section I argue that while clear divisions between affluent, ordinary working-class and poor tenants were evident between the wars, in the 1950s and 1960s, attempts were made to turn a social divide into a spatial one. From the late 1950s, there was an aggressive policy of council house sales, combined with income capping to push affluent workers out of tenure. While the affluent moved into owner occupation with the privatization of entire estates, increasingly so-called 'unsatisfactory tenants' and 'problem families' became concentrated in specific parts of particular inter-war estates. I argue that these policies combined with disinvestment in existing stock to result in the socio-spatial polarization of large inter-war neighbourhoods. This was reflected in shifting cultural representations that stigmatized these estates as contemporary slums. This residualization was the direct result of policies in relation to slum clearance, allocations and sales implemented from the 1930s, well before the period in which residualization is conventionally dated, and significantly before council house sales are supposed to have had major social and cultural consequences for the working class. This is a case study and there will be significant differences between localities depending upon the actions of local actors and the nature of local housing markets. However, the broad thrust of my arguments about the role of slum clearance and allocation policies in stigmatization and residualization are more widely applicable to the English experience of council housing during the mid-twentieth century.

II

The First World War has long been seen as a watershed moment in the provision of municipal housing in Britain.¹⁷ Apart from the London County Council (LCC), few English authorities had built to any scale prior to the conflict, and Brighton was no exception.¹⁸ As the war progressed, the cyclical downturn in the Edwardian housing market was turned into a structural crisis as house building virtually ceased and private rents were controlled at pre-1914 levels. It was politically

¹⁷ Stephen Merrett, *State Housing in Britain* (London, 1979), 31.

¹⁸ No more than 200 council houses had been built in connection with three slum clearance schemes in the 1880s and 1890s, see Jame Eyler, *Sir Arthur Newsholme and State Medicine, 1885–1935* (Cambridge, 1997), 75–7.

inconceivable that housing subsidies could be granted exclusively to private landlords, given the degree to which they were reviled.¹⁹ It was equally inexpedient to remove rent controls at the cessation of hostilities, given the prospect that landlords would again increase rents in a period of great scarcity. As Daunton argues, rent decontrol would be delayed 'until the market had been restored to equilibrium, which would be achieved in part through a massive one off provision of council housing'.²⁰ The 1919 Housing and Town Planning Act (or 'Addison' Act after the then minister for health) did just that: it obliged local authorities to survey the housing needs in their area and to use exchequer subsidies to build to meet them. Brighton's medical officer of health estimated that 3,152 working-class houses would be required during the next three years.²¹

The council engaged Stanley Adshead, professor of town planning at University College London to plan Brighton's first major development at South Moulsecomb.²² Adshead was one of a group of planners including Patrick Abercrombie and C.H. Reilly associated with the school of civic design at the University of Liverpool. Influenced by the American city beautiful movement they eschewed the picturesque approach advocated by Camillo Sitte and evident at Letchworth and the LCC's pre-war and wartime estates at Old Oak and Well Hall. Instead they revived the *Beaux-Arts* tradition of straight roads, symmetrical layout and formal approaches.²³ The estate received the approval of Adshead's peers in the nascent planning profession; A.C. Holliday in the *Town Planning Review* praised the informal layout around a central green, reminiscent of ancient downland villages.²⁴ The local press too, were enamoured with the scheme, with the *Brighton Gazette* in particular praising the layout and the variety of styles and materials used as the estate took shape.²⁵ For much of the mid-century period the estate was held up as one of the 'show places' of the town: listed as an attraction in visitors' guides to the resort between the 1930s and 1950s.²⁶

¹⁹ Peter Kemp, 'From solution to problem? Council housing and the development of national housing policy', in S. Lowe and D. Hughes (eds), *A New Century of Social Housing* (Leicester, 1991), 48.

²⁰ Daunton, *A Property-owning Democracy?*, 62.

²¹ Minutes of the general purposes committee, 13 Oct 1919, East Sussex Record Office [hereafter ESRO] DB/B/7/34.

²² Minutes of the general purposes committee, 15 Jun 1919, ESRO DB/B/7/33.

²³ Swenarton, *Homes Fit for Heroes*, 16–17. On the 'Liverpool school' see Simon Pepper and Mark Swenarton, 'Neo-Georgian maison-type', in Mark Swenarton (ed.), *Building the New Jerusalem: Architecture, Housing and Politics, 1900–1930* (Watford, 2008), 33–5.

²⁴ A.C. Holliday, 'The site planning of housing schemes', *Town Planning Review*, 18 (1920), 142.

²⁵ *Brighton Gazette*, 26 Jan 1921 and 1 Oct 1921.

²⁶ K.G. Browne, *Brighton: The Official Handbook of the Corporation* (Brighton, 1937), 18; Hamilton Fyfe, *ABC of Brighton and Hove* (Brighton, 1948), 43; C.G. Browne (ed.), *Focus on Brighton and Hove* (Brighton, 1951), 51.

In common with other estates built under the Addison legislation, South Moulsecoomb was always intended for the most affluent sections of the working class.²⁷ Yet astronomical rents and falling wages in the early twenties meant that houses on the estate were filled by middle-class tenants as well as the highest paid workers, a fact which exacerbated social divisions into the 1930s.

At the end of 1920, with construction costs reaching their post-war peak the housing committee met to consider Professor Adshead's proposal to build 263 houses of the parlour type on a site at Queens Park Road.²⁸ The minutes show that the committee agreed to radically alter these plans due to the fact that since they had been made there had 'been an urgent demand throughout the country for houses with less accommodation and of less rent'. Moreover, the councillors claimed, since available land close to central Brighton was limited 'and in view of the fact that large unhealthy areas are shortly to be demolished', it was thought 'advisable to erect in this area a type of house suited to such of the disposed as can be prevailed upon to move here'.²⁹ Costs of the 450 houses on the estate (built between 1922 and 1926) were lowered through various means such as omitting parlours, placing the toilets on the ground floor and increasing the number of houses to the acre from twelve to forty.³⁰ Whilst the corporation returned to garden suburb principles for general needs building for their third development at North Moulsecoomb, the lowering of housing standards generally set the tone for estates built for tenants from slum areas.³¹

Slum clearance proceeded alongside council house building in the 1920s; however, most activity took place during the 1930s following the provisions for clearance under the Greenwood Act of 1930 and the Conservative emphasis on the residual role of council housing from 1933.³² By 1939 more than 4,400 people had been displaced by schemes in Brighton and over 900 dwellings had been demolished, including a number in the Carlton Hill district which had been originally condemned as unfit as far back as 1877. The progress is partially shown in Figure 1.³³

²⁷ Ravetz, *Council Housing*, 78, 85–6.

²⁸ Construction costs based on Maywald's 1954 index in Brian Mitchell, (ed.) *British Historical Statistics* (Cambridge, 1988), 394.

²⁹ Minutes of the general purposes (housing) sub-committee, 8 Dec 1920, ESRO DB/B/7/35.

³⁰ Minutes of the general purposes (housing) sub-committee, 8 Dec 1920, ESRO DB/B/7/35; *Brighton Herald*, 23 Dec 1922.

³¹ Compare costs and floor areas for developments up to 1935 in Robert G. Baxter and Dennis J. Howe's 'Municipal activities in Brighton during the past twelve years', *Proceedings of the Institute of Municipal and County Engineers*, 63 (1936–7), 52–3.

³² Yelling, *Slums*, 47–54, 87–127.

³³ Different figures are found in different medical officer of health reports. For the more conservative estimates see the reports for 1938 and 1939.

Year	Dwellings demolished	People/families displaced	People/families re-housed	People/families found own Acc.
1922	48	229	519	95
1924	68	385	Included above	Included above
1931	200	999	819	180
1933	127	567	495	72
1934	128	651	475	176
1935	104	612	512	100
1936	7	297	250	47
1937	N/A	88	37	51
<i>Sub-totals</i>	c.682	3828	3107	721
1938	178	66 ^f	45 ^f	21 ^f
1939	112	581	65 ^f	42 ^f
<i>Totals</i>	c.972	4409 plus	2632 plus	721 plus

Source: Medical officer of health reports (Brighton, 1922–1939)

Note: ^f denotes families rather than individuals.

Figure 1

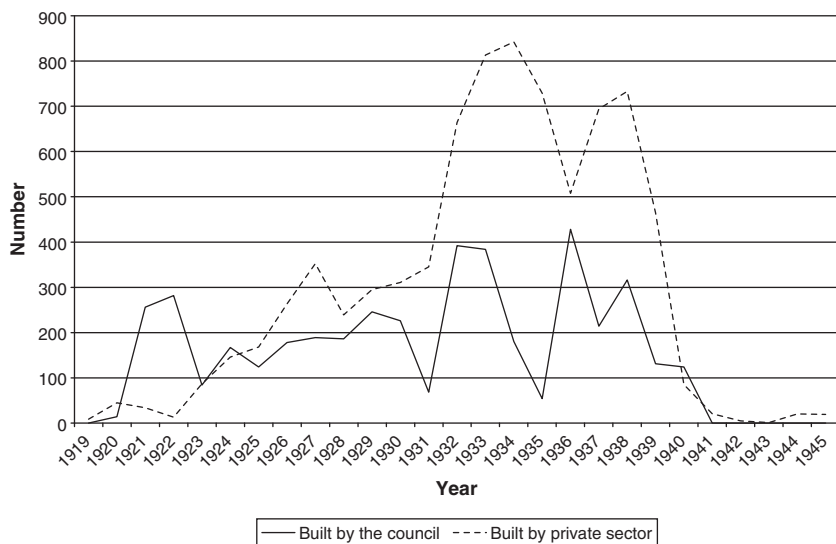
Houses demolished and persons displaced in Brighton, 1922–39.

Removal to an outlying estate often imposed additional burdens on the finances of families from the central areas and as the data show about 20 per cent of those displaced by clearance schemes preferred to find their own accommodation. As I discuss below, residents of Carlton Hill and a sympathetic medical officer of health had limited success in pushing for the development of central sites in the 1930s. Nevertheless the overwhelming thrust in terms of council building remained suburban. Between 1928 and 1934 over 1,000 houses were built in the Whitehawk valley initially under the Wheatley Act and later under the provisions of the slum clearance legislation of 1930 and 1933.³⁴ At nearby Manor Farm the whole of the land was acquired by the health committee from the Marquis of Bristol for rehousing people displaced by slum clearance.³⁵ By the time the war curtailed the East Moulsecomb development, Brighton council had built 4,285 houses and flats, 84 per cent of which were on suburban estates.³⁶ Suburban developments also dominated new building for owner occupation during the inter-war period with private estates constructed at Patcham, Saltdean, Withdean and Woodingdean. Conservative attempts to stimulate the private sector received a boost in 1931 due to the availability of cheap money following the decision to come off the gold standard. Rising real incomes for those in work combined with falling

³⁴ Minutes of the general purposes (housing) sub-committee, 10 Jul 1929, 9 Jul 1930, 11 Feb 1931, 14 Sep 1932 and 14 Jun 1933, ESRO DB/B/7/40–42.

³⁵ Minutes of the general purposes (housing) sub-committee, 28 Nov 1934, ESRO DB/B/7/43.

³⁶ Calculated from the annual reports of the medical officer of health for 1939 and 1940.



Source: Annual reports of the medical officer of health (Brighton, 1919–1945)

Note: Private sector figures include gains made from flat conversions

Figure 2

New houses and flats built by the council and private builders in Brighton, 1919–45.

land prices and plummeting building costs to stimulate a private building boom, most of which was for owner occupation.³⁷ As Figure 2 demonstrates the private sector out-built the public, accounting for 7,906 of the 12,149 houses and flats constructed between 1919 and 1945.

While no definitive local data exist, it seems likely that the majority of these homes were occupied by the town's burgeoning middle classes, although working-class owner occupation cannot be ruled out. Whilst Brighton had no tradition of working-class owner occupation prior to 1914, the availability of cheap credit and the very high rents of many council houses would have made a mortgage attractive to those in skilled, secure employment.³⁸ This could be countered by Gunn's argument that home ownership itself became a key marker of middle-class social identity in the inter-war period where: 'for the first time it was possible to define the middle classes as a whole as a class of owners and to make the symbolic distinction between the privately owned suburban residential estate and the working class, rent-paying

³⁷ Richard Rodger, 'Slums and suburbs: the persistence of residential apartheid', in P.J. Waller (ed.), *The English Urban Landscape* (Oxford, 2000), 253.

³⁸ Scott, 'Marketing', 7–10; Toby Harrisson, 'The growth of owner occupation in the 1930s, national characteristics and local reflection: Brighton and the Ladies Mile estate', unpublished paper (2006), 9–15.

council estate'.³⁹ This argument can only take us so far, however, if we consider the somewhat inconvenient empirical fact that there were middle-class council tenants throughout the period. Indeed, there were significant divisions between tenants in terms of class, occupational status and income which were further exacerbated by the onset of large-scale slum clearance.

The higher living costs associated with suburbanization in terms of rent, fuel and transport exercised those charged with improving the housing conditions of the town's working class from the 1920s. Slum clearance presented the local authority with a paradox when it came to rehousing tenants from the central areas: in providing modern housing they hoped to improve the living standards and lifestyles of tenants; however, in doing so, they risked impoverishing already poor families. At the end of 1928, the medical officer of health reported that some thirty households from the Hereford Street improvement area, 'including some who were not desirable' had been rehoused in the Whitehawk valley development, 'in the hope that given the chance they would improve with healthy surroundings and improved accommodation'.⁴⁰ However, he was concerned that this policy of housing clearance tenants on suburban sites would not be effective. He argued:

For the most part the tenants of these slums have to live near their work and they will not remove to the suburbs; they are generally so poor that they cannot afford the cost of travel to and from the centre of the town. Another difficulty is rent; the average these people can afford is about 8s. a week, they cannot pay 15s. a week or even the reduced rate of 12s. a week. Still another important point is that many are dirty and unsatisfactory tenants who would quickly ruin a new house.⁴¹

While a small number of houses and flats were built centrally on the Turner land in 1931 and Carlton Hill in the late 1930s, most new housing was suburban. In 1932, Dr Forbes again voiced his concerns, noting that:

In the [Carlton Hill] area there were 221 families, the average rent paid per family working out at 7/9 a week. Of these 70 per cent have already been housed centrally, and only 23 per cent have been re-housed at Whitehawk. They simply cannot go as they cannot afford a 50 per cent increase of rent [and] the cost of travel to and from work.⁴²

³⁹ Simon Gunn, 'Class, identity and the urban: the middle class in England, c.1790–1950', *Urban History*, 31 (2004), 43.

⁴⁰ *Annual Report of the Medical Officer of Health for 1928* (Brighton, 1929), 70.

⁴¹ *Annual Report of the Medical Officer of Health for 1928*, 73.

⁴² *Annual Report of the Medical Officer of Health for 1932* (Brighton, 1933), 69.



Source: Map Series: National Grid 1:10560 1948–1976: 1st Imperial Edition 1948–1977, pub.1963

Figure 3
Slum clearance in Brighton, 1860s–1960s.

The following year Dr Forbes reported that 21 per cent of tenants from Carlton Hill *who had taken* houses at Whitehawk had returned to central Brighton for financial reasons.⁴³ The locations of the clearance areas are shown in Figure 3; these can be usefully compared with the map of the new estates (see Figure 8).

The onset of slum clearance was also accompanied by a change in tone in the coverage which the local press gave to the estates. Whereas in the 1920s both the main weeklies the *Herald* and the *Gazette* had reported on the progress of new buildings, amenities and associative activities within a framework of civic pride, by the late 1930s significant

⁴³ *Annual Report of the Medical Officer of Health for 1933* (Brighton, 1934), 64.

doubts were being articulated at the wisdom of suburbanization.⁴⁴ At one of a series of public meetings held in 1937, one resident argued that: 'Whitehawk and Manor are held up as shining examples of slum clearance but I can tell you that a good 50 per cent of the people would willingly return to their hovels... so that they might enjoy a little community life and a little friendliness.'⁴⁵ There were also concerns that migration had exacerbated levels of deprivation, or as the *Gazette's* front-page later in the year announced: 'Re-housing slum dwellers has made poverty'.⁴⁶ The twin themes of an impoverished community life and continuing material poverty, exacerbated by the higher rents and additional costs of suburban living were the subject of a number of local newspaper articles during the remainder of the decade.⁴⁷ In 1939, under the headline 'Moulsecomb poverty – special report', a *Gazette* journalist noted: 'I heard of housewives with empty larders, of sick and ailing people in homes without the bare necessities of life, of children who sit a nights in lightless, fireless kitchens, because there is no money for the gas-meter, no coal for the grate.'⁴⁸ Significantly, the report refused to blame the tenants for their predicament; on the contrary, the reporter argued: 'The Brighton Corporation... cannot turn a deaf ear much longer to this tragedy, and Moulsecomb itself is organizing for a lowering of its rents.'⁴⁹

There was more than journalistic hyperbole to these assertions as contemporary social surveys demonstrated. In the inter-war period, work by M'Gonigle and Kirby in Stockton-on-Tees posited a causal relationship between working-class suburbanization, higher living costs and higher mortality rates. In *Poverty and Public Health* (1936), the authors compared the health levels of tenants before and after they moved from slum clearance areas to a new council estate. Both the crude and standardized death rates were significantly higher on the new estate than they had been in the old areas.⁵⁰ The authors argued that this was mainly caused by increased rents eating into family food budgets.⁵¹ Although Laybourn has described this kind of situation as 'by no means uncommon',⁵² it was almost certainly a worst case scenario aggravated by extensive long-term unemployment.

⁴⁴ See *Brighton Gazette*, 24 Apr 1937 and 8 May 1937.

⁴⁵ *Brighton Gazette*, 23 Oct 1937.

⁴⁶ *Brighton Gazette*, 20 Nov 1937.

⁴⁷ *Brighton Gazette*, 4 Dec 1937, 24 Dec 1938, 7 Jan 1939, 8 Feb 1939; *Brighton Herald* 12 Mar 1938, 16 Apr 1938, 29 Oct 1938, 26 Nov 1938.

⁴⁸ *Brighton Gazette*, 1 Apr 1939.

⁴⁹ *Brighton Gazette*, 1 Apr 1939.

⁵⁰ G.C.M. M'Gonigle and J. Kirby, *Poverty and Public Health* (London, 1936), 110–12.

⁵¹ M'Gonigle and Kirby, *Poverty*, 117–23.

⁵² Keith Laybourn, *Britain on the Breadline: A Social and Political History of Britain, 1918–1939* (Stroud, 1990), 84.

The Stockton study does, however, throw the issue of the impact of migration to a municipal suburb on living standards into sharp relief. In 1939 Marion Fitzgerald was commissioned by the Bishop of Chichester to carry out a survey into rent levels and living standards on the three Moulsecoomb estates. Her report *Rents in Moulsecoomb* contains useful data on how higher rent levels and other costs were met by families.⁵³ Of the seventy-nine county boroughs in 1936, only Croydon with 1,062 and Newcastle-upon-Tyne with 775 had more houses with rents above 12s per week than Brighton (with 541). In comparison, of the 'great cities', Birmingham had 8, Liverpool 147, Manchester none.⁵⁴ Fitzgerald carried out her most detailed investigation at North Moulsecoomb. At the time of the survey rents were 14s 4½d per week inclusive of rates for three-bedroom parlour houses. Using information obtained from tenants for their expenditure on insurance, fuel, lighting and transport costs, combined with Herbert Tout's estimates for food and clothing requirements based on age and sex, and adjusted for Brighton prices, Fitzgerald argued that families 'of a normal size' required a total regular income of £3 12s per week in order to meet living costs without skimping on food.⁵⁵ Fitzgerald argued that in over 60 per cent of households expenditure on food was frequently inadequate to meet dietary needs. However, Fitzgerald's methodology is somewhat suspect here, and if we calculate average weekly outgoings according to 'normal family size', we see that a minority of families (albeit a significant 45 per cent) regularly failed to meet the costs of suburban living (these calculations are outlined in the Appendix).

Notwithstanding these slight inaccuracies, Fitzgerald convincingly showed that there were significant divisions between tenants both within the three Moulsecoomb estates and between them. At North Moulsecoomb 55 per cent of families were regularly able to meet the cost of living, with 45 per cent, often with heads of household in seasonal work or unemployed, unable to do so. At East Moulsecoomb the socio-economic profile of heads of household was similar to North Moulsecoomb but the allocation of houses was divided between 'Class "A" let to ordinary applicants because they needed them' and 'Class "B" houses let to displaced tenants from the clearance areas and to families moved on account of overcrowding'.⁵⁶ Those in the first category paid 12s 9d for their two-bedroom houses, while those in the latter paid from 12s 7½d for a two-bedroom house rising by a shilling for each additional bedroom to 15s 7d for a five-bedroom house.

⁵³ Marion Fitzgerald, *Rents in Moulsecoomb* (Brighton, 1939), 6–7.

⁵⁴ Fitzgerald, *Rents*, 32.

⁵⁵ Fitzgerald, *Rents*, 9–10.

⁵⁶ Fitzgerald, *Rents*, 23.

Amongst the Class 'B' tenants, however, those from clearance areas automatically received a 25 per cent rent rebate, while none of those moved for overcrowding did, despite Fitzgerald's assessment that some of them needed it.⁵⁷ As Fitzgerald astutely observed, tenants from clearance areas were 'not necessarily poor':

Of the 're-housed' tenants a few have well appointed homes. Others, though obviously very poor and lacking furniture and apparatus, keep their houses and their children clean, but some have brought old habits into new habitations and need somebody to teach them with patience and tact how to take proper care of a good house.⁵⁸

It was at South Moulsecoomb that Fitzgerald concluded that rents were highest, reaching over 27s per week for three-bedroom houses. Unsurprisingly, these were tenanted by 'the better paid working classes and some middle class people'. Furthermore, Fitzgerald noted an attempt to maintain the socio-economic profile of tenants on the estate:

The lowest rented houses on this estate are the 70 at the Bevendean end built under the 1924 Act, when costs had fallen considerably. Most of these are let at 15/- inclusive, but recently a decision has been made to raise them to 19/9 on a change of tenancy. The idea seems to be to have uniform rents all over this estate, but by raising the rents of these relatively cheap houses the Corporation will be inviting the 'best payers' rather than the family most in need of a new house.⁵⁹

While claims that suburbanization exacerbated poverty in the inter-war period were not entirely without foundation, therefore, what is evident from both Fitzgerald's data and those of the local health department is the variety of working-class households who tenanted the estates in terms of class, incomes and family size. We should note the agency displayed by families not only in moving out in the first instance, but also in finding their own accommodation or moving back to the central areas if suburban lifestyles failed to suit either their social needs or their pockets. However, there were clear attempts at social engineering on behalf of the council in terms of raising rents to maintain the exclusivity of South Moulsecoomb, and in concentrating tenants from clearance areas in East Moulsecoomb. These trends would be reinforced, albeit by somewhat different means, in the post-war period.

The 1940s and 1950s saw an appreciable shift in emphasis in terms of the ways in which tenants from slum clearance areas were depicted. Whereas Fitzgerald, Dr Forbes and local journalists had criticized

⁵⁷ Fitzgerald, *Rents*, 24–6.

⁵⁸ Fitzgerald, *Rents*, 30.

⁵⁹ Fitzgerald, *Rents*, 33.

the role of high rents in exacerbating suburban poverty, and noted the fact that clearance tenants responded differently to suburbanization, increasingly poverty became personalized as behaviouralist interpretations took precedence over structural considerations. The war was vital in changing attitudes. The evacuation of schoolchildren in September 1939 and the resultant behavioural interpretations of urban poverty outlined by organizations such as the Women's Group on Public Welfare signalled the discovery of the 'problem family' in England.⁶⁰ John Welshman has argued that the concept of the problem family marked a transition from the 'social problem group' favoured by the eugenics movement in the 1930s.⁶¹ Pat Starkey, Ben Rogaly and Becky Taylor have related the issue of the problem family to the wider stigmatization of the 'feckless' working-class mother by groups of housing and social work professionals.⁶² While Brighton's Dr Forbes had identified 'unsatisfactory tenants' in the inter-war period, he had focused upon economic and environmental causes of poverty and emphasized the benefits which modern housing could bring in terms of modernizing lifestyles and improving living standards. Other professionals working to house families in the 1940s and 1950s were, however, more inclined to characterize some tenants as a problem demanding a draconian solution.

In his 1947 report the housing manager struck an optimistic note, arguing that: 'Although the number of "undesirable" tenants is only a small proportion of the total, there can be no relaxation of effort to ensure that these people are brought up to the standard of occupiers who keep their premises in a much better condition.'⁶³ The following year however, his tone was much less charitable. Noting that many of the evicted families were of 'an improvident type', he argued that 'the time has now arrived when the committee should consider the erection of austere accommodation for these families'.⁶⁴ In September 1953 the mayor of Brighton convened a conference to discuss 'various aspects of problem families in the borough'. The conference resulted in the establishment of the problem families sub-committee, consisting of representatives of the housing, children's education, health and welfare services committees to examine methods of dealing with problem

⁶⁰ Women's Group on Public Welfare, *Our Towns: A Close-up* (London, 1943), xiii-iv.

⁶¹ John Welshman, *Underclass: A History of the Excluded, 1880-2000* (London, 2006), 69.

⁶² Pat Starkey, 'The feckless mother: women, poverty and social workers in wartime and post-war England', *Women's History Review*, 9 (2000), 539-57; Becky Taylor and Ben Rogaly, "'Mrs Fairly is a dirty, lazy type': unsatisfactory households and the problem of problem families, Norwich 1942 to 1963', *Twentieth Century British History*, 18 (2007), 429-52.

⁶³ Minutes of the housing committee, 6 Sep 1948, ESRO DB/B27/9.

⁶⁴ Minutes of the housing committee, 7 Sep 1949, ESRO DB/B27/9.

families in the town.⁶⁵ The town's last medical officer of health, William Parker, and members of the problem families sub-committee argued that problem families should be closely grouped in order 'to enable the council's social workers to give them the intensive rehabilitation they require'.⁶⁶ In the early 1960s when high-rise flats had been built on the Albion Hill site, so called 'grade one' families (mainly older married couples without children) from the suburban estates were offered the new flats while potential 'problem families' from the clearance areas went to specifically designated areas of Moulsecoomb and Whitehawk.⁶⁷ In the summer of 1967 the secretary of the North and East Moulsecoomb Tenants' Association wrote to the housing committee expressing concern about the nuisance caused by the 'increasing numbers of problem families on these estates'.⁶⁸ At the same time that allocation policies began concentrating the boroughs' poorest families onto specific estates the Conservative-controlled council was encouraging more affluent tenants to leave the sector. This was achieved in two ways: via a cap on incomes and most effectively in terms of subsequent residualization, through council house sales. However, as I outline below, the debate over what to do about overly affluent tenants originated between the wars.

III

In 1928 'A Moulsecombe [sic] tenant' wrote to the *Herald*: 'Were these houses not built for the working classes? If so why are people who could easily pay 30/- weekly (*to go by those who keep their car*) allowed to remain?'⁶⁹ While comprehensive information about tenants' occupations is lacking, there are enough traces in the historical record to suggest that there were *some* middle-class tenants in properties at South Moulsecoomb throughout the inter-war period.⁷⁰ Evidence for this can be found in Fitzgerald's 1939 *Rents in Moulsecoomb* cited above. Other evidence suggests a longstanding middle-class presence on the estate. Ruby Dunn in her memoir recalled that some of the men living on the Avenue during the 1920s commuted daily to London. Among the occupations of her neighbours she listed a local government clerk, two

⁶⁵ *Housing Manager's Annual Report for 1953* (Brighton, 1954), 6.

⁶⁶ Minutes of the housing committee, 4 Mar 1964, ESRO DB/B27/17.

⁶⁷ Minutes of the housing committee, 24 Aug 1964, ESRO DB/B27/17.

⁶⁸ Minutes of the housing committee, 26 Apr 1967, ESRO DB/B27/19.

⁶⁹ *Brighton Herald*, 29 Sep 1928.

⁷⁰ In her analysis of Liverpool housing department records McKenna concluded that 41 per cent of families housed under the 1919 Act could be classified as middle class, see McKenna, 'The suburbanization', 181.

civil servants, four teachers and the owner of a bathing pool.⁷¹ Furthermore, the political and associative activities on the estate suggested a significant middle-class population. For example, whereas tenants at Queen's Park formed a tenants' defence league and those at Whitehawk and Manor Farm a community association, Moulsecoomb residents formed a ratepayers' association, one of the quintessentially middle-class institutions of the age. In local elections during the 1930s anti-socialist candidates backed by the ratepayers' association consistently polled between 37 and 53 per cent in the Moulsecoomb ward.⁷² Controversy over whether council tenancies ought to be granted to middle-class tenants erupted in the summer of 1939. At a meeting of the town council it was alleged that some tenants were earning £1,000 a year and an upper limit of £4 10s. a week was proposed, with those earning more being given notice to quit.⁷³ The plan was shelved, however, following vigorous protests against 'means testing' from the Moulsecoomb ratepayers' association.⁷⁴

Following the focus on poorer tenants in the 1930s, between the 1940s and mid-1950s the social constituency for council housing expanded again to encompass skilled manual and non-manual workers. The 'new estate' became a key motif in a discourse of alleged classlessness which emerged during the 1950s.⁷⁵ The local press once again reproduced the fluid place of the estates in the popular imagination. At one of the new estates a *Sussex Daily News* reporter found that: 'Hollingbury's residents are all kinds – tradesmen, office workers and labourers. They did not choose to live there; they came because they were offered new homes at reasonable rents.'⁷⁶ By the late 1950s and 1960s, however, a renewed torrent of criticism was projected at council tenants. This took the form of familiar complaints from home owners about council houses lowering the tone of an area.⁷⁷ Increasingly, however, tenants also came under fire for their affluent lifestyles. A typical example of these types of charge is this extract from a letter to the *Evening Argus*:

Why is it that so many council house dwellers do nothing but groan and whine about their good fortune? These people settle themselves in for next to nothing, and then start buying a car, a TV

⁷¹ Ruby Dunn, *Moulsecoomb Days: Learning and Teaching on a Brighton Council Estate, 1922–1947* (Brighton, 1990), 15 and 30–4.

⁷² Sam Davies and Bob Morley, *County Borough Elections in England and Wales, 1919–38: A Comparative Analysis*, vol. 2 (Aldershot, 2000), 141.

⁷³ *Brighton Gazette*, 3 Jun 1939.

⁷⁴ *Brighton Gazette*, 22 Jul 1939.

⁷⁵ Stuart Laing, *Representations of Working-class Life, 1957–1964* (London, 1986), 18–20.

⁷⁶ *Sussex Daily News*, 15 Dec 1952.

⁷⁷ *Evening Argus*, 17 Oct 1957, 31 Dec 1957, 7 Nov 1959.

set, a washing machine, a spin dryer etc with the money they could have used as a deposit on a house of their own.⁷⁸

Another widespread complaint was that middle-class rate-payers were subsidizing feckless workers with Gertrude Jordan of Hove arguing that: 'Working class people, with their subsidised houses, free education, welfare services, new cars and televisions look down on us professional classes, who have to live in top floor or basement flats for which we pay exorbitant rents, in order to keep them in the luxuries they demand.'⁷⁹ Whereas in the inter-war period antipathy was projected at middle-class tenants occupying houses intended for the working class, in this period middle-class antipathy towards council tenants was reinforced by arguments that working-class tenants were enjoying affluent lifestyles in subsidized housing which they scarcely deserved. But were council tenants in the post-war period more affluent? The answer has to be yes, but the evidence is not as conclusive as one would like. As Figure 4 shows between 1950 and 1964, the housing department categorized the families it rehoused on a rough weekly income scale based on the earnings of the head of household.

Clear trends are difficult to detect given both the degree to which the measurement of income levels changed over time and the fact that we do not know by precisely how much those in the highest income category exceeded the stated amount. Nevertheless it is apparent that the strong tendency to mainly house those in this latter category fell markedly after 1956. While this certainly coincides with the radical change in the measurement scale, it also coincides with the renewed emphasis on slum clearance. As Figure 5 shows, the slum clearance schemes peaked in the five years between 1955 and 1959, bucking the national trend, but in line with other programmes in the south east.⁸⁰

Further light can be shed on the types of tenants being rehoused if we consider data on the primary reasons for rehousing. In the first five post-war years priority was given to 'overcrowded families with children' who had lived in the town for many years.⁸¹ As Figure 6 shows, this trend continued into the early 1950s.

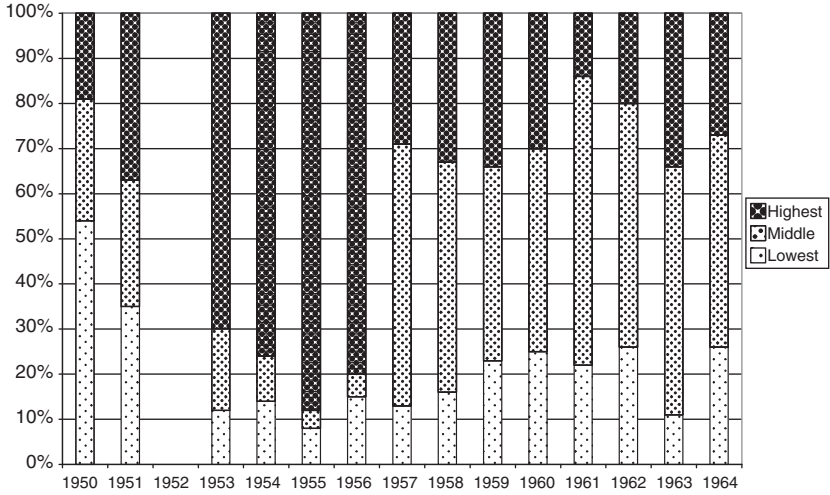
By the mid-1950s, however, we can see that the percentage of those housed according to length of time on the waiting list and those rehoused due to overcrowding declined. This decline almost exactly mirrors the spikes in those housed from condemned property, suggesting that cleared areas were also the most overcrowded and coinciding with

⁷⁸ *Evening Argus*, 26 Aug 1959.

⁷⁹ *Evening Argus*, 1 May 1961.

⁸⁰ Yelling, 'The incidence of slum clearance', 237–8.

⁸¹ *Housing Manager's Annual Report for 1949* (Brighton, 1950).



Source: Housing manager's annual reports (Brighton, 1950-1964)

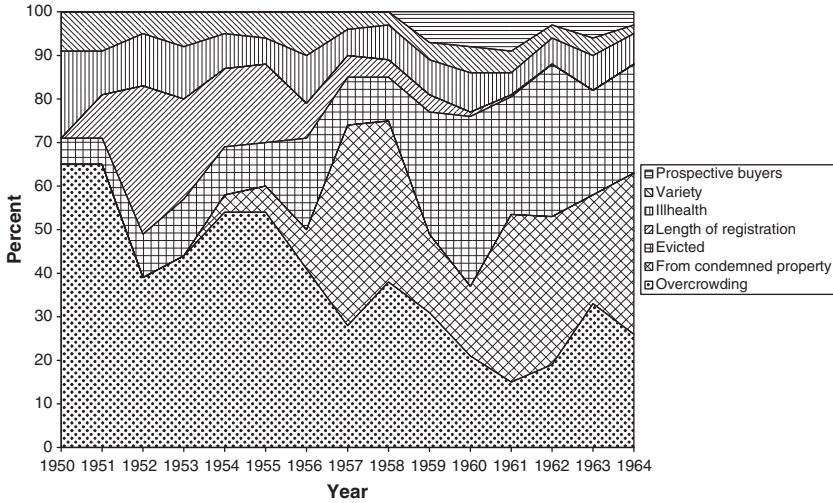
Notes: 1950-1956 Lowest = under £5 10s per week
 Middle = under £6 10s per week
 Highest = over £6 10s per week
 1957-1960 Lowest = not exceeding £5 per week
 Middle = not exceeding £10 per week
 Highest = exceeding £10 per week
 1961-1963 Lowest = not exceeding £5 per week
 Middle = not exceeding £12 10s per week
 Highest = exceeding £12 10s per week
 1964 Lowest = not exceeding £6 per week
 Middle = not exceeding £14 per week
 Highest = exceeding £14 per week

Figure 4
 Percentage of families rehoused by weekly income, Brighton, 1950-64.

Period	Demolitions	People re-housed
1945-49	67	22
1950-54	37	295
1955-59	529	2445
1960-64	474	722
1965-69	310	759
Total	1,417	4,243

Source: Medical officer of health reports (Brighton, 1945-1969)

Figure 5
 Houses demolished and people rehoused in Brighton, 1945-69.



Source: Housing manager's annual reports (Brighton, 1950–1964)

Figure 6
Percentage of families rehoused according to reasons for rehousing, 1950–64.

the main clearance drive of 1955–59 shown in Figure 5. The rise in the percentage rehoused because of eviction from 1958 coincides with the removal of the statutory restrictions on rents that had been operative since 1915 under the terms of the 1957 Rent Act, and the resultant rent increases.⁸² As slum clearance proceeded, council building for general needs stopped. Figure 7 shows that private building for owner occupation revived considerably from the early 1950s.

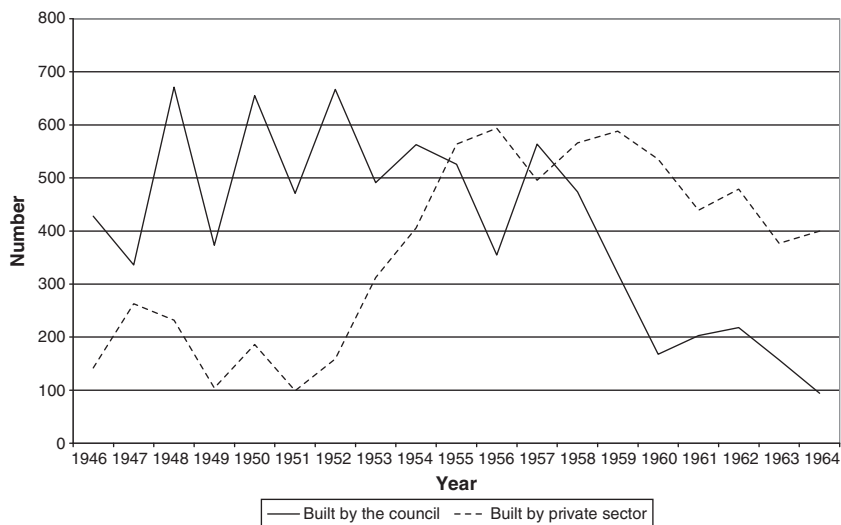
Indeed, from 1955 the private sector accounted for the majority of new houses and flats built for every year apart from 1957. Declining local authority completions emphasized the residual role assigned to council housing. In the early 1960s moreover, attempts were made to move the highest-earning families out of council property altogether. Tenants' incomes were first capped in July 1962 with households whose incomes exceeded £1,250 per year given six months notice to quit.⁸³ This figure was raised in 1966 to £1,500 per annum, less £2 per week of the wife's earnings,⁸⁴ while in 1970, the limit was set at £1,750 only to be revised upwards to £2,000 two years later.⁸⁵ Furthermore, money

⁸² Alan Simmonds, 'Raising Rachman: the origins of the Rent Act, 1957', *Historical Journal*, 45 (2002), 843–68.

⁸³ This included half the wife's income but not contributions from other household members; see minutes of the housing committee, 5 Jun 1963, ESRO DB/B27/16.

⁸⁴ Minutes of the housing committee, 20 Apr 1966, ESRO DB/B27/17.

⁸⁵ Minutes of the housing committee, 31 May 1972, ESRO DB/B27/21.



Source: Annual reports of the medical officer of health (Brighton, 1946–1964)

Figure 7

New houses and flats built by the council and private builders in Brighton, 1946–64.

began to flow from the local authority into the private sector. Between 1964/5 and 1978/9, while spending on council housing actually fell by 1 per cent over the period, council expenditure in the private sector rose by 61 per cent.⁸⁶ Much of this increase was accounted for in grants for the improvement of private houses and in loans for private house purchase. Particularly pertinent for the residualization of the sector was the sale of much of the best post-war council stock. At the end of 1952 the council decided that all houses provided under part V of the 1936 Housing Act should be made available for sale to sitting tenants with the exception of some in the centre of town. Initially sales were slow: between 1952 and 1958 just 124 houses had been sold, mainly at South Moulsecomb and on the other inter-war estates.⁸⁷ Policy changed in 1959 when the whole of post-war Coldean and in 1961 part of Hollingbury were designated private estates whereby no property becoming vacant would be re-let other than to tenants willing to buy.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ QueenSpark Rates Book Group, *Brighton on the Rocks: Monetarism and the Local State* (Brighton, 1982), 108.

⁸⁷ *Housing Manager's Reports for the Years 1953–58* (Brighton, 1953–58).

⁸⁸ It is not clear whether the policy of privatizing estates was widespread or not; however, Cullingworth in his 1963 study of Lancaster thought Brighton's policy unusual enough to comment on it. In Bristol, a Conservative administration introduced sales to sitting tenants in 1960, a policy retained by Labour when they won back control in 1963,

This was a development that was to have profound consequences for working-class fragmentation, as noted at the time by an *Argus* reporter:

Despite rock-bottom prices only 400 council houses have been sold in the past nine years... The reason is not hard to find. You have only to talk to a few tenants to hear the words: 'we would have brought before. But you can never be sure of your neighbours'. Owner-occupiers, on the other hand, are a fair guarantee of the sort of people who will be living next door. To become a 'private estate' is the final accolade of respectability. Many people deplore the move to turn corporation homes into bargains for their better off tenants. But you won't find them out at Hollingbury.⁸⁹

In 1962 council house sales ceased except in the designated sale areas of Coldean, Hollingbury and South Woodingdean, while houses at Hollingdean, Bevendean, Staplefield Drive, Rottingdean and part of South Woodingdean were available for purchase by sitting tenants.⁹⁰ In 1974, sales to sitting tenants in other areas were once again allowed and in 1976 house sales were extended to include all sitting tenants *with the exception* of those in Whitehawk, North Moulsecoomb and parts of the town centre.⁹¹ The impact of the sales policy meant that in the years *before* the introduction of 'right to buy' legislation, 2,505 houses and flats had been sold including the majority of the council's best post-war stock.⁹² Figure 8 shows the location of the major estates.

Figure 9 shows the degree to which the estates became polarized between the major post-war developments which were privatized and the largely inter-war estates which were not. Percentages for six of the top seven sales areas would have been significantly higher if only houses (rather than houses and flats) had been included in the stock calculation.

Although the ban on house sales in North Moulsecoomb and Whitehawk was rescinded in 1979, the cumulative effect of sales in other areas meant that it was *these estates*, along with the Kingswood and Milner flats which had both the lowest proportion of sales *and* the highest proportion of tenants which the council considered to be a problem. A council house allocation policy that prioritized need above

see J.B. Cullingworth, *Housing in Transition: A Case Study in the City of Lancaster, 1958–1962* (London, 1963), 200; Bassett, 'Council house sales', 325–6.

⁸⁹ *Evening Argus*, 25 Feb 1961.

⁹⁰ *Housing Manager's Report for the Years 1965–1967* (Brighton, 1968), 8.

⁹¹ Brighton Borough Council, 'Council house sales', Brighton (Aug 1974), 1; Andrew Graves, 'Housing tenure – the changing pattern', unpublished paper (University of Sussex, 1984), 33.

⁹² Graves, 'Housing tenure', 33.



Source: Map Series: National Grid 1:10560 1948–1976; pub.1963

Figure 8
Council estates in Brighton.

Estate	Houses sold	% of stock private
Coldean	511	68
Woodingdean (S)	453	62
Hollingbury	743	50
Bevendean	233	32
Rottingdean	6	21
Hollingdean	179	19
Moulsecoomb (S)	150	15
Woodingdean (N)	39	9
Moulsecoomb(E)	71	8
Burstead Close	5	7
Manor Farm	28	6
Queen's Park	32	6
Patcham	5	4
Craven Vale	15	4
Portslade	1	3
Moulsecoomb (N)	10	3
Misc.	11	1
Tarner/Carlton Hill	7	0.6
Whitehawk	5	0.4
Bates	1	0.3
Bristol	0	0
Newhaven Street	0	0
<i>Total</i>	<i>2505</i>	<i>17</i>

Source: Based on Brighton housing department data, calculated from A. P. Graves: 'Housing Tenure – the changing pattern', unpublished paper, (University of Sussex, 1984), appendix, 33.

Figure 9
Council house sales by estate in Brighton, 1952–79.

all else was reinforced by the Cullingworth report of 1969.⁹³ By the mid-1970s the cumulative effects of years of disinvestment and the ghettoization of the town's poorest families in a decreasing pool of increasingly dilapidated stock was becoming apparent. In a 1975 article for the local *Evening Argus*, Stephen Goodwin reported that:

North Moulsecoomb has become the unwitting stuff of legends... the name a brand for its houses and its people. Describe some hair-raising event there to a Brightonian and he nods knowingly... In North Moulsecoomb... vandalism, truancy, family feuds come under the same euphemism – 'antisocial behaviour'. It has built up in the manner of a legend, a certain amount of truth embellished in the chatter of public bars, launderettes and street corners. Whitehawk

⁹³ Central Housing Advisory Committee, *Council Housing: Purposes, Procedures and Priorities* (London, 1969), 21.

used to carry the same stigma. People would tell you not to go there after dark or that policemen only entered in pairs.⁹⁴

Between 1973 and 1979, residents of Whitehawk fought a bitter and ultimately unsuccessful campaign to prevent the wholesale redevelopment of the estate, while residents of the Milner flats had their own problems to contend with.⁹⁵ This time Adam Trimmingham reported on 'An address of shame for its tenants':

Ever since they were built they have had a reputation for being the den of thieves, the resting place of layabouts and the drying out ground of alcoholics... the names of Milner and Kingswood do not bring confidence to bank managers, shopkeepers offering credit or employers.⁹⁶

The tropes used to depict the problem estates often parallel those used to represent urban slum areas as 'other'.⁹⁷ Thus we have the all-pervasive smell, and the associations with the archetypal other—the foreigner. For Trimmingham, Milner and Kingswood: 'have a name as rotten as the smell that drifts up from the market beneath them. On a beautiful hot spring day they have the atmosphere of an Italian back alley.'⁹⁸ Moreover, these are areas inhabited by criminals, where the agents of the state fear to tread. Whereas Goodwin claimed that at Whitehawk, policemen would only enter in pairs, Trimmingham noted: 'It is said that Brighton police station was moved from the town hall to nearby John Street so the long suffering coppers would not have so far to go to catch the criminals.'⁹⁹ Echoing nineteenth-century depictions of slum areas as rookeries and sties¹⁰⁰ the flats were described as: 'Abounding with people, dogs and cats at all times of the day... it will take more than a dab of paint and a wash of the walls to get rid of the flats reputation. After all, a leper can't change his sore.'¹⁰¹ In keeping with other contemporary representations of the poor, problems of vandalism and the decline in 'community' values were placed at the door of 'problem families'.¹⁰² Trimmingham's vicious reportage prompted a number of tenants to march to the *Argus* offices and demand an

⁹⁴ Stephen Goodwin, 'The unsavoury legend of N. Moulsecoomb', *Evening Argus*, 13 Mar 1975.

⁹⁵ On opposition to the Whitehawk redevelopment, see Fred Netley, *Holy Oak: A History of Whitehawk and Manor Farm, 1934–1974* (Brighton, 2002), 122–9.

⁹⁶ *Evening Argus*, 9 May 1975.

⁹⁷ See Mayne, *The Imagined Slum*, 127–87.

⁹⁸ *Evening Argus*, 9 May 1975.

⁹⁹ *Evening Argus*, 9 May 1975.

¹⁰⁰ See accounts from the *Brighton Gazette* on the Cumberland Place area from 1896 in Sian Evans, 'Housing provision and the working classes in Brighton', unpublished paper (Brighton Polytechnic, 1985), 18–22.

¹⁰¹ *Evening Argus*, 9 May 1975.

¹⁰² *Evening Argus*, 9 May 1975.

apology. A new tenants' association was quickly formed and the paper printed a page-length article in which tenants refuted the allegations made by Trimmingham and outlined some of the problems of poor estate management and maintenance.¹⁰³ By this stage such protests could do nothing to reverse the long-term residualization and stigmatization of these estates brought about by slum clearance and targeted council house sales, the significance of which I draw out in the conclusion.

IV

The disparity between the opulence of certain areas of the town and its working-class districts has been an enduring theme in the history of twentieth-century Brighton. Thus Herbert Carden, the great socialist housing reformer of the inter-war years likened the town to 'a ragged garment with a golden fringe'.¹⁰⁴ For Carden, the 'golden fringe' consisted of the seafront hotels and regency squares. The 'ragged garment' referred to the streets of the central districts such as Sun Street and Paradise Place: home to the teenage gangster Pinkie in *Brighton Rock*—what Greene called 'the shabby secret behind the bright corsage'.¹⁰⁵ The sartorial metaphor is particularly apposite in this instance. These were the streets of the *lumpen* (ragged) proletariat: hawkers, peddlers, tramps, prostitutes, itinerant labourers—streets where Italian and French immigrants and Roma travellers might settle for a few years. For Molly Morley the Carlton Hill district in the 1930s was: 'an area of dealers and totters: you would see them sorting their rags, and then the mums would come and find clothing and other useful items for a few pennies. There was more profit in this than when it was all weighed up for the trade.'¹⁰⁶ For Walter Benjamin an archetypal figure of modernity was the rag-picker. As Ben Highmore notes:

The rag-picker deals in the second-hand, in the dreams of the past for a future that was never realised. The modern day rag picker treads a fine line between a sentimental attitude towards the past and a revolutionary nostalgia for the future. When the latter takes precedence over the former, the rag picker's radical task becomes one of *cataloguing the broken promises* that have been abandoned in the everyday trash of history.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ *Evening Argus*, 16 May 1975.

¹⁰⁴ *Sussex Daily News*, 3 Feb 1919. My emphasis.

¹⁰⁵ Graham Greene, *Brighton Rock* (Harmondsworth, 1986), 140

¹⁰⁶ In Dave Morley and Ken Worpole (eds), *The Republic of Letters* (London, 1982), 7.

¹⁰⁷ Ben Highmore, *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory* (London, 2002), 65. My emphasis.

It is not without a measure of irony then that from the mid-1970s when people looked at what had become of Carden's vision of a greater Brighton it was the suburban fringes themselves—the modern inter-war council estates, which Carden and others in the Labour movement had worked so hard to build—that looked increasingly ragged. The task of 'cataloguing the broken promises'—of homes fit for heroes, of jobs and prosperity for all was one which QueenSpark books took up in Brighton from the early 1970s. Here residents and former residents of both the older urban neighbourhoods and the modern municipal suburbs registered a sense of loss in tones which did indeed walk the line between sentimentality and radical nostalgia. Arguably, while sentiment commonly informed accounts of family and home, the neighbourhood itself and the networks and practices which engendered a sense of belonging were more likely to produce nostalgia as critique.¹⁰⁸ As the urban poor moved from the overcrowded neighbourhoods of the centre they found that the stigma associated with the slums had pursued them into the suburbs.

Further council house sales, deindustrialization and rising unemployment from the mid-1970s arguably increased residualization and socio-spatial polarization; however, these years lie beyond the purview of this article. What this article has demonstrated is the *longue durée* of residualization in Brighton and the key roles which slum clearance and council house sales played in this. The role of council house sales requires particular attention. While Brighton's Conservative council pursued the policy from the 1950s, in Norwich successive Labour administrations had opposed council house sales, and appealed (unsuccessfully) to the high court in 1982 over what they viewed as excessive central government interference in implementing a policy for which there was little local demand.¹⁰⁹ In Bristol, however, both Labour and Conservative-controlled administrations sold off council properties from the 1960s, while the later 1970s saw the local Labour Party increasingly divided over the policy.¹¹⁰ While the role of council house sales in residualization and polarization will therefore shift from locality to locality, it seems likely that the other key elements in the story, namely the longstanding divisions between affluent and poor tenants and the role played by slum clearance and allocations policies in stigmatizing certain estates, will have a more universal application. Indeed, there is wider evidence of these trends in studies of Becontree

¹⁰⁸ See Ben Jones, 'The uses of nostalgia: autobiography, community publishing and working class neighbourhoods in post-war England', *Cultural and Social History*, 7 (2010).

¹⁰⁹ Forrest and Murie, *Selling the Welfare State*, 210–15.

¹¹⁰ Bassett, 'Council sales in Bristol, 1960–1979', 325–7.

and Liverpool between the wars and Norwich over a longer period.¹¹¹ Whether the Brighton example, notwithstanding the role played by council house sales, is representative of the English experience during the mid-twentieth century more generally requires further research, for thus far historians have been largely silent on an issue which had far-reaching consequences for community and class formation.

Appendix: The Moulsecoomb survey data

Fitzgerald argued that families 'of a normal size' required a total regular income of £3 12s per week in order to meet living costs without skimping on food.¹¹² As Figure A1 shows, she argued that this margin was achieved by only a minority of households.

'Normal' family size at North Moulsecoomb was five people, with Fitzgerald estimating half the families to be of that size, a quarter of four persons, a fifth of seven and a small proportion of eight or more. Unfortunately, Fitzgerald does not give ages. However, we can, for the sake of argument imagine two average families of five and seven persons respectively and estimate their weekly expenditure on rent, fuel and lighting, insurance based on Fitzgerald's estimates and food and clothing, based on the British Medical Association scale, shown in Figure A2.

'Family one' consists of a husband, wife, two children between 10 and 14 and one child under 10. 'Family two' consists of husband, wife,

<i>Families with regular incomes</i>	Percentage
72/- gross and over	37.5
60/- gross and under 72/-	17.5
50/- gross and under 60/-	10.0
<i>Families with irregular incomes</i>	
Heads of families in building trade/seasonal occupation and no subsidiary earners	10.0
Heads of families as above with subsidiary earners total wages not exceeding 25/-	15.0
Heads of families unemployed at time of survey	10.0

Source: Marion Fitzgerald, *Rents in Moulsecoomb* (Brighton, 1939).

Figure A1
Weekly family incomes at North Moulsecoomb.

¹¹¹ Olechnowicz, *Working Class Housing*, 29–34, 235–7; McKenna, 'The suburbanization', 181; Rogaly and Taylor, *Moving Histories*, 38–50.

¹¹² Fitzgerald, *Rents*, 9–10.

Age and Sex	Food	Clothes	Total
	s. d.	s. d.	s. d.
Infant, under 5	3 8	5	4 1
5 and under 10	4 7	8	5 3
10 and under 14	6 3	10	7 1
Man, 14 & under 65, and 65 and over if working full time for full wage	7 4	1 5	8 9
Woman, 14 & under 65, and 65 and over if working full time for full wage	6 3	1 1	7 4
Man, 65 and over, not working	4 5	1 0	5 5
Woman, 65 and over, not working	4 5	8	5 1

Source: Herbert Tout, *The Standard of Living in Bristol* (Bristol, 1938).

Figure A2

Bristol survey needs standard: personal requirements, 1937 prices.

Family one			Family two		
	Shillings	Pence		Shillings	Pence
5 members			7 members		
Rent	14	4	Rent	14	4
Insurance	3	0	Insurance	3	
Ave fuel	8	6	Ave fuel	8	6
Clothing	2	34	Clothing	4	35
Food	29	20	Food	39	32
Total	61	4	Total	74	5

Note: Average fuel based on winter estimates.

Figure A3

Estimated average weekly expenditure on selected items for two families at North Moulsecomb, 1939.

two adult children, one son aged 9, one daughter aged 6 and an infant. Estimated weekly expenditure is shown in Figure A3.

With most families having five members and only a minority consisting of seven or more, we can see, by comparing these estimates with those of incomes in Figure A1 that probably 55 per cent of families earned just about enough each week to get by without cutting back on food. However, it would seem that in the remaining 45 per cent of families, those grossing below 60s a week or where heads of households were in seasonal and irregular work, there would be a high probability that cuts would have to be made in the food budget. It is also evident that large families, while rarer than in previous generations, were still a significant cause of poverty during this period.