

**Estates: an Intimate History**  
**Lynsey Hanley      Granta Books 2007**

**Introduction**

1. Class is built into the physical fabric of country.
2. Play word association with 'Housing Estate' = ? fear? Shame? Disgust? Pride?
3. Fight each other rather than system – I do not have to fight to be seen and heard

FIRST PHASE. Homes fit for heroes.

'17 – '45: a quarter of working class people moved from inner cities into outer-urban, built by private and public developers. Factories on edge required workers.

'Deserving poor' : Asked by housing officers personal life style to determine only best w/c accommodated. How they did washing, noisy pets, budgeted. Required to buy or rent curtains and ensure children had shoes.

1934: The Cutteslowe Walls (Oxford car manufactory) divided private w/c from public w/c housing illegally but remained in place for 25 years. Built by the Urban Housing Company

Wythenshawe (Manchester)  
Speke (Liverpool)

SECOND PHASE: post '45.

A brief period when quality homes were built but then the chance to build inequality out of the landscape was passed up.

THIRD PHASE:

Systems built quantity.

By 1970s the re-entrenchment of the class system was complete.

**This Must be the Place**

1964: Harold Wilson.

Richard Crossman, Minister for Housing freed off green-field outer land (felt contained) and was concerned only for quantity – on Castle Vale there was an aeroplane hanger but it was not used as a community centre. Houses without a break – boring terraces. No amenities, estates just to 'house'.

Many sold cheap to teachers and police (trouble was expected)

Now feel deserted – people are either 'out' or locked inside, stationary parked cars.

**The Rise of the Council Estate**

**1939 -1945: Population grew by 1 Million, nearly 4 million Homes destroyed.**

1844: Engels publishes *The Condition of the Working Class in England*

1850f: First subsidised rented homes.

Bournville,

Saltaire (outside Bradford) built by Mill owner Titus Salt in West Yorkshire.

1875: Artisans' Dwelling Act – slum demolition .

Life expectancy in Bethnal Green remains at 16 yrs. Tradesmen 26, professionals 45.

1883: Andrew Mearns. *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London: an inquiry into the condition of the abject poor*. “We shall be pointed to the fact that without State interference nothing effectual can be accomplished upon any large scale.. These wretched people must live somewhere.”

1889: Charles Booth *Life and Labour of the People*. (further editions till 1903)

1893: first bricks of “**The Boundary Street Estate**” LCC built and managed. Bethnal Green/Shoreditch

Arts & Crafts influence on 1,069 dwellings. 23 blocks in a star formation.

Arch: Owen Fleming, Rowland Plumb & T.Blashill. Communal facilities and 200 shopfronts. (Predates garden cities by a few years)

Replaced the subterranean slums of the Old Nichol but new rents of 3s/wk open only to best-paid workers!

1903: Letchworth Garden City – Ebenezer Howard. *Tomorrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform*. 1898) renamed *Garden Cities of Tomorrow* 1902 Plan to dismantle capitalism by self-governement and self-sustaining cities. Small townships of 10K, co-operative communities, buffered y green-belt. Urbs plus Rus, town/country with each family having land plot.

LCC: Progressive Party dominated housing committee since 1890, then Conservatives took over but still built estates of vernacular cottages – Tooting, Norbury, Mill Hill; Becontree – 120K. No pubs; Wythenshawe in Manchester; New Earswick in York; Cutteslow – walled-off in Oxford.

### **Lloyd George:**

Homes fit for heroes, 10<sup>th</sup> of conscripts barred by ill-health. No houses during war.

500K Homes required in first year to clear slums and 100K annually thereafter.

Minister for Heath Christopher Addison produced the **Addison Act 1919** (rev.1924) Still slow progress.

**1918: Tudor Walters standards.** Good sized rooms, large metal windows.

Letchworth’s architect Raymond Unwin. Quality higher than private developments but no amenities and often isolated from work and friendship circles.

Suburbanisation of working class: 1914 less than 1% of GB housing council-houses to 10% in 1938. Mostly suburban without amenities. By 1939 LCC had re-housed 258K! As well as cottages many were tenements of low quality.

Interviewees said 1. houses not flats, 2. enough rooms and garden, 3. a community.

Many newly-housed commuted back to city during weekends to be with family. Mass observation also reported setting-in of apathy

1921: *The High Cost of Building Working Class Dwellings* inquiry.

### **Post 2<sup>nd</sup> World War:**

**William Beveridge** liberal civil servant had produced report. Five Giants: Want, Ignorance, Disease, Idleness, Squalor. When war ends they will be addressed.

1943: Abercrombie Plan for New Towns (edge cities)

Thomas Sharp was post-war town planner 1946 *Town Planning*.

1949 *Housing Manual* Argued for no segregation of classes into outer estates.

Bevan determined to see this quality realised  
1951 Festival of Britain, Landsbury Estate. Even furniture was designed. (Only later stages were high-rise)  
Govt considered nationalising all rented accommodation, but Bevan settled for a ratio of 1:4 private to council. But raw materials were lacking post-war and Communists squatted. Also compromised with aluminium & concrete (readily available) building Prefab's in old aircraft factories.

Labour building 227K pa in 1948. a million homes in its first five years.  
Conservatives promise 300K.  
Bevan said: "we shall be judged for a year or two by the number of houses we build. We shall be judged in ten years' time by the type of houses we build."

Tudor Walters standards gave boring sameness to estate housing, single class and obvious. Private developers escaped those standards so different styles.  
Isolation from work, amenities, relations, added to ghetto stigma.

- 1: Large building companies: off the peg packages.
- 2: Local authorities & town-planners: easy way to produce numbers
- 3: Architects: housing as weapon of social reform.

**Le Corbusier.** Swiss. (real name: Charles-Edourd Jeanneret) Modernist – clean lines. Homes were only machines for living in. *Unité d'habitation*.  
Bourgeois life would collapse if individualistic family homes were eliminated, with common dining rooms, washing etc. Glasgow LDC sent deputation to learn and built 300 high rise – most in whole UK. In 1970s 70% Scottish housing LA rentals. Birmingham had to house

**Macmillan:** Announced "Great Housing Crusade" as first Minister for Housing (no longer Ministry of Health) Promised 300K per annum through 50s – two thirds to be council. (220K in 1953). "The People's House" was small two-bedroom terraces and flats; smaller than Bevan's.  
Shortage of bricks, so Plasterboard, system-building (seen as sexy), small windows, yards not gardens. Cheap construction methods and speculative building. Mac saw Council housing as stepping stone to home ownership.  
Green belt throttled cities and Le Corbusier's machine-home proliferation. High-rise concentration kept rates inside city.  
1956 Housing Subsidy Act – more money for LAs the higher they built.  
1962 Minister for Housing was Keith Joseph.  
1968 Peak at 450K homes. Modernism was architecture of Welfare State.  
RONAN POINT 22 stories. Canning Town – Danish Larsen-Nielsen pre-cast concrete bolted together (max six stories). Taylor Woodrow-Anglian. Did not need skilled men to bolt it together. Now hard core for City Airport.

LA councillors sought prestige by Modern and later Brutalist buildings.  
RInsitBrit Architects RIBA forced by symposium to prefer this style.  
All very similar because the system build is same.  
Park Hill Estate Sheffield 1962. 13 storey snake with decks. "San Quentin"  
Grade II listed by English Heritage!  
**Goldfinger:** Brutalist style. 65-67 Balfron Tower and Carradale House, Poplar.

**1979:** Nearly half of UK lived in Council housing.

4,500 tower Blocks in UK: maintenance problems, badly mixed concrete, loose windows, lifts etc, etc. Two flats cost same as three houses to maintain.

IN SUM: “thoughtlessness; the hard sell of building contractors; poor workmanship; Brutalist concrete designs; lack of maintenance; the well-meant but dippy optimism of local-authority planners and architects; a fetish for quantity over quality; power-crazed council leadership.” p 122.

(Labour concerns itself in opposition with Rachman: Notting Hill 1950s.

### **Can now tell class by housing tenure**

1973 Oil Crisis: unemployment & inflation. IMF loans. LA concentrate ‘problem families’. in high rise. Proportion of loan parents, gangs, BEM above fifth floor level higher (new immigrants forced to low jobs) Drug problems.

Can’t *flaneur* estate it’s too dangerous and obvious. (Guy Debord Psychogeography) Power & Tunstall (LSE 1981-1991) Loan parents increase 9 to 18% [4% national]

### **Broadwater Farm. Tottenham 1971. p125**

12 system-built blocks and 3 miles of walkway. 1.5K homes remote management.

Not popular, no housing shortage so, singles, BEM and elderly. On flood area.

Unemployment 42%

1981 – so bad, demolish. Govt included it in scheme: local management team of 40!

New youth association led by Jamaican mother.

1985 youth trip to Jamaica – order breaks down, no police til Handsworth riots alert.

5 October 1985: Cynthia Jarrett killed by police. Raided her home to find son Floyd for driving without tax. Next night riots, when PC Keith Blakelock hacked to death.

Inquiry: £33million now pumped in which was not in its Priority Estate Project earlier

1985 – 850 burglary, 2005 down to One. On site management officers. Rarely police.

Estates work when (p129) “*combination of political will, financial resources and intensive management by a resident team of estate managers and maintenance staff, and enough committed tenants to provide a sense of stability and hope.*”

**1979** Council House tenancy UK peaked of 40%, and incomes were most equal.

But equalisation depressed people!? 1978 – Winter of Discontent.

Thatcher elected!

### **1980 Heseltine launches Right to Buy** Idea of Macmillan and Heath.

1982 200K properties. Councils not allowed to reinvest in housing.

1980-95: 1.6 million homes become private, leaving 95% tenants on benefits.

2010: number of those on waiting list is equal to number of houses sold since 1980.

House is not an investment, it is somewhere to live!

Chris Holmes (was director of Shelter) “**Housing poverty is now the most extreme form of social inequality in Britain.**”

1. Tenants now surrounded by extremely **poor neighbours**
2. **Isolation.** The architectural space traps you.
3. **Low aspirations** since alternatives meagre
4. Fettered by circumstances beyond your **power** to control.

5. Worse physical and mental **Health**
6. **Inadequate maintenance** – Harlow all built simultaneously now old.

### **Housing Associations:**

**1988 Tenants' Guarantee** required tenant consultation before new building.

### **Housing Action Trusts**

**1997 Labour resumes power**

**Enabling State not providing state.**

### **Stock Transfer:**

By 2001, 120 councils had transferred stock to RSLs (Registered Social Landlords)

Too much rental supply in North, Too little in South, forcing B&B families.

### **The Hole in the Head (Chapter 4) p148**

A descent life with prospects depends on social capital – esp for w/class.

Upper class feel entitled to voice opinions.

Stress build-up: life shorter by 10 years; One seventh of chance of HEd. 10-15%

chance of leaving school without qualifications; 25-30% chance of the 5 GCSEs.

Twice as likely to smoke than wealth achievers. 34% more likely to report illness.

Ready supply of drugs. Family break-up prevalent. Postcodes cannot get reasonable loans and insurance, credit or jobs – deemed less trustworthy. Transience.

Consigned to estate and forgotten (reinforced class system)

Collusion of some teachers with lack of expectation.

**Cortisol:** hormone from stress is good in small doses but constantly it weakens immune system & essential organs.

Most available Food is low-grade or expensive corner shops (you need a car). Greasy take-aways or Liddels.

Chavs (from Charva – abusive of gypsies) Lacoste tracksuits ubiquitous in Liverpool.

Extreme conformity to show the others are scruffs.

Fear: Security doors of the 80s bred as much fear as did the previous violence.

Oscar Newman: *Defensible Space* 1972 – if residents don't claim communal space it becomes dangerous (stairwells, 'playspace' etc)

### **Housing Choice:**

2000: 42% of housing stock was deemed substandard (1.7million homes) Government said all council houses were to be brought up to standard – but Council backlog of repairs prohibited action. Pushed LAs to transfer to RSLs (Registered Social Landlords) who could borrow private money. Tenants not asked if they wanted to remain LA and have caretakers and services replaced but to vote for RSL stock transfer or keep LA and have ALMO (non-profit Arms Length Management Organisation. Otherwise an experimental PFI. Birmingham Council spent £15m on 'say yes to Transfer'. 'Regeneration' capital was abundant – witness the sprawl along Thames Gateway.

Now 72% UK 'own' their own home. NHS and Education is loved but social housing is demonised. But it served UK well for many years. It was also concomitant with income equality in 1979.

**Making it better:**

P219: “If council estates are to remain the places where the least well-off are concentrated, every possible chance to make up the disadvantages of being poor needs to be concentrated in those areas. This means building children’s centres...and free nurseries, local shopping areas that, if necessary, are subsidised (preferably by taxing the profits of out-of-town supermarkets) and adding a public transport system that is so inexpensive, regular and comprehensive that it doesn’t matter if you don’t own a car.”

Whether or not they own the property, if they have a say in its management, the sense of care and pride increases. Locals should know the management and service providers (rubbish collectors, repairers, etc)

Resident, well-supported social workers, Not eviction but care.

Proper infrastructure, amenities and upgrade of properties.

**Wayne Hemmingway**

Dartford housing estate vs Wimpeyfication.