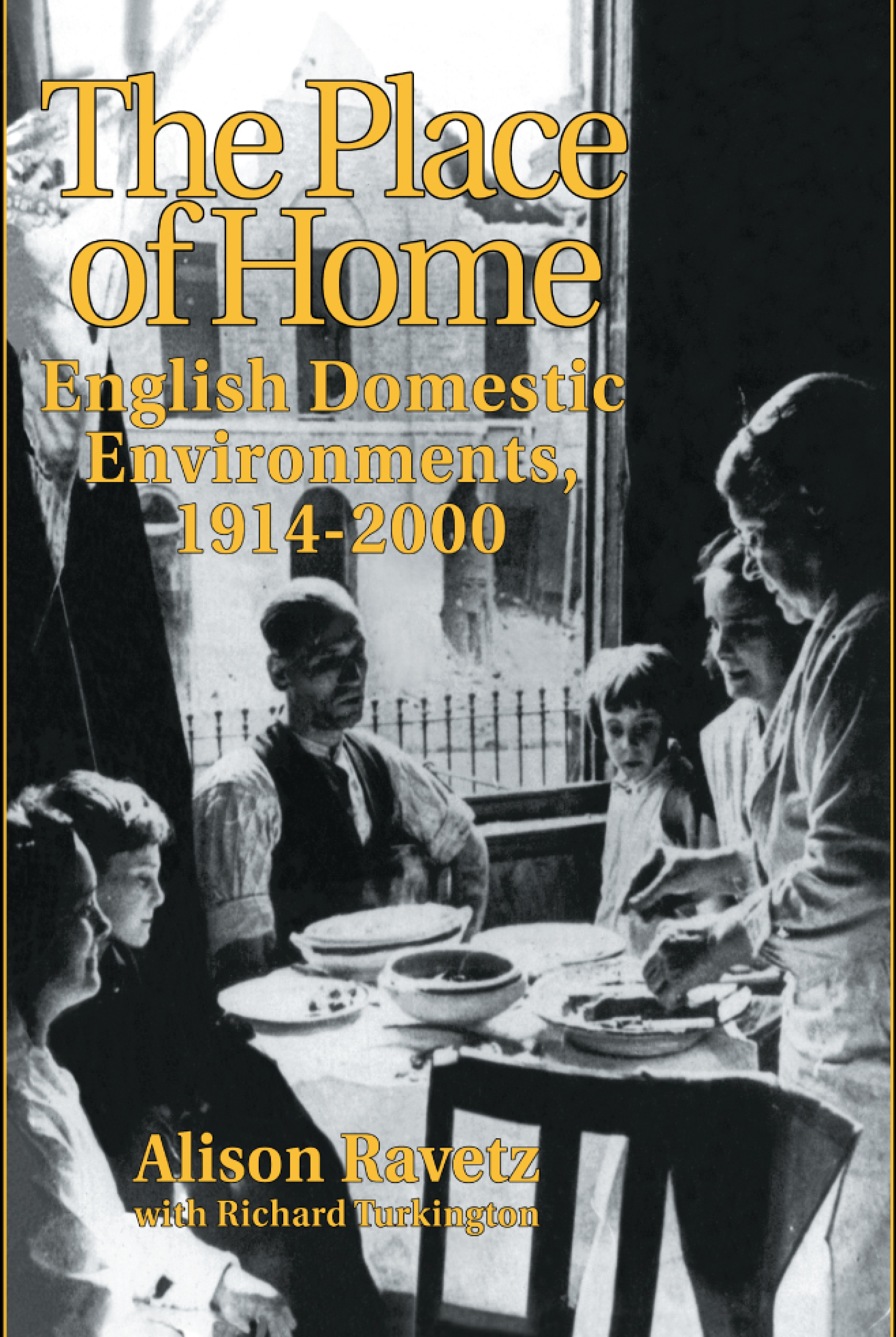
The Place of Home

English Domestic Environments, 1914-2000



Alison Ravetz

with Richard Turkington

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ALISON RAVETZ
WITH RICHARD TURKINGTON

Taylor & Francis
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

Published by Taylor & Francis
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN
270 Madison Ave, New York NY 10016

Transferred to Digital Printing 2006

First edition 1995

© 1995 Alison Ravetz with Richard Turkington

Typeset in 10/12½ pt Times by Cambrian Typesetters, Frimley, Surrey

This book was commissioned and edited by Alexandrine Press, Oxford

ISBN 0 419 17980 1

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A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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CONTENTS

Acknowledgements viii

1. INTRODUCTION: THE CONTEXT 1

2. THE SUBURBAN HOME 18

The suburban home in its context 18
The speculative suburban house 21
The suburban council house 23
Suburban estates between the wars 26
The postwar family house 29
Postwar estates and suburbs 36

3. FLATS AND MAISONETTES 41

The origins of the English flat 41
Middle-class flats after 1914 43
Flats for special groups 44
Council flats to 1939 46
Council flats after 1945 49
The high-rise estate 51
Living in flats 52

4. THE SURVIVAL OF THE PRE-1914 HOUSE 61

The English terraced house 61
The social function of terraced housing: control of private renting 63
Uncrowding the slums 66
Unfit for human habitation 69
Improvement of the older houses 74
The pre-1914 house in its neighbourhood 77

5. AT HOME IN 'HOMES': INSTITUTIONAL LIVING 80

People without homes 80
The postwar homeless 84
From workhouse to residental Home 86

From residential care to 'care in the community' 87
From common lodging house to hostel 90
Homes in 'Homes': contradictions of institutional living 93

6. SELF-HELP AND ALTERNATIVE HOUSING 96

Prefabricated houses 96
Nomadic housing 98
Residential caravans and mobile homes 102
Self-help housing: shacks and plotlands 105
Self-help housing: self-build 106
Squatting 109
Housing co-operatives and alternative communities 112
The significance of self-help housing 116

7. THE TECHNOLOGY OF THE HOME 119

Technology and the domestic interior 119
Fuel and power 122
The coal-fired house 123
Gas and electricity in cooking and space heating 126
Central heating 127
Daylighting 128
Artificial light 131
Water 133
Baths and hot water 134
Sanitation 138
The changing technology of the home: 'white goods' 140
Telecommunications and the automated home 142
The energy-conscious home and the self-sufficient home 144
Domestic technologies at the end of the century 146

8. ROOMS 149

The evolution of the house interior: cultural codes 149
Space in the home 151
The scullery and kitchen 153
The parlour 156
The contributions of the interwar semi 157
The downstairs after 1945 159
The Parker Morris house 161
The upstairs 163
The changing interior: space and function 165
The changing interior: users' contributions 167
Users' contributions: furnishings 170

9. GARDENS AND EXTERNAL SPACE 176

The origins of the modern domestic garden: the vernacular gardening tradition 176
The origins of the modern domestic garden: the Victorian suburban garden 178
The forecourt and the front garden: the Edwardian house 180
Tidy and 'twee': the interwar front garden 180
The erosion of the front garden 183
The backyard and allotment garden 184
The 'home gardener': back gardens in the interwar years 185
The interwar garden: preference and popularity 187
The war years: 'dig for victory' 189
The postwar years: from the 'minimum' to the 'patio' garden 190
The side of the house 195
The garden and external space in the twentieth-century home 197

10. THE CHANGING EXPERIENCE OF HOME 200

House and home: housing progress and housing users 200
Residential movement 200
Residential movement and 'community' 202
Why people moved 205
Attitudes to the home 206
Users' contributions to the home: housekeeping 208
Care of people in the home: meals and hospitality 211
Other forms of care giving in the home 214
The contributions of housework to the home 216
The postwar housewife and the division of household labour 219
'Women's liberation' and the time spent on housework 220
The further reaches of the home in the twentieth century 224

Bibliography 225
Abbreviations and Measurements 237
Index 239

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks are due to the Department of Social Policy and Sociology of the University of Leeds, where Alison Ravetz held an Honorary Fellowship from 1992 to 1995; to the Librarians of Pershore College of Horticulture and to Nicola Coxon, Conservation Officer, Birminham City Council for their assistance to Richard Turkington; and to Ann Rudkin and Anna Ravetz for their valuable editorial help.

We are grateful also to all those who have provided pictures for the book and in particular to the following for their kind permission to reproduce illustrations: Abbey National, Avoncroft Museum of Buildings, Birmingham City Council, Eldonian Community, English Heritage, Focus Housing Association, Peter Mitchell, *Newmarket Journal*, Town and Country Planning Association, *Yorkshire Post*. Apologies are made to any copyright holders for unintentional omissions.

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Finally we would like to thank Steve Poolton for his skill and patience in photographing our originals from some very difficult source materials.

1

INTRODUCTION: THE CONTEXT

When this story opens the population of England numbered less than 34 millions, distributed in some seven million households and a lesser number of dwellings. Eighty years later the population size was over 46 millions, and there were nearly a million more dwellings than the nation's eighteen and a half million households. Over the middle decades of the century the population had made net gains from migration, with the consequence that by the 1990s slightly over 6 per cent belonged to ethnic minorities, the black minorities, in particular, being heavily concentrated in the big conurbations. The fraction of people who lived in the care of others, in institutions of various kinds, was tiny – less than half a per cent – and it had fallen by nearly a half since 1914.

The time span covered here, the best part of a century, was one of unparalleled economic, technical and social change. It included the two World Wars, several lesser conflicts and a 'Cold War'; and two major economic depressions, of the 1930s and the 1980s, each accompanied by mass unemployment and restructuring of industry. It also saw the full implementation of a Welfare State in the 1940s, building on more tentative attempts of the early 1900s and between the wars. Essential to this, and owing much to 'the revolutionary influence of war upon social policy' (Marwick, 1968, p. 122), was an increased role for government. In 1914, the state could not even reliably know how much people earned; when it emerged victorious in 1945 there were very few areas of life, including the interior of the home, into which it had not intruded.

Though deep structural changes had long been under way, England in 1914 was a strongly hierarchical society. The poor were a race apart, clearly recognizable from their physique, clothing, speech and behaviour. Many lived at or little above survival level, in homes with a pre-industrial level of squalor. 'Gentility' was still recognized and, though not necessarily linked to financial wealth, it could command many privileges, including private education, service from tradesmen, and domestic servants. War hastened changes already in train. From 1921, and particularly over the period 1931–1951, those in white collar, salaried positions began to increase, so that they eventually outnumbered those in manual occupations by the mid-1970s; but their incomes fell relative to skilled manual workers. Between the wars, new industries had caused a drift to the south east, leaving residues of the unemployed in the old industrial areas. Half a century later, a new generation of 'sunrise' industries was less able to absorb large numbers, and with progressive contraction of traditional manufacturing industries there was a growing polarity between those who were unemployed or in low-paid, insecure service jobs, and those with the management and information skills relevant to a rapidly changing economy. It was now becoming a very real question whether the future economy would ever again be able to use the labour of the many unskilled people, who were now more of an 'under class' than a working class.

Between these two points lay a period of rising productivity and affluence. Rearmament had offered a way out of recession in the 1930s, and egalitarian wartime measures followed by a period of full employment brought an unprecedented class convergence. The rising cost of living was offset by rising incomes and smaller families, while increasing numbers of wives were able to make a contribution to family incomes. The proportion of married women in paid work rose from around a tenth in 1931 to over a half by the mid 1980s. With universal and free medical care, better diet, increased educational opportunities and powerful unions, these trends rapidly eliminated the old and most obvious indices of class difference: malnourished or maimed bodies, children dressed in hand-me-downs, and young mothers aged before their time. Up-to-date family housing, with all its associated possessions, made its own contribution to the 'increasingly pervasive influence of middle-class values' (Stevenson, 1984, p. 465).

Change in the family, that 'essential glue of the social fabric' (Marwick, 1982, p. 171) was crucial to twentieth-century lives. A reduction of family size had begun as long ago as the 1870s, but at the turn of the century marriages with five or six surviving children were still normal. Average family sizes then steadily reduced, touching under two children per marriage by the mid 1930s, and again after 1972. The downward trend was interrupted only by a short boost to the birthrate after 1945, and a more sustained one between the early 1950s and 1964. This meant a significant contraction in the active period of childbearing and rearing, the period between a woman's first and last childbirth nearly halving between the 1930s and the 1970s. Working-class families continued on average to be larger than middle-class families, a difference that was discernible in council owned and owner-occupied houses. A much greater difference, however, was seen in the ethnic minorities: those of Pakistani or

There was no ambiguity as to the poor, how and where they lived. (*Source*: n.d. but 1960)

Bangladeshi origin, in particular, continuing to have families of a size not seen in the indigenous white population since Victorian times (Coleman, 1988).

Households, in distinction to families, were further diminished in size by the final disappearance of resident domestic servants after 1939, and of lodgers, who were a normal part of many households to around 1960. At the start of the century the average household size was around four and a half. From 1931 it declined sharply, to become little more than two by 1985. By mid century, nearly two thirds of households contained three people or less; but the most dramatic rise was in the single person household: a rarity before 1939, this accounted for more than a fifth of all households by 1981. A big contributing factor was the growing independence of young people; but the main cause was the changing age distribution of the population. Between 1911 and 1981, lower birth rates and increased life expectancy, particularly among women, brought about a threefold increase in the proportion of people of sixty-five and over, while the proportion of children under fifteen was reduced by one

The functions and deeper social or personal meanings of the home were established long before 1914, so that even the Blitz could not disturb this Plymouth family. (*Source*: Boyd Orr, 1943) third. The recognition of the existence of single people not living in families, and of the propriety of their having homes of their own, was an important strand in housing in the later half of the century.

The most important steps in the creation of the modern home had been taken long before the start of our period: in particular, its functional separation from commerce and manufacture, along with its physical relocation in the suburb, where women and children were segregated in each other's company and away from the formal economy (Hall, 1982; Davidoff and Hall, 1983). From this there arose a new kind of domestic economy: dedicated to producing, not items for sale or even items consumed within the home, but care of children, husbands and other family members, with accompanying social rituals, and an elaborate care of the home itself, in the form of housework (Davidoff, 1976). These together constituted a 'domestic culture' which reflected dominant and deeply held social, moral and religious values of the time.

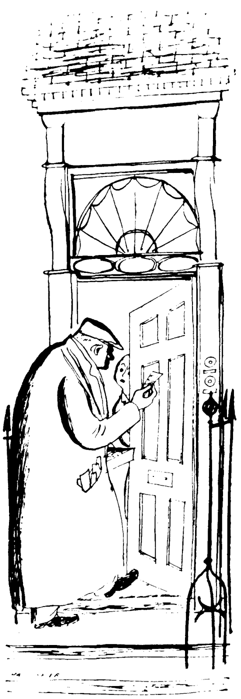
Although apparently segregated from industry, capitalism and the city, the role of the home was in fact crucial to urban-industrial society. Industrialization had brought with it new ways of living and confusions of different populations who lived and worked in close proximity but who had different backgrounds, customs, religions, skills and occupations. Social gradations became crucially important to identity and security, most particularly at borderlines between classes. The most important of these, in the eyes of Victorians, was that separating 'respectability' from 'non respectability'. This not only divided middle from working classes, but was sensed at many levels of the social scale where, coming from diverse origins, respectability was 'best seen as a bundle of self-generated habits and values derived from past customs and present responses to living and working conditions' (Thompson, 1988, p. 355). One of the things that gave it great force was fear of falling victim to the harsh Victorian Poor Law, which was 'perhaps the one big success of the century' in impelling people towards respectable domestic standards (*Ibid*, 1988, p. 355).

Wives were the chief guardians of family respectability, and the scrubbed and whitened doorstep and sill (as here) its most important sign. (*Source*: Allied Iron Founders, *c.* 1954)

How people were housed played a critical role here. Clearly, identity and security were best guaranteed by one-class streets or districts, notably the 'byelaw' suburbs of one-family houses which became the norm for a wide cross-section of working and middle classes in the half century before 1914. 'Enveloped however thinly in its own privacy' (*Ibid*, 1988, p. 182), the house could show its status by lace curtains and whitened doorstep, while a developing technology served to 'encapsulate' it. With its own back entrance, water supply, privy, and clothes line, it was released from the necessity of sharing: 'release from the necessity of doing one's dirty washing in public was literally the path to respectability' (*Ibid*, 1988, p. 193).

Thus a peculiarly English atmosphere of residential repose was created. For many years respectable middle-class citizens had been passing byelaws to cleanse their streets of unwanted traders and other intruders (the 'no hawkers, no circulars' plates found on many front gates to 1950 or beyond providing a last reminder), and the result was to make the surroundings of the home mere 'waste space or connective tissue . . . sterile or anonymous' (Daunton, 1990, p. 204). In general, the street activities of earlier times, which had once engaged all classes, were progressively suppressed: fairs, public executions (the last in 1868), contests, gambling, cockfighting, unruly games, music and dancing, as well as more familial events like wakes and weddings (Stedman-Jones, 1974). Street life did continue in working-class neighbourhoods, but in emasculated form: a Lambeth man thought he could even pinpoint the ending of knees-ups and spontaneous dancing around 1900 (Harrisson and Madge, 1939). In the present century, social use of the street was increasingly reserved for special occasions – coronations or victory celebrations – and one last echo was the street parties of London squatters of the 1960s and 1970s, who occupied the last decaying remains of classic working-class neighbourhoods (Chapter 6, below).

Working-class domestic life was, nevertheless, noticeably more gregarious than that of the middle classes and, as long as it was not disturbed, it remained in many respects collective. The 'classic' slum was familiar, cosy and colourful, a village-like world of well understood 'tribal areas' only a step beyond the door of the house, itself always open but inviolate (Hoggart, 1957). The 'tribes' were not always friendly, and most had their outcasts (Roberts, 1971); but in hard times people owed much to their neighbours. This was not to be confused with personal closeness, for neighbourliness 'did not imply the intimacy of friendship' but rather 'reciprocity – looking out for one another' (Benson, 1989, p. 118). And for all their mutuality, since they lacked true autonomy such neighbourhoods were more vulnerable than anyone foresaw to the closure of their staple industries, the rationalization and centralization of their services – schools, shops, transport – and above all to the coup de grace of slum clearance.



'Keep off my doorstep, *please*' pleased Anne Blythe in *Housewife*, April 1946, viewing the resumption of such intrusions with alarm.

There never was any precise definition of the slum, partly because of its multiple contributing factors – bad landlords, bad buildings, environmental pollution, overcrowding, feckless occupants – but partly also because its categorization changed with time. Even in Victorian society, technically substandard housing affected only a minority of English workers, who were widely admitted to be better and more cheaply housed than their European counterparts (Thompson,

Women in particular depended on mutual support in poverty. (*Source*: Allied Iron Founders, *c.* 1954)

1988). As much as anything, the term 'slum' was a label used subjectively, not only by different-class onlookers, but by those of its inhabitants who wished to distance themselves from it, both physically and socially.

Their attitudes, and the answering sympathies of those who campaigned on their behalf, provided much of the motivation of housing policy, notably after each World War when, as it were, the nation gathered its energies for an onslaught on the obsolete and disgraceful living conditions that some of its citizens had to endure. Thus in 1919 subsidized and universal council housing was introduced, with the explicit intention of extending what was then the most up-to-date and superior family housing to a select portion of the working class. By 1945 this and a widening experience of home ownership between the wars made possible a concept of a universal domestic culture: the product of raised working-class standards and expectations and realistically lowered middle-class standards. The result was a compact and functional family home which reflected 'an increasingly common culture, balanced by the cult of domesticity and individual choice' (Stevenson, 1984, p. 381).

This encouraged, not a nuclear family home (for this had always been the norm in English history) but an increasing nuclearization of the family, with weakening of ties to the extended family and increasing absorption in the home itself. As well as removal to suburban estates, this owed much to increasing leisure and holiday time which was spent, if not on the house and garden, on holidays away from home. Among other things, the trend meant less readily available support for grandparents as they aged, and child-rearing practices without the active help, or even regular acquaintance, of grandparents, aunts or wider kin.

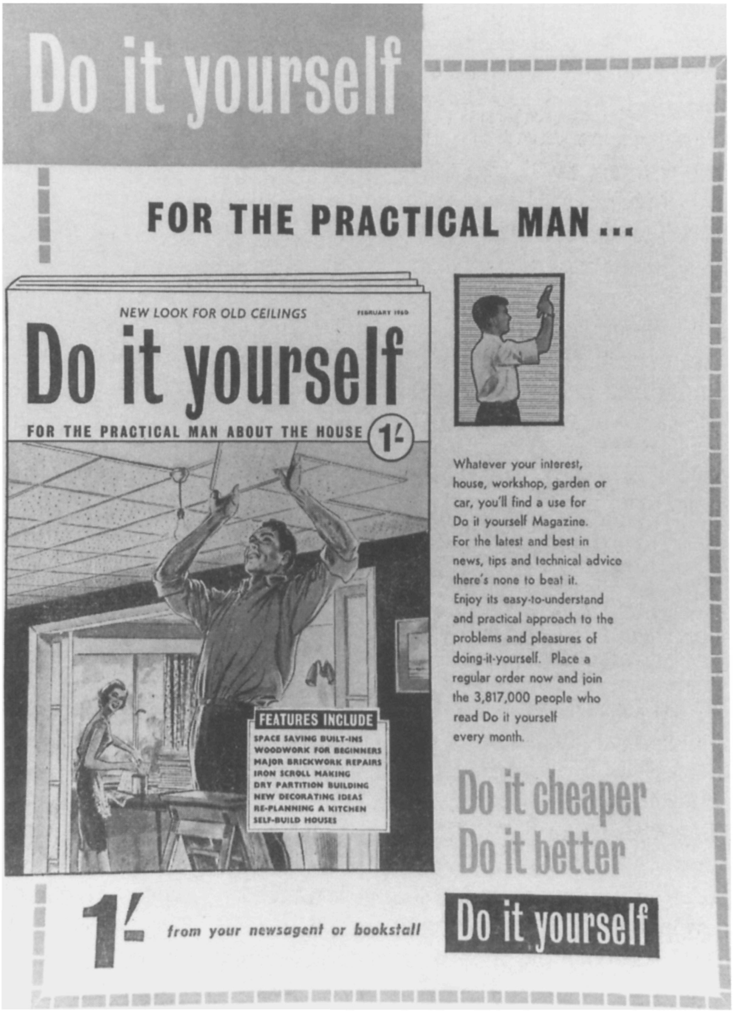
To a large extent the old frameworks of kin and neighbourhood were replaced by a new consumerism, made possible by rising household incomes and smaller families to keep. Mass production of goods for the home was far from new after 1914, but it grew in importance, promoted by the weekly and daily press, advertisements on hoardings and in the cinema. Goods were made more accessible by hire purchase and mail order, while new materials such as plastics made them cheaper or more versatile. The biggest stimulus of all, however, came from a domestic electrical supply, which began to be available to all classes between the wars but, like plumbing and hot water, only became universal after the Second World War (Chapter 7, below). Already before the war ended the independent research body, Political and Economic Planning, was assessing how the light engineering industries could adapt and expand into the market for household appliances when hostilities were over (PEP, 1945). What was not allowed for at this time was the phenomenal increase of family cars after 1950. These would take up space outside the home and fill much of people's leisure and holiday time, and indeed of their consciousness generally.

"BELLING"
Electric Cookers

Suburbanization and electrification changed family relationship within the home. (*Source*: Advertisement, North Metropolitan Electric Supply Company, June 1933)

The other revolution in the home was the change in its leisure functions. Before 1914, leisure time was briefer but parlour games and homemade entertainment were more common: daughters, in particular, provided music, and children, party pieces. There was no precedent for broadcasting and nothing, perhaps, could match the first impact of the 'wireless' on the home in 1922, which was 'as near magic as anyone could conceive' (Stevenson, 1984, p. 431). Although listening to its only heavy and expensive set united the family, particularly in the war years, this brought the world of national and international affairs into the sanctum of the home. But in the event it was television that did most to change domestic behaviour, for unlike listening to the radio, which did not have to interrupt household tasks, it commanded the whole attention. With larger and coloured screens, it obtruded into people's lives as radio had never done and soap opera neighbours became more compelling than real-life neighbours of the street.

Through the interwar years and beyond, the housewife's lighter tasks such as sewing and mending were usually described as her leisure activities. To judge from the huge growth of women's magazines and the rise of the Women's Institute after 1914, the full-time housewife between the wars took her home crafts very seriously, baking, preserving, rug making and adorning her home with many handmade items. Eventually there came a stage in the second half of the century when such skills were no longer passed down to daughters. Their loss was partly offset by an entirely new phenomenon of home decorating and 'do-it-yourself', in which husbands usually played the leading part, and which eventually became a new, informal sector of the economy in its own right (Pahl, 1984). While this appeared to be completely individualistic, it was closely connected to the consumer industries and advertising. It was the paradoxical nature of the twentieth-century home to seem increasingly


Do it yourself
FOR THE PRACTICAL MAN...
NEW LOOK FOR OLD CEILINGS
FEBRUARY 1960
Do it yourself
FOR THE PRACTICAL MAN ABOUT THE HOUSE
1/-
FEATURES INCLUDE
SPACE SAVING BUILT-INS
WOODWORK FOR BEGINNERS
MAJOR BRICKWORK REPAIRS
IRON SCROLL MAKING
DRY PARTITION BUILDING
NEW DECORATING IDEAS
RE-PLANNING A KITCHEN
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New homes brought a new role for husbands, wives playing an ancillary part. (*Source*: *DIY Gardening Annual*, 1950) self sufficient but in fact to be increasingly dependent on centralised utilities and services – part of a 'mass culture [that] was hard to escape' (Stevenson, 1984, p. 402).

The nature of poverty was also affected by these changes, becoming qualitatively different from what it had been before 1914. After the establishment of the Welfare State, 'primary' poverty was found only exceptionally. By the end of the century even those living on welfare benefits in unsatisfactory houses shared many of the goods of the affluent: not only three piece suites and wall-to-wall (if inferior quality) carpeting, but colour TVs and perhaps video recorders, which were now counted as basic items in the family budget, albeit to the indignation of older citizens who remembered them as luxuries. But many of the supports of the earlier phase of poverty had also disappeared: people were now less adept at making do and improvising and, above all, they lacked the neighbourhood support and solidarity of large numbers in similar deprivation. It was in many ways harder to be poor in a society where most were doing well. This applied particularly in housing, where a 'general improvement . . . made the condition of those who did not share in it the more keenly felt' (Holmans, 1987, p. 483).

Two fundamentals governed the course of housing after 1914: firstly, houses were durable and commonly outlasted human lives. The stock increased by accumulation, not normally increasing by more than two per cent a year, so that for the most part people's homes had been the homes of many others before them. This meant that houses built for one social order and scale of priorities served under greatly different social conditions, becoming part of an elaborate housing hierarchy: 'chronological strata of houses of different ages . . . extended and reinforced a social structure that was also embodied in the types and values of new houses' (Thompson, 1988, p. 187). Secondly, the cost of a new house, or the stored-up capital value of an old one, was far beyond the means of most people, particularly when they were young and building families and so most in need of domestic space. Their only access to homes was then either by the form of interest called rent, or by borrowing for purchase, which was closely linked to earnings and taxation.

This was one of the routes through which the state was able directly to influence access to housing. In the earlier nineteenth century it was not at all obvious that the state should be involved in housing at all. To 1914, virtually all houses were built by private enterprise, as and when markets and land became available, and the bulk were rented from private landlords. The earliest direct state intervention was for public health reasons, through designation of dwellings 'unfit for human habitation', with closures and clearances. Other motives besides public health were involved, for crime and immorality were to be removed with slums, and valuable sites freed for commercial and highway uses. However, the actual amounts of slum clearance before 1914 were small and the two main campaigns were of the twentieth century. The first was in the 1930s, when the connection between bad housing and bad health was demonstrably clear; but by the time of the second, in the 1950s–1970s, it was far more tenuous, and other arguments had to be brought into play to justify the removal of so much older housing (Chapter 4, below).

The second intervention of the state, through the byelaws, was the regulation of technical standards of new house building. In effect this created the special nature of the pre-1914 terraced house, as well as influencing the quality of all housing built subsequently (Chapter 7, below). The unintended but momentous effect was 'to widen the gap between the rent-paying capacity of working class families and the economic price at which working class dwellings could be provided' (Cullingworth, 1966, p. 16); but the full consequences of this only became apparent over time, as the older stock of pre-byelaw houses was diminished through clearance.

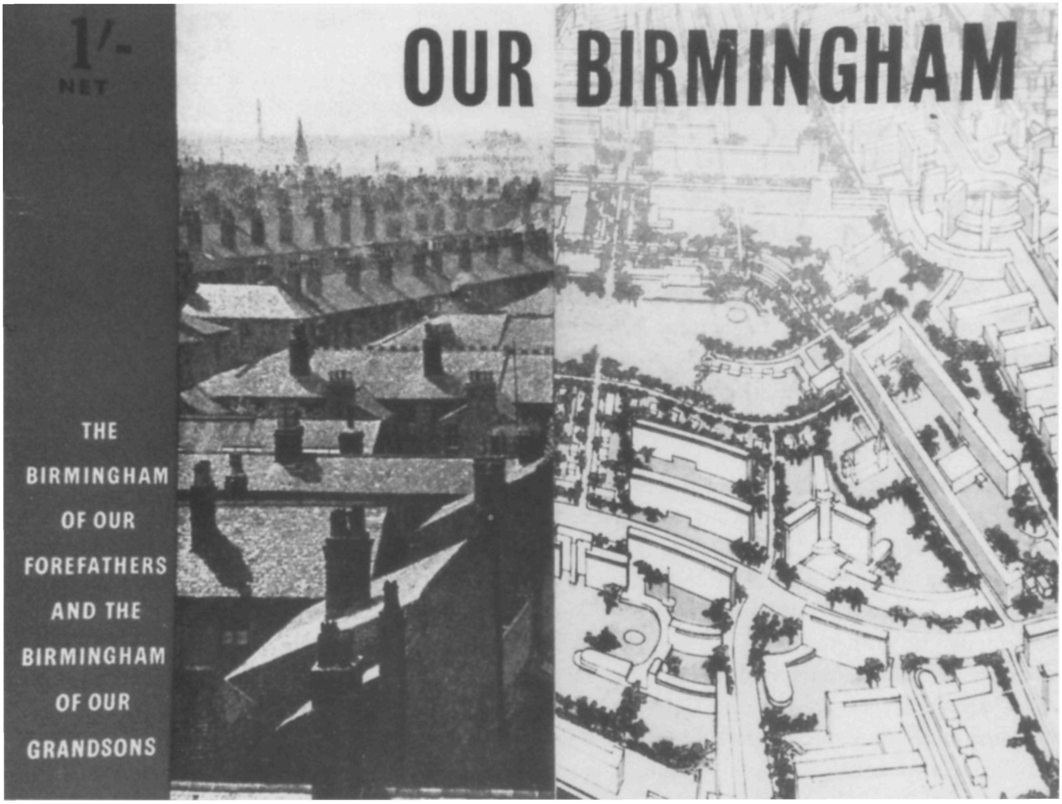
Direct state provision and management of new houses, through subsidy to local councils, only began in 1919, and it was not arrived at without much controversy and campaigning. At first it was intended as a temporary measure only, and there are differing explanations of its real motivation (Swenarton, 1981; Daunton, 1987; Holmans, 1987). In the event, it was continued for some seventy years, during which it became the main form of rented housing, at its peak (in the 1970s) contributing nearly a third of the total housing stock.

What made it outstandingly important, and indeed made the British housing system unique, was that it worked alongside the freezing of rents of private landlords, first imposed in 1915. Again not intended as anything other than a temporary measure, rent control endured in one form or another for half a century, and then continued to influence subsequent rent regimes. Control was one of the main reasons for the decline of landlordism, changing as it did the balance of power between landlord and tenant 'decisively in favour of the latter' (Benson, 1989, p. 84). This was masked from the perception of many onlookers, however, because of the poor quality of the stock in question and the comparative poverty of many of its tenants, which conspired to make landlords' rapacity, rather than the system, seem the root of the problem. In contrast, council housing at its best offered the most advanced kind of suburban family dwellings, albeit these embodied many assumptions about patterns of family and domestic life that were strongly reinforced by housing managers using a range of sanctions.

The regulation of land for housing was another and entirely twentieth-century means of state intervention in housing. For centuries, upper class suburbanization had caused the spread of cities and engulfment of villages. With population growth and developing public transport, lower class suburbanization also escalated, and the diffusion of automobiles between the wars threatened to remove all practical barriers to commuter suburbs. At the same time there was a growing concern for countryside preservation, particularly among urban-based amenity groups seeking to preserve access to unspoilt countryside. The earliest steps towards state control over housing land were taken in 1909, when, however, they were more to do with the planning, rather than placing, of new suburbs. Between the wars state control over land development increased, but was still very limited by the powers of private land owners. The 1930s, however, saw the beginning of control of ribbon development around London, with the establishment of a 'green belt'. Planners' powers were finally transformed by the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act, which obliged all developers to conform to a development plan, without any right of compensation.

The thinking behind these statutory plans was crucial to the future location of housing. They invariably defined the urban structure in terms of concentric rings of decreasing residential densities, and marked out permitted land uses according to a principle of functional separation, most particularly of residential areas from industry and commerce. To a large extent this simply confirmed the *status quo*: the post-1919, low-density suburban estates, council owned or private, were judged to need nothing more than protection, while the definition of town centres as mainly non-residential agreed with their existing land prices and rents. With the established public health machinery there was no obstacle, when it was propitious, to removing any old, substandard housing they might have.

The more problematic areas, however, were the inner rings around centres, and the countryside. In 1947 it was envisaged that the former would be redeveloped largely as council housing



After the war, the old environment would be entirely replaced by clean, modern, low-density towns and cities, through Town and Country Planning. (Bournville Village Trust, *c.* 1946)

estates. To an extent they were, but large parts were left declining and neglected, trapped between high-value city centre stores and offices and the prosperous suburbs, and gouged by the new highways linking suburbs to centres. In rural areas the planning presumption was at first against new building of any kind, except in the strictly government controlled new and expanded towns; but population growth made it impossible to adhere to this, particularly in England's southern regions. New private housing estates were therefore conceded around many country towns and designated villages; but as far as possible remoter rural land and, above all, the green belts now established round all major cities were treated as sacrosanct. Thus land policies achieved 'the containment of urban England': 'a uniquely British form of urbanisation' (McKay and Cox, 1979, p. 39; Hall *et al.*, 1973). It prevented the endless sprawl of low-density housing over the face of the land, but at the cost of scarcity prices for homes in the countryside, with a consequent housing problem for young or low-paid rural workers: a problem that was exacerbated by the unhindered conversion of many village houses to second homes. It also made it impossible for cities to find land for populations displaced by slum clearance, with the consequence that rebuilding often took the form of high-rise family flats (Chapter 3, below).

Amendment of this situation by the latter part of the century was at best partial. At the risk of alienating some of their natural supporters Conservative governments continued to resist demands for new houses in rural areas, even in the form of well designed new villages. They offered some cash grants for reintroducing middle-class housing in city centres, where it was placed in recognizable enclaves, sometimes enclosed by walls, and preferably with a natural attraction like a river or waterside, to tempt back buyers.

Together, these policy interventions created a hybrid system that regulated rather than replaced a free market in housing. This was somewhat masked by a public debate that was dominated by two apparently opposite and irreconcileable philosophies. That of the left favoured state housing for all, as a subsidized social service, while that of the right opposed indiscriminate state provision and would only as a last resort subsidize such people as were not provided for in the market. However, once it overcame its initial resistance, the Labour Party concurred in the rise to dominance of owner occupation after the 1950s. The privileged position of this tenure then relegated council housing to the position of a 'second estate': a complementary but inevitably inferior tenure.

Under the hybrid system neither party had the will or ability to follow its stated goals to their logical end. Regulation rather than revolution might have obvious benefits, not least of reflecting a broad social consensus; but this was on the whole an inefficient way of developing a national housing system over a period of great social change. In particular, it 'prevented debate on housing from focusing on such fundamental questions as access to housing, the extent of inequality in housing, and the effects of policy on occupational and residential mobility' (MacKay and Cox, 1979, p. 153). One might add that neither was it particularly well designed for the maintenance of the housing stock or its technical efficiency and innovation.

The chosen route for addressing housing problems meant others that were not followed. One might have been subsidy of private developers, which was tried for only a few brief years in the 1920s. Another and more likely route would have been state reliance on the voluntary housing trusts which were becoming active providers of housing for the urban poor from the 1860s. Despite being included in every measure for public housing, they were not called upon to play an active role until 1964, when the Housing Corporation was set up to encourage them and channel special housing association subsidies. Even then, their role was not significant until 1974, when they were charged with housing single people and other special kinds of household not normally offered council housing. Again, it was not until the 1980s that they were charged with the provision of the 'social housing' which was to replace council housing, but this policy was vitiated by the fact that as yet their contribution was little more than two per cent of the entire housing stock.

There was never any serious suggestion of the state making direct payments to those in housing need, to enable them to find their own accommodation in a freely operating market. Under rent control, the subsidy of private tenants came out of landlords' pockets, through frozen rents, while under council housing the state subsidy was attached to the properties occupied so that, although it was pooled between properties of different qualities, it was limited to those selected as tenants.

Dependance on council housing as the main channel of housing reform owed much to the strong English tradition of model villages built by great industrialists, a tradition in which it seemed more acceptable to replace slums by 'ideal' dwellings than to use any more direct wealth redistribution. 'Bad housing is highly visible, and its power to shock correspondingly great . . . Such conditions offended against widespread sentiment about fairness and human dignity, even if the inequalities of income and wealth from which they sprang were regarded as being part of the natural order of things' (Holmans, 1987, p. 14).

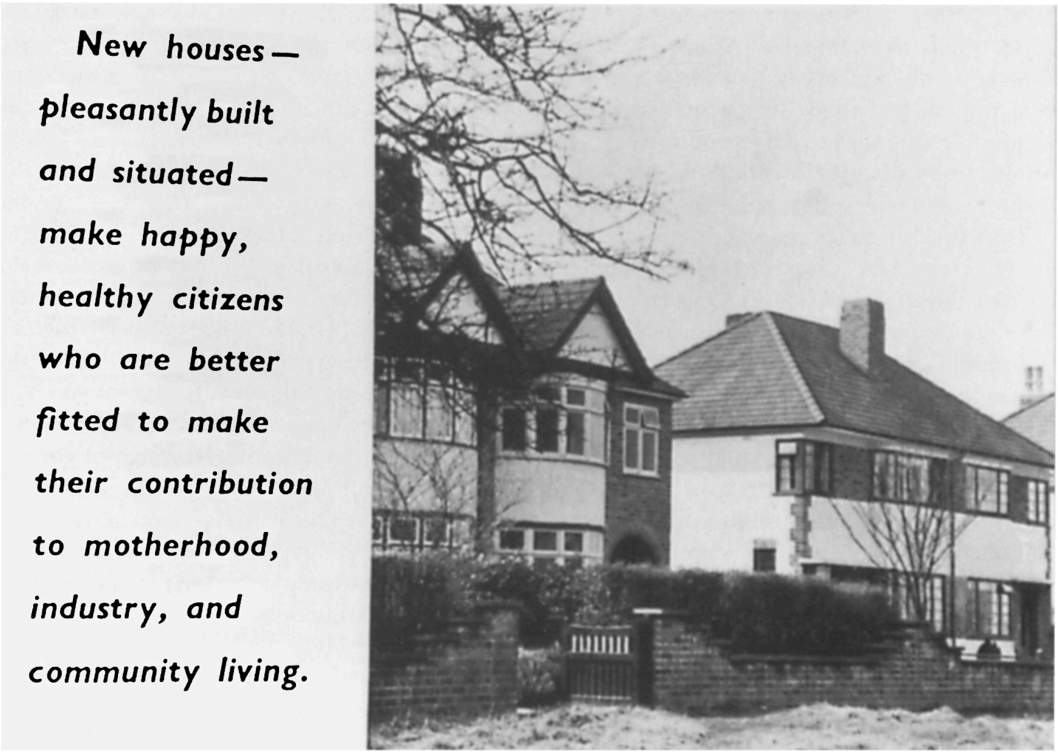
Clearly, there were inherent dangers in such an approach. Official criteria of housing standards, and the standards of domestic behaviour these entailed, were dictated by upper-class and expert opinion, so imposing values that were not necessarily valid for everyone. The fact that they also made housing more costly left people with little freedom to decide on a different allocation of their own resources. This was not too serious as long as the pre-1914 houses could cater for those excluded or dissenting from such 'reform'; but as the older houses diminished in number they were less and less able to fill this role. Above all, the fact that the whole housing system was increasingly constrained by policy made it particularly vulnerable to public expenditure cuts, and to the changes of direction that frequently accompanied changes of political control.

Thus the last policy phase of the century, of an extreme right Conservative government, did attempt to put all housing on a free market footing, as part of its wider programme of reforming and reducing the welfare state. In principle, this might have addressed some of the weaknesses of a hybrid, public-private system, for instance by really transferring public subsidy from dwellings to people through the 'housing benefit' introduced in 1982–83. But the by now severe reduction of council-owned stock was not adequately compensated by growth in other rented housing, and housing benefit levels were cut rather than raised as rents rose with inflation. At the same time, increased reliance on home ownership at a time of high unemployment and welfare cuts accentuated some of the latent problems of this tenure. It had doubled since the Second World War, overtaking private rented housing by 1961, and it now accommodated about two thirds of all households. Long acknowledged by both left and right as the main prop of a 'property-owning democracy' (the phrase first used by Anthony Eden in 1946), it had enjoyed a privileged status, both ideologically and through the tax system. It was so extolled, indeed, that there grew up the idea that 'home' in its truest sense could only be achieved in a house owned by the family occupying it (Saunders, 1990). This of course did violence to the long history of the cult of domesticity, but by the end of the century it had arguably become true. However, like most privileges, home ownership was best enjoyed by a minority. Once it had become the overwhelmingly majority tenure the government was no longer prepared to subsidize it so generously as before, while a disastrous fall in house prices in the late 1980s created a seriously deprived category of home owner, with a debt far greater than the market value of the home, unable to sell, and on occasion repossessed by the building society and rendered homeless.

These have been the main strands in the course of housing in the twentieth century. The most elusive player in the drama has been the user, in whose interests houses were built and policy devised. Unlike other groups, users did not have a corporate voice but entered the housing system individually, often from a position of weakness. There has been a largely undocumented but nevertheless searing collective experience of being without a home throughout the century: the experience of those who, at various times and places, tramped the streets knowing that their children, skin colour, or obvious poverty would slam doors against them. But for the majority – and notwithstanding a deterioration for some of the middle classes in the middle years of the century – this was a period of rising technical standards and satisfaction (Burnett, 1986; GHS, 1971–94). There were, however, minorities whose situation became more difficult as general standards rose. The demise of sharing and lodging, for instance, produced 'an all-or-nothing contrast between a separate house and nothing at all' (Holmans, 1987, p. 482).

Taking the users' experience into account is essential if we are to see the house or dwelling not just as a material object but as that infinitely more complex thing, a home. The crucial gap between the two is well illustrated by the furnished 'show house', which fools no one that it is a real home, however artfully a copy of the local paper is arranged on the coffee table. Like many ordinary things, the evolution of the home turns out to be a large and mysterious subject, the evidence for which lies largely in a huge body of journalistic, biographical and oral material which is beyond the scope of the present book to explore. Here we can only draw on the evidence of the main canon of housing literature: in addition to many valuable sociological and ethnographic studies and the small field of environmental psychology, this includes user studies in some abundance. These do however have limitations, in being confined mostly to public sector housing, and framed within technical parameters that fail to do justice to that part of users' experience and attitudes that is governed by intangibles, such as economic or even symbolic considerations.

Two unique and especially valuable texts need special mention: the *Mass Observation Enquiry into People's Homes* of 1943 and a later compilation of official user studies (Hole



The 'house' of the developer becomes the 'home' of the family. (*Source*: City of Leicester, *c.* 1946) and Attenburrow, 1966). With a small number of other outstanding reports and research studies, these are referred to so often that, for readers' convenience, they are listed and briefly described below. With other scattered sources, they suggest some of the historical shifts in people's relationships to their homes that are further explored in the last chapter of this book. At all times, the vast majority of people had little or no influence over the types and basic technicalities of their homes, but they showed infinite ingenuity in making secure spaces for themselves, even in the unlikeliest circumstances: whether it was the rough sleeper's cardboard box, the single armchair appropriated by an old person in an institution, the dosser's 'large rhododendron bush' (NAB, 1966), or the amazing use of a string of other people's homes by a 'resident vagrant' in a block of London flats (Parker, 1983).

The bulk of scholarship on housing is concerned with housing policy, with smaller amounts falling within urban sociology, architectural history, economics, and interdisciplinary women's studies. The present work is deeply indebted to all of these, most particularly the long, careful, and well reported research studies of urban sociologists and ethnographers from the 1930s to the 1960s. This is, however, neither a study in policy nor the contribution of housing to the social system, but a history of the home as it has evolved and been experienced since 1914. Other than John Burnett's classic work of 1986, there has been surprisingly little systematic historical study of the twentieth-century home. Besides looking at a narrower time span, the present work differs from his in looking at the whole range of housing options available at any one time. It therefore includes, among other things, institutional housing and the changing use of houses surviving from earlier periods – and in these respects it resembles the work of Shaw in 1985. The social range included is intended to cover the great majority of the population, from the very poor, homeless and institutionalized, to the generality of families and households in what would today be recognized as 'ordinary' homes. This presents no problem for most of the period. In the later decades of the century there was an increase in second homes, holiday homes and luxury homes, the last likely to be protected by

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Spoilt for choice? What was on offer was the accumulation of several generations' homes and there could be a problem of affordability. Leeds, 1995.

electronic security devices and to have large grounds, swimming pools, saunas, and other luxuries not experienced by 'ordinary' people. Even these homes, however, derived from the general evolution, and while they may have set trends that others would later follow, no attempt is made to elaborate on them here.

A NOTE ON SOURCES

There are surprisingly few comprehensive and accessible documentary sources for the history of the twentieth-century home. For the convenience of readers, those that are most often referred to are listed below, according to the way they are referenced in the text.

Tudor Walters, 1918

Report of the Committee appointed by the President of the Local Government Board to consider questions of building construction in connection with the provision of dwellings for the working classes, chaired by Sir John Tudor Walters. [Local Government Boards for England, Wales and Scotland. Cd. 9191. London: HMSO.] This set standards, with plans, for the earliest subsidized council houses and estates.

Mass Observation, 1943

An Enquiry into People's Homes. A Report prepared by MO for the Advertising Service Guild, the fourth of the 'Change' Wartime Surveys. [London: Murray.] Mass Observation, described as an independent, scientific, fact-finding body, interviewed 1200 people in 1941–42 in eleven places throughout England, selected to give a representative cross-section of working-class settlement and dwelling types, including pre-1914 houses, old and new flats, garden city settlements and recently built suburban council estates.

Dudley, 1944

Design of Dwellings. Report of the Design of Dwellings Sub-committee of the Central Housing Advisory Committee and Study Group of the Ministry of Town and Country Planning, chaired by the Earl of Dudley. [London: HMSO.] This set the standards for new, postwar council housing and estates.

Pleydell-Bouverie, n.d.

Daily Mail Book of Post-war Homes based on the ideas and opinions of the Women of Britain, complied by Mrs. M. Pleydell-Bouverie. Undated, but 1944. [London: Daily Mail Ideal Home Exhibition Department.]

PEP, 1945

The Market for Household Appliances. A study of the market for household appliances produced by the light engineering industries before the war; the design of the appliances then available; and the market as it may exist in the next ten years. [London: PEP.] PEP is described as an independent non-party research organization preparing fact-finding reports and broadsheets.

Housing Manual, 1949

[Ministry of Health. London: HMSO.] This set out in text and pictures the applications of the Dudley Report.

Chapman, 1955

The Home and Social Status, by Dennis Chapman. [London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.] Based on interviews and observation of 275 families living in five different types of house in Liverpool in 1950, to illustrate the 'place, material culture, behaviour and attitudes of . . . urban families and to relate this to social differentiation'.

Parker Morris, 1961

Homes for Today and Tomorrow. Report of a committee chaired by Sir Parker Morris at request of the Central Housing Advisory Committee. [Ministry of Housing and Local Government. London: HMSO.] The brief was to consider and make recommendations for standards of design and equipment for family housing in public and private sectors.

Townsend, 1962

The Last Refuge: a survey of residential institutions and homes for the aged in England and Wales by Peter Townsend. [London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.] Based on visits to 173 institutions and interviews with 489 elderly residents.

Hole and Attenburrow, 1966

Houses and People: a review of user studies at the Building Research Station. [London: Ministry of Technology.] The user studies included surveys involving nearly 4000 people, mainly in London and the south of England, and in conurbations. They were weighted towards larger households and the families interviewed were considered to be fairly typical of those on housing estates and in New Towns.