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Housing for Single Working Women in Inter-War London 1919-1939

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The Open University
2023

A Thesis Submitted in Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in Architectural History

Abstract

This thesis investigates the provision and design of housing designated for single women in London between 1919 and 1939. The housing type catered to the needs of many thousands of single women workers who had carved out careers before and during the First World War. Others, newly empowered by the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act of 1919, were entering the professions for the first time in fields previously barred to women. The human losses sustained during the conflict compounded the pre-existing imbalance between men and women in the population. Such circumstances swelled the ranks of the so-called 'surplus' women to around 1.75 million, rekindling fears over the potential decline of the nuclear family. Faced with meagre incomes and a dire shortage of small affordable flats, the desire for a home of their own amongst these women was more acute than ever. Spurred on by the promise of Lloyd George's 'Homes for Heroes' programme and the more favourable terms for public utility societies in the Housing and Town Planning Act of 1919, a new generation of housing reformers attempted to resolve the housing issue for self-supporting women. Drawing upon a wide range of underused archival sources, architectural plans, contemporary publications and census data, this thesis focuses on the efforts of these inter-war women's housing organisations, analysing their business and design practices as well as their and architectural achievements. It explores the impact of discourses of home efficiency and labour-saving in the alternative context of homes designed for single women. It further considers how normative assumptions of gender and class shaped and were shaped by these newly created living spaces. Uniting architectural history and women's history, the resultant synthesis offers a more inclusive, holistic view of the inter-war built environment which foregrounds women's contribution and experience.

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Abbreviations

BL	The British Library
CLBC	Central London Building Company Limited
DSIS	Domestic Servants Insurance Society
GCTPA	Garden Cities and Town Planning Association
GFS	Girls' Friendly Society
LCC	London County Council
LDC	Ladies' Dwelling Company Limited
LHB	London Housing Board
LHS	London Housing Society Limited
LMA	London Metropolitan Archives
LRC	Ladies' Residential Chambers Company Limited
LWH	Lady Workers' Homes Limited
MP	Member of Parliament
NUSEC	National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship
NUWSS	National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies
ODNB	Oxford Dictionary of National Biography
OTA	Over Thirty Association
OTHA	Over Thirty Housing Association
PUHS	Public Utility Housing Society
RIBA	Royal Institute of British Architects
SICLC	Society for Improving the Condition of the Labouring Classes
TNA	The National Archives
UWHA	United Women's Homes Association
UWIS	United Women's Insurance Society
WIL	Women's Industrial Council
WL	The Women's Library
WPH	Women's Pioneer Housing Limited
WSPU	Women's Social and Political Union
YWCA	Young Women's Christian Association

Introduction

In 1936 the Over Thirty Association published the findings of Rosamond Tweedy's investigation into the housing conditions of women wage-earners living alone in London:

...Cooking is usually done in a gas ring in the room. Water has often to be carried up or down two or three flights of stairs. In a large number of cases there was no bath...the rooms were eloquent of the poverty and squalor in which the women must live as the price of their freedom. A twelve and sixpenny camp bed, food exposed to dust in an upturned orange box, washing-up bowl under the bed, towels and washing on lines; that is what lay concealed behind those Yale locks.¹

The study's content and biblical title, *Consider Her Palaces*, represented a heartfelt plea to the Ministry of Health, municipal authorities and voluntary organisations, to convince them of the urgent, continuing need for adequate housing for self-supporting single women (Fig. 165). In the wake of the Depression, many were struggling to sustain professional and business careers carved out before and during the First World War. Faced with meagre incomes, landlords less willing to let to unmarried women, and a dire shortage of affordable urban flats, the desire for a home of their own was more acute than ever. The social aspects of the plight of these so-called 'surplus women', reluctantly setting-up homes in ill-suited boarding house rooms, have been explored but the architectural dimensions have not been adequately examined.² The specialised housing schemes of a new wave of enterprises attempting to fulfil the pressing need for such accommodation between the wars have largely been overlooked, their architectural significance marginalised. The 1936 publication's mission to draw attention to this 'hitherto neglected aspect of the housing problem', thus remains as relevant now as then.³ This thesis therefore aims to address the historiographical oversight, investigating the ideas and motivations which shaped the provision and design of housing for single women in inter-war London.

Thesis Topic, Scope and Terms

Following the 1918 Armistice, Lloyd George's election pledge 'to make Britain a fit country for heroes to live-in' promised major housing reform. Partly motivated by revolution in Europe and civil

¹ Rosamond Tweedy, *'Consider Her Palaces': A Study of the Housing Problem for Lower Paid Single Women Workers in London*, (London: The Over Thirty Association, 1936), pp.27-31. The title evokes a biblical phrase: Psalm 48.13-14 (King James version).

² For example Virginia Nicholson, *Singled Out: How Two Million Women Survived without Men after the First World War*, (London: Penguin, 2008).

³ Tweedy, *'Consider Her Palaces'*, p.3

unrest at home, the formation of the Ministry of Reconstruction and passing of the Housing, Town Planning, &c. Act of 1919 (the 'Addison Act') formally acknowledged the mammoth task ahead 'as a great national charge and duty'.⁴ However, plagued with a shortage of labour, materials and funds the programme of public-subsidised housing, with an ambitious goal of constructing half a million new homes, ran aground by July 1921. In the event, the bulk of suburban housing was achieved through private speculation.⁵ Nevertheless in London, the authorities constructed substantial amounts of new family housing, particularly at vast outlying estates like Becontree, in Barking and Dagenham (1921-35). Although tasked with comprehensively surveying the housing needs of their locality, new state-subsidised schemes never encompassed the housing needs of the 'one-person family'.⁶ The exclusive focus on all forms of the family home, whether manifested in the local authority cottage-estate home, or the speculatively built suburban semi, continued to obscure the deepening housing crisis for single women throughout the inter-war decades.

The lack of recognition for this sector of the working population was nothing new. Since the latter part of the nineteenth century, a succession of philanthropically motivated entrepreneurs had attempted to persuade the London authorities to attend to the housing needs of the rising number of middle-class women workers, who, either by desire or necessity, took advantage of the expanding field of opportunity in education, training and employment, largely facilitated through the efforts of the women's movement. Many secured respectable, paid employment positions in such fields as nursing and teaching. Others were attracted to urban centres, to work in the rapidly expanding clerical and retail sector. Christened somewhat pejoratively as so-called 'New Women', their new-found independence was controversial and perceived as a threat to the patriarchal status quo. In London, whilst working men were amply accommodated in privately built bachelor chambers, large London County Council (LCC) hostels such as Parker Street (1892), and in six huge model lodging houses (1892-1906), established by philanthropist Lord Rowton, provision for their female counterparts was severely lacking. Elsewhere nationally the municipal authorities responded by erecting purpose-built hostels for working women in Glasgow (1872), Cardiff (1911) and Manchester (1910). But the issue in the capital was left to the philanthropists to resolve.

The first pioneering developments for middle-class women were championed by Lady Mary Feilding in the 1880s and carried forward by such model dwelling companies as the Ladies' Residential Chambers Ltd and Ladies' Dwelling Company Ltd. From the turn of the century, continuing efforts to address the needs of the more numerous lower-paid women workers resulted in progressively denser planned blocks, with smaller cubicles and bedrooms and enhanced communal facilities, including Brabazon House (1902) and Ada Lewis Lodging House (1914). The

⁴ Lloyd George speech at the Grand Theatre, Wolverhampton, 23rd November 1918. The chief architect of the Act was Minister of Health Dr Christopher Addison.

⁵ See Mark Swenarton, *Homes Fit for Heroes: The Politics and Architecture of Early State Housing in Britain*, (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1981).

⁶ Tweedy, *Consider Her Palaces*, p.17; the study reported that the LCC had taken little stock of 'one-person families', the very small proportion of one-room flats (277 of their 68,629 dwellings), let to elderly pensioners.

same decades saw women's schemes extend their reach into the garden cities and suburbs with low-rise, quadrangular schemes like Waterlow Court (1909). However, their combined efforts never came close to the scale needed to meet the demand.

After the First World War, the community of women wage-earners was augmented by a new breed of female worker, who, newly empowered by the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act of 1919, entered the higher professions for the first time in fields previously barred to women, such as law and accountancy. In addition, the terrible human losses sustained during the conflict deprived many thousands of women of fiancés and husbands, compounding the pre-existing imbalance of over a million more women than men in the population.⁷ Such circumstances swelled the ranks of so-called 'surplus' women to around 1.75 million, rekindling fears over the potential decline of the family.⁸ With little prospect of marriage, large numbers were obliged to earn their living and make their own homes. Others determined to retain self-fulfilling occupations, yet restrained by the enforcement of marriage bars, actively chose to delay or reject marriage altogether. But the gender ideology of the nineteenth century, the 'natural', biologically determined place of men and women within 'separate spheres' posited by John Ruskin, Herbert Spencer and others – with men more suited to the political, legal and economic public arena, and women to the private domestic environment – still held considerable sway. The outrage expressed over the unhealthy condition of First World War recruits, and men's usurpation by women during demobilisation, both served to reinforce the nuclear family as the ideal social formation, and the national import of the role women must play as wives and mothers. Between the wars, domestic environments persisted as the socially acceptable domain for all classes of women, wage-earners and working housewives alike.

Despite considerable resistance, the favourable loans and subsidies in the 1919 Housing Act and the promise of an enhanced role for public utility societies in national housing delivery encouraged a new wave of women's housing providers, founded by housing reformers and feminist activists keen to facilitate independent working lives through more suitable housing. Organisations such as The Lady Workers' Homes Company (LWH), Women's Pioneer Housing Limited (WPH) and the United Women's Homes Association (UWHA) provided a range of small flats for women in new and converted buildings between the wars. There is currently a paucity of published literature concerning women's housing schemes, particularly in the inter-war decades. This thesis, therefore, centres on developments of this period, although it is perhaps inevitable that some of the schemes covered do not neatly fit within this periodisation. The LWH initiative for instance, commenced in 1914 but operations were disrupted by the First World War. Nevertheless, the body of work of the women's housing providers after the conflict represents an identifiable new wave of activity, spurred on by the revitalised agenda for housing reform.

⁷ The 1911 Census recorded 1,178 000 'excess' women: Jane Lewis, *Women in England 1870-1950: Sexual Divisions and Social Change*, (Brighton; Bloomington, Ind: Wheatsheaf; Indiana University Press, 1984)., p.3.

⁸ See Katherine Holden, 'Imaginary Widows: Spinsters, Marriage, and the "Lost Generation" in Britain after the Great War', *Journal of Family History*, 30 (2005).; Nicholson, *Singled Out*, Introduction.

The stated objective for most of these new organisations was to meet the housing needs of female workers, businesswomen and professionals and other women of moderate means. This thesis aims to clarify precisely who the tenants were and why flats specifically for women were still deemed so necessary in this period. In terms of their demographic profile, the prospective tenants were single, unmarried spinsters, but also widows (and to a lesser extent those separated or divorced). Most emanated from Britain, Ireland and the Colonies, with ages ranging from their 20s to 70s, and their family backgrounds spanning the social spectrum: from respectable, working-class households to prosperous land-owning or aristocratic families. They were either working in or retired from a broad range of occupations: the majority were qualified in the fields of nursing, midwifery and teaching, or were employed in the office-based sphere as clerks, secretaries, typists or telephonists. A smaller yet significant contingent earned their living as writers, artists or musicians, or had attained pioneering positions in such higher professions as medicine, architecture or scientific research. Some of the housing providers also catered to women in roles of lower economic status, for example those working long hours as cooks, ticket clerks or waitresses. Census returns and related records attest to the women's schemes being socially-mixed environments, where an ophthalmic surgeon might share a landing with a short-hand typist, or a headteacher live alongside a retired lady's maid.

Though the female tenant base was diverse, they were united by their self-dependent status and small incomes. In general, 'women's work' was more precarious and wages significantly lower than their male counterparts, even for the higher professionals. In the strained post-1918 economic climate, availability was as much an issue as affordability, with even the smallest of the pre-existing flats now occupied by couples. The limited range of women's residential chambers and residential clubs pioneered since the 1880s were perpetually over-subscribed, and many of the larger hostels only accepted women under thirty. The majority of women were faced with living out their lives in cramped boarding house rooms, overseen by notoriously unsympathetic landladies openly expressing a preference for male lodgers, who often paid additional fees for laundry or catering. All such circumstances conspired to result in an insatiable demand for small, affordable one and two-room dwellings throughout the period.

The geographical focus of the research centres on London, more specifically within or just beyond the bounds of the former County of London and its twenty-eight constituent metropolitan boroughs.⁹ Although the housing issue for women workers was by no means confined to the capital, and was keenly felt in many British urban centres, it was the metropolis, with its rapidly expanding opportunities in government and commerce where the magnetic pull was strongest, drawing in large numbers of women from outlying or rural districts to the workplace, many seeking accommodation in this exciting but alien environment. Most public utility societies specialising in

⁹ The administrative County of London was first established under the Local Government Act 1888, with the London County Council as local authority (the Corporation in the City of London). In 1900, the district boards and civil parishes were amalgamated to form the 28 Metropolitan Boroughs. This was superseded in 1965 by the much-expanded Greater London area with 32 boroughs.

housing single women, documented in the National Archives, appear to have operated in the capital. The London locus also offers the best opportunity to explore continuities/ discontinuities with the earlier Victorian and Edwardian schemes. Moreover, flats as a dwelling type were almost exclusively confined to the London area between the wars, with most other municipal authorities not contemplating block dwellings as a mainstream housing solution until the late 1930s.¹⁰

This thesis aims to bring clarity to the terminology related to blocks of flats and various other multi-occupancy dwelling forms for single people, differentiating between similar types which tend to be glossed over in the existing literature such as common lodging houses, lodging houses and boarding houses or residential chambers, residential clubs and hostels. Understanding of women's flats and inter-war flats more generally suffers from anachronistic assumptions of 'flat' denoting a fully self-contained dwelling unit ranged over one level, contained within a multi-storey, multi-occupancy block. The use of the term 'flat' or 'flatlet' between the wars was not always applied consistently, and diverged somewhat from present-day definitions, being freely applied to accommodation types that shared sanitary amenities.

Literature Review

The Historiography of Inter-War Housing

The new housing schemes provided for single women have suffered a remarkably similar pattern of historiographical neglect. To date, the bulk of scholarly attention paid by architectural historians of the inter-war period has centred on Lloyd George's reconstruction programme and the various efforts under subsequent governments to improve the family housing stock for both the middle and working classes. Growing disillusionment with the achievements of architectural modernism during the 1970s effected a shift in architectural historical focus and a growing interest in past ideologies of housing, notably the transformation of British suburbs in the 1920s and 1930s. Mark Swenarton's *Homes Fit For Heroes* was amongst a number of published studies that went beyond the political and economic dimensions of housing provision to critically assess the design of suburban housing, as a product of both public and private enterprise.¹¹ These formed the basis for further specialised

¹⁰ Liverpool was the only other English city to embrace block dwellings in significant numbers between the wars: flats constituted around 40% of subsidised housing in London and 20% per cent Liverpool, whereas nationally the figure was barely 5%: Alison Ravetz, 'From Working Class Tenement to Modern Flat: Local Authorities and Multi-Storey Housing between the Wars', in *Multi-Storey Living: The British Working-Class Experience*, ed. by Anthony Sutcliffe (London; New-York: Croom Helm; Barnes & Noble, 1974), pp. 122-50.

¹¹ Swenarton, *Homes Fit for Heroes*. Other studies include Arthur M. Edwards, *The Design of Suburbia : A Critical Study in Environmental History*, (London: Pembroige Press, 1981); Paul Oliver, Ian Davis, and Ian Bentley, *Dunroamin : The Suburban Semi and Its Enemies*, (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1981).; Alan A. Jackson, *Semi-Detached London : Suburban Development, Life and Transport, 1900-39*, 2nd edn (Didcot: Wild Swan, 1991). For this historiographical development see Mark Swenarton, 'Tudor Walters and Tudorbethan: Reassessing Britain's Inter-War Suburbs', *Planning Perspectives*, 17 (2002).

monographs and articles such as Andrzej Olechnowicz's exploration of the delivery, design and social consequences of larger, outlying council estates like Becontree.¹²

This significant and expansive body of architectural historical research almost invariably centred around family homes, whether manifested in the local authority cottage or speculatively built suburban semi. In contrast, the historiography of blocks of flats and other multi-household dwelling types is still very much evolving. Research has focused on the post-Second World War mass housing high-rise blocks,¹³ or at the extremes of Victorian flat-building activity: model working-class tenement blocks provided through 'five per cent philanthropy', and the introduction of 'French Flats' and high-end apartments.¹⁴ Richard Dennis' work on mansion blocks offered much-needed analysis of the wide range of middle-class flats constructed in and around London during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, 'a substantial and still under-researched and under-appreciated sector of London's housing market'.¹⁵

The statement also applies to the inter-war period, where a comprehensive history of flats is still to be written. Most scholarly analysis has revolved around re-housing programmes for slum-dwelling families. Alison Ravetz was one of the earliest to consider the evolution of the flat type in this period, notably the emergence of municipal blocks which drew inspiration from European exemplars.¹⁶ Simon Pepper went on to examine the LCC's experimental Ossulston Estate (1925-9) in greater detail.¹⁷ Innovative blocks for working class families, brought to fruition through the combined efforts of voluntary organisations and commercial sponsorship, have been subjected to detailed analysis in recent decades, notably R. E. Sassoon House, Peckham (1934), conceived as part of the Pioneer Health Centre and 'Peckham Experiment', and Kensal House, Ladbroke Grove (1936), co-designed by housing consultant Elizabeth Denby and architect Maxwell Fry.¹⁸ At the other end of the social scale, luxury blocks by distinguished architects and patrons have featured in architectural surveys: the Park Lane flats of the Grosvenor Estate (1926-30) by Wimperis, Simpson and Guthrie with Edwin Lutyens as consulting architect, or Tecton's Highpoint I and II (1935-8) by Berthold

¹² Andrzej Olechnowicz, *Working-Class Housing in England between the Wars: The Becontree Estate*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).

¹³ For example, M. Glendinning and S. Muthesius, *Tower Block: Modern Public Housing in England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993); Florian Urban, *Tower and Slab: Histories of Global Mass Housing*, (London: Routledge, 2012).

¹⁴ This includes John Nelson Tarn, *Five Per Cent Philanthropy: An Account of Housing in Urban Areas between 1840 and 1914*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973).; Anthony Sutcliffe (ed.), *Multi-Storey Living: The British Working-Class Experience*, (London: New York: Croom Helm; Barnes & Noble, 1974).; Richard Dennis, 'Babylonian Flats' in Victorian and Edwardian London', *The London Journal*, 33 (2008).; Richard Dennis, 'Residential Flats: Densification in Victorian and Early Twentieth Century London', in *Mobilising Housing Histories: Learning from London's Past*, ed. by Peter Guillery and David Kroll (London: RIBA Publishing, 2017), pp. 75-90.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p.88.

¹⁶ Ravetz, 'From Working Class Tenement to Modern Flat'.

¹⁷ Simon Pepper, 'Ossulston Street: Early L.C.C. Experiments in High-Rise Housing, 1925-29', *London Journal*, 7 (1981).

¹⁸ Elizabeth Darling, *Re-Forming Britain: Narratives of Modernity before Reconstruction*, (London: Routledge, 2007). See also Mark Llewellyn, 'Urban Village' or 'White House': Envisioned Spaces, Experienced Places, and Everyday Life at Kensal House, London in the 1930s', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 22 (2004).

Lubetkin.¹⁹ The historiography of inter-war block dwellings in art deco or ‘streamlined moderne’ style remains surprisingly sparse. Elain Harwood’s recent survey has begun to fill this void, spotlighting such developments as Lichfield Court, Richmond-on-Thames (1934-5) which epitomised the new breed of sophisticated complexes for affluent professionals embracing all modern conveniences.²⁰ However, the broad range of architecturally distinctive, outer suburban ‘labour-saving’ flats which similarly sprung-up from the mid-1930s across outer suburban Metropolitan Boroughs like Balham, Streatham and Clapham, still await critical analysis.

Most developments considered comprised larger flats for families or couples. However, selective schemes aimed at the single professional have enjoyed a particularly high profile. The Isokon flats at Lawn Road, Hampstead (1933-4) designed by Wells Coates for Jack and Molly Pritchard, listed early at Grade II in 1974, roused interest from architectural and design historians alike.²¹ Though languishing in a state of disrepair for several decades, heightened appreciation of Modernist architecture in the twenty-first century, as well as an interest in its high-profile émigré occupants including Walter Gropius and László Moholy-Nagy, transformed this modest block into a magnet for research.²² Along with Frederick Gibberd’s Pullman Court, Streatham (1933-5) recently re-examined by Christine Hui Lan Manley, their influence on ‘minimum flats’ is widely acknowledged.²³ However, fundamental design concepts – one-room formats, spatial efficiency, compact kitchens, built-in furniture – owe much to earlier flats designed for single women. In many ways this is symptomatic of the much wider neglect of dwelling spaces for single occupancy by architects and architectural historians alike.²⁴ As Alan Powers observed ‘there are few contemporary house forms that give much dignity to the idea of living on one’s own’.²⁵ Much of the design impetus behind the women’s flats was to offer single working women, the majority living in cramped boarding house rooms, privacy and solace. This thesis thus offers a fresh, more inclusive perspective on the evolution of dwelling spaces designed for single occupancy and minimum-living, as well as a consideration of the processes which rendered so many examples less visible.

¹⁹ Julian Holder and Elizabeth McKellar (eds.), *Neo-Georgian Architecture 1880-1970: A Reappraisal*, (Swindon: Historic England, 2016).; Alan Powers and Morley Von Sternberg, *Modern: The Modern Movement in Britain*, (London: Merrell, 2005).

²⁰ Elain Harwood, *Art Deco Britain: Buildings of the Interwar Years*, (London: Batsford, 2019).

²¹ Sherban Cantacuzino, *Wells Coates, a Monograph*, (London: Gordon Fraser, 1978); Laura Cohn, *Wells Coates : Architect and Designer, 1895-1958*, (Oxford: Oxford Polytechnic Press, 1979); Cheryl Buckley, *Isokon : Architecture, Furniture and Graphic Design, 1931-1939*, (unpublished M.Litt thesis, University of Newcastle upon Tyne, 1981).

²² See for example Elizabeth Darling, *Wells Coates*, (London: RIBA, 2012).; Daniel Moore, 'A New Order Is Being Created: Domestic Modernism in 1930s Britain', *Modernist Cultures*, 11 (2016)., 409-428; Leyla Daybelge and Magnus Englund, *Isokon and the Bauhaus in Britain*, (London: Batsford, 2019). The Isokon flats have increasingly been lauded as a prototype for ‘minimal living’ with a dedicated museum founded in 2014.

²³ Christine Hui Lan Manley, *Frederick Gibberd*, (Swindon: Historic England, 2017).

²⁴ Creative retreats and studios have received attention, for example Victoria Rosner, 'The House That Virginia Woolf Built (and Rebuilt)', in *Machines for Living : Modernism and Domestic Life*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 240-57.; Elisabeth Vellacott’s studio (1959), Huntingdonshire discussed in Elizabeth McKellar, 'All Roof, No Wall: Peter Boston, A-Frames and the Primitive Hut in Twentieth-Century British Architecture, c.1890-1970', *Architectural History*, 62 (2019)., 237-269, (pp.248-52).

²⁵ *Ibid*, p.252; Alan Powers, 'At Home With Her Art', *Country Life*, 12 Sep 2002, pp.160-3.

Housing for Single Women

The first steps to recover the history of organisations supplying purpose-built blocks and flat conversions for single working women were taken in the 1980s in unpublished studies: Hilary Daniels and Jean Richardson's institutional history of the Over Forty Association, and Dorothy Field's masters study of the UWHA.²⁶ Lynn Pearson's book on *The Architectural and Social History of Cooperative Living* included a historical overview of the housing type from the late-nineteenth to early twentieth centuries.²⁷ Since then, the inter-war women's schemes have largely fallen through the net, one notable exception being Isobel Watson's research into the career of flat-building entrepreneurs like Abraham Davis, which discussed his unprecedented foray into flats for single women.²⁸ However, their Victorian and Edwardian architectural precedents were recently re-examined by Emily Gee. Grounded in her listing work for Historic England, Gee's article and chapter provided the most sustained analysis to date of this earlier period.²⁹ They traced the evolution of this new urban building type in London, demonstrating the distinct moral and spatial challenges involved in developing suitable, affordable accommodation options for women across a variety of built examples, including lesser-known developments designed by the emerging specialist R. Stephen Ayling. Gee's conservation appraisal touched upon post-First World War examples such as Furnival House, Highgate (1919), constructed for employees of the Prudential Assurance Company, and Lutyens' headquarters building for the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), Bloomsbury (1928-30), which provided accommodation on its upper floors. The current project expands this initial pioneering research, applying in-depth scholarly analysis to the range of new women's housing provided in London up to the outbreak of war in 1939. Focusing on the work of this next generation of women's housing reformers also allows an assessment of the continuities/discontinuities with the earlier women's schemes.

As these studies demonstrated, homes for women workers were not just confined to the metropolis but also built in the expanding suburbs. The turn towards architectural conservation in the late 1970s prompted a renewed appreciation of the architectural legacy of the garden city movement and utopian ideals of Ebenezer Howard. The master-planning of Raymond Unwin and the ethos of housing reformer Henrietta Barnett amongst others, underpinned new research into

²⁶ Hilary Daniels and Jean Richardson, *A Place of Her Own: Work and Housing for the Older Woman*, (London: The Over Forty Association, 1983).; Dorothy Field, "'A Home of One's Own': The United Women's Homes Association and Housing for Single Working Women", (Unpublished masters dissertation, University College London, 1986).

²⁷ Lynn F. Pearson, *The Architectural and Social History of Cooperative Living*, (London: Macmillan, 1988).

²⁸ Isobel Watson, 'Rebuilding London: Abraham Davis and His Brothers, 1881-1924', *The London Journal*, 29 (2004), 62-84 The Research for heritage projects by the Holly Lodge Estate Residents' Association, and Women's Pioneer Housing are further exceptions.

²⁹ Emily Gee, "'Where Shall She Live?': The History and Designation of Housing for Working Women in London 1880-1925", *Journal of Architectural Conservation*, 15 (2009), 27-46; Emily Gee, "'Where Shall She Live?': Housing the New Working Woman in Late Victorian and Edwardian London", in *Living, Leisure and Law: Eight Building Types in England 1800-1941*, ed. by Geoff Brandwood (Reading: Spire Books, 2010), pp. 89-109.

the development of Letchworth and Welwyn Garden Cities and the Hampstead Garden Suburb.³⁰ This generated further nuanced studies, notably Iain Borden's analysis of the spatial arrangements of flats for couples within Homesgarth, one of the co-housekeeping quadrangles at Letchworth.³¹ Waterlow Court, Hampstead Garden Suburb (1909) is probably the best-known Edwardian development for professional women. Erected by the Improved Industrial Dwellings Company, its carefully crafted, neo-vernacular cloistered form and the pedigree of designer M.H. Baillie-Scott ensured its architectural recognition early on with Grade II* designation in 1965. However, inter-war additions such as Queen's Court, Hampstead Way (1927) and Emmott Close, Wildwood Road (1928), designed by Hendry and Schooling for the UWHA, have received comparatively less attention. There has also been limited exploration of the connections between garden city ideology and housing schemes for single women, for example through the Women's Section of the Garden Cities and Town Planning Association (GCTPA) chaired by Lady Gertrude Emmott.³² The current research project throws further light on these lesser-known schemes and individuals and explores the cross-fertilisation of ideas amongst the inter-war women's housing committees, and how they were manifested in designs of women's flats.

Women joining the workplace and in need of accommodation was not only a London-based phenomenon. As the pages of contemporary periodicals like *Work and Leisure* or the *Woman's Herald* illustrate, comparable housing initiatives sprung up across Britain's urban centres from the 1870s onwards.³³ Inter-war schemes were also provided nationally, WPH venturing to Brighton, and the UWHA branching out even further in its coverage. Whilst these schemes are largely absent from the literature, the insights of architectural historians looking beyond the British Isles at comparable initiatives are valuable, notably the parallel path followed across the Atlantic. Jeanne Lawrence's study of the establishment of residential clubs for single women wage-earners in early twentieth-century Chicago reveals close similarities.³⁴ The *Eleanor Clubs* established by the philanthropist Ina Robertson in 1898, were provided in a series of progressively larger converted buildings, culminating in two purpose-built blocks in the 1920s. Lawrence emphasised how adaptive re-use acted as a means of experimentation in an evolutionary journey towards the 'ideal', bespoke accommodations for single women. Residential clubs rose to prominence in London during the same period, and adapting buildings was also a common vehicle for experimentation. This thesis

³⁰ For example Mervyn Miller, *Letchworth : The First Garden City*, (Chichester: Phillimore, 1989).; C. W. Ikin and Brigid Grafton Green, *Hampstead Garden Suburb : Dreams and Realities*, (London: New Hampstead Garden Suburb Trust, 1990).

³¹ Iain Borden, 'Social Space and Cooperative Housekeeping in the English Garden City', *Journal of Architectural Planning Research*, 16 (1999), 242-257.

³² Emmott, president of UWHA, chaired the 1918 Women's Housing Sub-Committee and subsequent housing bodies. For the GCTPA see Dennis Hardy, *From Garden Cities to New Towns : Campaigning for Town and Country Planning, 1899-1946*, (London: E & FN Spon, 1991).

³³ See for example Mrs Beddoe's schemes at Bristol: *Work and Leisure*, Mar 1889, p.285; accommodation at Leeds: *Woman's Herald*, 19 Sep 1891, p.765.

³⁴ Jeanne Catherine Lawrence, 'Chicago's Eleanor Clubs: Housing Working Women in the Early Twentieth Century', *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture*, 8 (2000).

presents an opportunity to trace the architectural evolution of such women's accommodation in London.

Institutional Residential Environments for Single Women

Women working and living away from home in a range of shared accommodation types, likewise, bear useful comparison. Many of these shared the same moral, gendered design considerations as the flats examined in this thesis. Martha Vicinus' study of women's working communities between 1850 and 1920 provides the most comprehensive study to date of a range of alternative domestic environments occupied by single women: residential halls at women's colleges; settlement houses; sisterhoods and deaconesses' houses; residences for hospital-based nurses; and accommodation for teachers at reformed boarding schools.³⁵ Analysis centred on the economic, social, emotional and spiritual significance of such institutions for their women occupants and wider society. However, female communities established in residential chambers, residential clubs and hostels during the same period only received a brief discussion in the Appendix. The architectural and social history of the women's university colleges was explored in greater depth by Margaret Birney Vickery.³⁶ To garner support and social acceptance for women students, Vickery contends that designs closely simulated middle-class domestic environments, drawing on country houses as much as the Oxbridge model. The post-1918 legislative gains for women university students necessitated further expansion of both teaching and residential facilities, but the evolution of women's university residences in this period has been less-studied. The Deneke building (1932) for instance, an addition to Lady Margaret Hall, University of Oxford, containing residences for female undergraduates, was considered by Gavin Stamp but only as an element of Giles Gilbert Scott's oeuvre.³⁷ Likewise, Andrew Saint's account of the relocation of medieval Crosby Hall (1466) from Bishopsgate to the Chelsea embankment at the turn of the century as part of Patrick Geddes' vision of a university city for London neglected the plans for experimental, self-governed residential chambers for professional women and students within the complex.³⁸ This thesis demonstrates the parallels that can be drawn between the spatial and formal planning of university accommodation and flat developments for women, many of which deployed the quadrangular collegiate format.

The University Settlement Movement, founded by Samuel and Henrietta Barnett, established a new type of urban institution with residential accommodation allowing university men, and later women, to work and live amongst the poor of Whitechapel. By 1914 there were twenty-seven settlements in London and thirty-nine nationwide. Deborah Weiner's architectural

³⁵ Martha Vicinus, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women, 1850-1920*, (London: Virago, 1985).

³⁶ Margaret Birney Vickery, *Buildings for Bluestockings: The Architecture and Social History of Women's Colleges in Late Victorian England*, (London: Associated University Presses Inc., 1999).

³⁷ Gavin Stamp, 'Sir Giles Gilbert Scott in Oxbridge', in *Oxford and Cambridge (Twentieth Century Architecture 11)*, ed. by Elaine Harwood, Alan Powers, and Otto Saumarez Smith (London: The Twentieth Century Society, 2013), pp. 30-51.

³⁸ Andrew Saint, 'Ashbee, Geddes, Lethaby and the Rebuilding of Crosby Hall', *Architectural History*, 34 (1991). See Alice Zimmern, 'Ladies' Dwellings', *The Contemporary Review*, 77 (1900), pp.103-4.

analysis of Toynbee Hall (1883), the first settlement designed by Elijah Hoole, emphasised the traditional Oxbridge planning of the inner courtyard and communal rooms which exuded the domestic comforts of a refined Victorian country house. Scholarly interpretation of accommodation for women graduates at Bermondsey or the Women's University Settlement, Southwark is yet to be investigated. This thesis explores links between Barnett's ideology to 'bring the best to the lowest' within the settlements, with her determined desire for social inclusivity at Hampstead Garden Suburb which underpinned her support for women's schemes.³⁹

The residential blocks designed by the Ministry of Health architects to house female munitions workers at Gretna, Scotland, during the First World War have been considered by Chris Brader.⁴⁰ His research demonstrated the spatial and social hierarchies which operated across temporary hostels which often became permanently occupied buildings by the end of the war. The installation of lady superintendents and matrons reflected the paternalistic/maternalistic regime developed in many of the London women's hostels. The segregation of men and women in these various types of residential environment also prompts exploration of the contrasts and similarities in design and experience across single-sex accommodations in post-1918 London.

Women Shaping the Built Environment

Second-wave feminism of the 1960s and 1970s, and the development of women's history as an interdisciplinary field, encouraged many architectural historians to re-assess women's contribution to the built environment from a feminist perspective. Lynne Walker's pioneering research since the 1980s has recovered the work and reputations of many under-acknowledged women architects.⁴¹ Since then, a range of further studies have continued to expand understanding, for instance examining the careers of women who studied at the Architectural Association, the prestigious London training institution which barred women students until 1917.⁴² So far there has been limited exposure for those from the first wave of post-World War One qualified architects who became involved in women's housing. Gertrude Leverkus, for example, was the first woman to qualify through the Bartlett School of Architecture, University College London, as an associate of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), and one of the first two women to gain fellowship status. Whilst her career achievements were recently highlighted by Rebecca Spaven during the Bartlett's centenary history project and in Jane Robinson's survey of pioneering women

³⁹ Deborah E. B. Weiner, 'The Architecture of Victorian Philanthropy: The Settlement House as Manorial Residence', *Art History*, 13 (1990), 212-227.

⁴⁰ Chris Brader, 'Timbertown Girls: Gretna Female Munitions Workers in World War I', (unpublished PhD thesis, Warwick University, 2001).

⁴¹ For example Lynne Walker (ed.), *Women Architects: Their Work*, (London: Sorella, 1984).; Lynne Walker, 'The Entry of Women into the Architectural Profession in Britain', *Woman's Art Journal*, 7 (1986), 13-18; Lynne Walker, 'Golden Age or False Dawn? Women Architects in the Early 20th Century', (2012), <<https://historicingland.org.uk/content/docs/research/women-architects-early-20th-century-pdf>> [accessed 30 Oct 2023].

⁴² Elizabeth Darling and Lynne Walker, *AA Women in Architecture 1917-2017*, (London: Architectural Association, 2017).

professionals, *Ladies Can't Climb Ladders*, her architectural projects have never been fully examined.⁴³ By analysing Leverkus' designs for WPH women's flats, prepared over the course of two decades (1923-1943), this thesis partially rectifies this oversight.

The twenty-first century has seen historians of the built environment increasingly look beyond the restrictive confines of the architectural profession, to consider women's agency through a range of specialised roles. Opening the field to women designers more generally, Jill Seddon investigated the impact of professionalisation between 1920 and 1951. Far from enhancing career prospects, Seddon argued that this marked the marginalisation of many women shaping domestic environments during the period.⁴⁴ Elizabeth Darling and Lesley Whitworth's interdisciplinary collection *Women and the Making of Built Space in England* broadened the sources of female agency further still, consciously preferring 'making' rather than 'designing'; a term strongly associated with the architectural profession. For example, Elizabeth Denby's role as 'housing consultant' was not only instrumental in the design of model housing of the 1930s, but also in conceptualising the ideal *All-Europe* home.⁴⁵ Current scholarship continues to uncover further women protagonists, professional and non-professional, who shaped the built environment, including Elizabeth McKellar's research into the architectural projects of self-trained builder/designer Annabel Dott, and Luca Csepely-Knorr's work on women landscape architects.⁴⁶ Providing further proof that women were not always the passive end-users of homes being designed on their behalf by men, many inter-war women's housing initiatives were conceived and developed by women possessing expertise in building and design rather than practising as certified architects. The current project thus expands upon these efforts to foreground women with a broader skill base as primary agents of change in London's built environment.

In the 1980s, architectural historians also began to interrogate women's significant contribution to the sphere of domestic design. This was led by Dolores Hayden's highly influential 1981 examination of women, 'material feminists' as she termed them, re-defining the domestic environments of nineteenth and early twentieth-century North America.⁴⁷ Further studies followed including the ground-breaking *Making Space: Women and the Man-Made Environment* by the

⁴³ Jane Robinson, *Ladies Can't Climb Ladders: The Pioneering Adventures of the First Professional Women*, (London: Transworld, 2020). Rebecca Spaven has since compiled an *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (hereafter *ODNB*) entry for Leverkus.

⁴⁴ Jill Seddon, 'Mentioned, but Denied Significance: Women Designers and the 'Professionalisation' of Design in Britain C.1920-1951', *Gender & History*, 12 (2000), 426-447.

⁴⁵ Elizabeth Darling and Lesley Whitworth (eds.), *Women and the Making of Built Space in England, 1870-1950*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).; Elizabeth Darling, "'The Star in the Profession She Invented for Herself': A Brief Biography of Elizabeth Denby, Housing Consultant", *Planning Perspectives*, 20 (2005), 271-300.

⁴⁶ Elizabeth McKellar, 'Annabel Dott and Colonial, Metropolitan and Rural communities', in *Reconstruction: Architecture, Society and the Aftermath of the First World War*, ed. by Neal Shasore and Jessica Kelly (London: Bloomsbury, 2023), pp. 219-40.; See for example Luca Csepely-Knorr, 'Female Landscape Architects and the Independent Landscape Institute' (Women's History Network Annual Conference 'Professional Women: The Public, the Private, and the Political', London School of Economics, 2019). Growing academic interest was also demonstrated by the multidisciplinary conference 'How Women Build' (Manchester School of Architecture, 2020 – postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic).

⁴⁷ Dolores Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods, and Cities*, (Cambridge, MA: M.I.T., 1981).

feminist architectural cooperative Matrix. This included Barbara McFarlane's essay 'Homes Fit for Heroines: Housing in the Twenties', one of the first to scrutinise the work of the Women's Housing Sub-Committee, an all-woman advisory body appointed to the Ministry of Reconstruction in 1918.⁴⁸ Tasked with assessing recently constructed public housing and specifications for further family dwellings, its appointment represented the first formal consultation of women on housing design. McFarlane demonstrated how the impact of their detailed findings was blunted by housing enablers at both central and municipal levels, drawing parallels between the extent of women's agency in the 1920s and 1980s. Taking a longer view of women's contribution since the nineteenth century, Alison Ravetz argued that women's input into housing design 'never surpassed the peak reached by the Sub Committee'.⁴⁹ Focusing on an international selection of homes by high-profile architects, half from the 1920s, Alice T. Friedman's later research pointed to women's patronage as an important catalyst for innovative domestic design in avant-garde environments.⁵⁰

Darling was one of the first to draw links between the spatial configurations of 1930s family homes and women's citizenship, in the wake of fuller political participation afforded by the Equal Franchise Act of 1928.⁵¹ Approaching from a different disciplinary angle, historians concerned with the impact of the new directions in feminism, New or Equality, after the First World War, have similarly made connections between women's growing influence in the sphere of domestic design and their political activism and citizenship. Cheryl Law's study of the Women's Movement in the aftermath of the Representation of the People Act 1918 emphasised the continued vitality of activism, recovering the work of a multitude of women's organisations whose campaigns for emancipation went beyond universal suffrage to embrace all aspects of women's lives, including housing.⁵² Caitríona Beaumont went on to highlight the important contribution made to housing design by voluntary organisations including the YWCA, as a means to foster younger women's active citizenship.⁵³ Karen Hunt demonstrated the ways in which women identifying themselves as socialist or Labour Women harnessed the political potentialities of working class women's homes, campaigning for better housing as a means to win political allegiance.⁵⁴ Revisiting the impact of the 1918 Women's Sub-Committee, Krista Cowman reassessed the social and political profile of its committee members, and their recommendations for three of the most contested domestic spaces:

⁴⁸ Barbara McFarlane, 'Homes Fit for Heroines: Housing in the Twenties', in *Making Space: Women and the Man-Made Environment*, ed. by Matrix (London: Pluto Press, 1984), pp. 26-36.

⁴⁹ Alison Ravetz, 'A View from the Interior', in *A View from the Interior: Feminism, Women and Design History*, ed. by Judy Attfield and Pat Kirkham (London: The Women's Press, 1989), pp. 187-205.

⁵⁰ Alice T. Friedman, *Women and the Making of the Modern House: A Social and Architectural History*, (London: Harry N. Abrams, 1998).

⁵¹ Elizabeth Darling, 'A Citizen as Well as a Housewife: New Spaces of Femininity in 1930s London', in *Negotiating Domesticity: Spatial Productions of Gender in Modern Architecture*, ed. by Hilde Heynen and Gulsum Baydar (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 49-64.

⁵² Cheryl Law, *Suffrage and Power: The Women's Movement, 1918-1928*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 1997).

⁵³ Caitríona Beaumont, "'Where to Park the Pram'?: Voluntary Women's Organisations, Citizenship and the Campaign for Better Housing in England, 1928-1945', *Women's History Review*, 22 (2013), 75-96.

⁵⁴ Karen Hunt, 'Gendering the Politics of the Working Woman's Home', in *Women and the Making of Built Space in England, 1870-1950*, ed. by Elizabeth Darling and Lesley Whitworth (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 107-22.

the kitchen/scullery, bathroom and parlour.⁵⁵ For Cowman, the essential underlying motivation of the committee was to transform the home from 'a site of domestic drudgery to one of empowerment where active and respectable female citizens could be produced'. In this view, refining the optimal domestic layout post-1918 was less about household productivity, more a catalyst for active political participation.

What all these works hold in common is a focus on moves to improve the family home in its various forms, mainly working-class, and from the 'housewife's point of view'. Although Law acknowledged the involvement of women campaigners in running and supporting single women's housing schemes like WPH, overall historical evaluation in this arena has been sparse. Darling and Nathaniel Walker's latest essay collection *Suffragette City* has broadened the study of women's political activism and its impact on the urban built environment through a wider, global range of case studies.⁵⁶ The research in the current thesis draws upon this developing analytical framework, connecting political motivations and design aspirations in the context of this neglected housing type. Offering new insights into relatively unknown women activists and women's organisations will also enhance the existing knowledge base and help to disentangle the complex web of women's networks operating during the inter-war period. As David Doughan and Peter Gordon pointed out, information, even for prominent and well-known women's organisations, 'is often scattered, partial (in both senses), or so exiguous as to be almost non-existent'.⁵⁷ Analysis of women's housing as a vehicle to enable independent lives will also help to promote interdisciplinary connections, bringing together housing history, women's history and feminist critique.

Labour-Saving, Efficiency and Other Discourses in Domestic Design

The increasingly prominent role played by the kitchen as a site of design change after 1918, has been a frequent subject for enquiry, as architectural historians have sought to understand the influences and motivation behind the drive towards household efficiency, Taylorist scientific management and labour-saving in design. Nicholas Bullock for example, was one of the first to analyse the impact of American publications like efficiency expert Christine Frederick's 1913 *The New Housekeeping: Efficiency Studies in Home Management*, particularly in Germany.⁵⁸ He has shown how the kitchen and kitchen ergonomics became a central issue for proponents of rationalisation in German housing design of the 1920s, as a means to promote the productivity and professionalism of the housewife. Susan Henderson emphasised the universal impact of scientifically devised, space-conscious fitted kitchens, notably Viennese architect Margarete

⁵⁵ Krista Cowman, "'From the Housewife's Point of View': Female Citizenship and the Gendered Domestic Interior in Post-First World War Britain, 1918-1928', *The English Historical Review*, 130 (2015), 352-383.

⁵⁶ Elizabeth Darling and Nathaniel Walker (eds.), *Suffragette City: Women, Politics, and the Built Environment*, (London: Routledge, 2019).

⁵⁷ Peter Gordon and David Doughan, *Dictionary of British Women's Organisations, 1825-1960*, (London: Woburn, 2001), Introduction.

⁵⁸ Nicholas Bullock, 'First the Kitchen – Then the Façade', *Journal of Design History*, 1 (1988), 177-192.

Schütte-Lihotzky's 1926 Frankfurt Kitchen, mass-produced for Ernst May's municipal housing estates.⁵⁹ Examining the British experience, design historian Deborah Sugg Ryan has shown how similar ideas proffered during and after the First World War by household advice writers like Dorothy Peel in her *The Labour-Saving House*, exerted a considerable influence on domestic design, particularly the kitchen.⁶⁰ The impact of Peel's many editorials and publications on household management on domestic planning, and her roles on the 1918 Women's Housing Sub-Committee; and in the establishment of the Pioneer Health Centre project, Peckham, have been recognised.⁶¹ However, her efforts in the sphere of women's housing, as a long-serving member of the WPH executive, are also highlighted in this thesis.

Reassessing the impact of American, European and home-grown ideas in Britain, cultural geographer Mark Llewellyn has considered the configuration of architectural space in kitchens conceived by Elizabeth Denby in the 1930s, and Jane Drew after the war. For Llewellyn, although the leap towards labour-saving, efficiency and modernity attempted by both designers was ambitious, for women users, 'the experience of the kitchen was somewhat different than the theory'.⁶² Studies such as these currently focus on family environments. How discourses surrounding kitchen efficiency and rationalisation played out in the design of homes for women living alone is considered in this thesis, as well as the lived experience of kitchen space known variously in the schemes as *kitchenettes*, *pantry kitchens*, *scullerettes* or *work rooms*.

Space and Spatial Practice: Social Identities and Meanings in Design

The innovative work of architectural theorists on the social construction of space has offered historians new analytical approaches with which to approach class, gender and other themes in their research. It has been influential for architectural and design historians wishing to theorise the design changes which took place in the inter-war domestic environment.⁶³ Focusing on urban flats in 1930s London, Darling has recently discussed representations of class, sexuality and home in three residential scenarios.⁶⁴ Heteronormative, marital-sexual relationships were perpetuated through the promotion of private bedroom space in these flats, or conversely, was used to mask

⁵⁹ Susan R. Henderson, 'A Revolution in the Woman's Sphere: Grete Lihotzky and the Frankfurt Kitchen', in *Architecture and Feminism*, ed. by Debra Coleman, Elizabeth Danze, and Carol Henderson (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996), pp. 221-48. See also Tim Benton, *The Modernist Home*, (London: V&A Publications, 2006).

⁶⁰ Mrs. C. S. Peel, *The Labour Saving House*, (London: John Lane, 1918). See Deborah Sugg Ryan, *Ideal Homes, 1918-39: Domestic Design and Suburban Modernism*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), p.30 and pp.101-6

⁶¹ See Darling, *Re-Forming Britain*, pp.96-7 and p.150

⁶² Mark Llewellyn, 'Designed by Women and Designing Women: Gender, Planning and the Geographies of the Kitchen in Britain 1917-1946', *Cultural Geographies*, 11 (2004), 42-60, (p.55).

⁶³ See Beatriz Colomina, 'Sexuality & Space', (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992).; Louise Durning and Richard Wrigley (eds.), *Gender and Architecture: History, Interpretation and Practice*, (Chichester: Wiley, 2000).; Jane Rendell, Barbara Penner, and Iain Borden (eds.), *Gender Space Architecture: An Interdisciplinary Introduction*, (London: Routledge, 2000).; Hilde Heynen and Gulsum Baydar (eds.), *Negotiating Domesticity: Spatial Productions of Gender in Modern Architecture*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005).

⁶⁴ Elizabeth Darling, 'Class, Sexuality and Home in Inter-War London', in *Sexuality and Gender at Home: Experience, Politics, Transgression*, ed. by Brent Pilkey, et al. (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), pp. 19-34.

non-conforming occupants. Deborah Sugg Ryan's research on inter-war domestic design and the evolving conception of the 'ideal home' has examined the contents, decoration and spatial layout of the archetypal, middle-class suburban home. Her work demonstrated the forging of new class and gender identities, arguing that suburban modernity was constructed as a fusion of old and new: past notions of nation and Empire, and modern ideas of technology and labour-saving.⁶⁵ With a focus on material culture, Ryan's work underlines the significance of materiality and lived experience in analysing these built spaces. Lively design debates relating to new inter-war family homes, surrounding such issues as kitchen furniture, bathroom location or the necessity for parlours, raged throughout the period. However, the spatial and material considerations for small flats, particularly those for single women, have been largely neglected.

Social and cultural historians considering gender and class across a variety of historical periods have also placed spatial and material dimensions centre stage. Jane Hamlett has explored spatial arrangements and material conditions to research life in three Victorian and Edwardian institutional types: asylums, boarding schools and lodging houses.⁶⁶ In each, Hamlett argues, residential space often deliberately evoked domesticity, whilst configurations ensured strict control. Work co-authored with Rebecca Preston focusing again on the Rowton Houses is relevant for comparing working men's and women's spatial experience.⁶⁷ In her recent reassessment of the University Settlement Movement, Lucinda Matthews-Jones employed similar methods via her 'room biography approach' to interpret how various spaces within Toynbee Hall acted 'as active participants in the formation of settlement sociality'.⁶⁸ Although architectural types and timeframes differ, analyses of spatial regulation and privacy in these institutions offer insightful methods for investigating women's housing.

Terri Mullholland's recent insight into women's experience of inter-war boarding house rooms, as expressed in novels by writers including Winifred Holtby and Dorothy Richardson, is similarly relevant. At the intersection of literary and spatial theory, her research considers how the interiors of these 'alternative domestic spaces' were used to explore interiority, a pervasive theme in literary modernism. Mullholland contends that this emerging body of inter-war literature constituted a distinct literary sub-genre; a discursive medium through which to debate social change.⁶⁹ Turning to the two decades after the Second World War, Alistair Cartwright's research

⁶⁵ Ryan, *Ideal Homes, 1918-39: Domestic Design and Suburban Modernism*; Deborah Sugg Ryan, *The Ideal Home through the 20th Century*, (London: Hazar, 1997).

⁶⁶ Jane Hamlett, *At Home in the Institution: Material Life in Asylums, Lodging Houses and Schools in Victorian and Edwardian England*, (London: Palgrave MacMillan UK, 2014).

⁶⁷ Jane Hamlett and Rebecca Preston, "'A Veritable Palace for the Hard-Working Labourer?': Space, Material Culture and Inmate Experience in London's Rowton Houses, 1892-1918", in *Residential Institutions in Britain, 1725-1970: Inmates and Environments*, ed. by Jane Hamlett, Lesley Hoskins, and Rebecca Preston (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2013), pp. 93-108.

⁶⁸ Lucinda Matthews-Jones, 'Settling at Home: Gender and Class in the Room Biographies of Toynbee Hall, 1883-1914', *Victorian Studies*, 60 (2017), 29-52

⁶⁹ Terri Mullholland, *British Boarding Houses in Interwar Women's Literature: Alternative Domestic Spaces*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016).

also investigates experiential aspects of life in rented lodgings, for both men and women across various forms of shared dwelling. Inter-disciplinary analysis, combining archival valuation lists and rent tribunals and representations in visual culture, including popular films, architectural exhibits and maps, has allowed nuanced readings of neglected architectural features such as internal walls and partitions.⁷⁰ As this thesis demonstrates, the phenomenon of the insubstantial, noise-transferring partition persisted as one of the major material drawbacks and defining features of 'flat-living', especially in adapted buildings. Detailed examination of spatial practices deployed in a range of inter-war flats designated for unmarried women working in London will add another dimension to this body of work, contributing a further domestic category to this developing field of enquiry.

Architectural Historical Approaches

Overall, the inter-war built environment has been less comprehensively studied than other historical periods, often viewed as a period of uninspiring historicism before British designers fully grasped the potential of International Modernism after the Second World War. Such perceptions owe much to the sway of Nicholas Pevsner amongst others, in the shaping of the twentieth-century architectural historical canon, through the curation of inter-war buildings for heritage listing in the 1970s and in their coverage and treatment in the volumes of *Buildings of England*.⁷¹ One symptom was an undue emphasis on building projects connected with high-profile émigrés. However, over the last two decades architectural historians have increasingly promoted more considered and inclusive approaches to the period.⁷² Initial efforts focused on expanding the accepted British modern movement corpus by including overlooked buildings and designers in surveys of the period.⁷³ Further studies, such as Elizabeth Darling's *Re-forming Britain: Narratives of Modernity Before Reconstruction*, promoted a much broader conception of inter-war modernism, examining and highlighting the significance of many lesser-known architectural projects and protagonists.⁷⁴ In recent years there have also been more comprehensive reappraisals of Neo-Georgian and Art Deco-styled buildings which hitherto tended to be overshadowed by Modernist counterparts.⁷⁵ Indeed, it has only been within the last ten years that such built examples have been routinely heritage-listed. The current thesis builds upon these more inclusive approaches and interpretations of inter-war architecture.

⁷⁰ Alistair Cartwright, 'Life between Walls: Race, Subdivision and Lodging Houses in Postwar London', *Architectural Histories*, 8 (2020), 1-16; Alistair Cartwright, 'Rented Worlds: Bedsits, Boarding Houses and Multiple Occupancy Homes in Postwar London, 1945-1963', (doctoral thesis, University of London: ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2020).

⁷¹ See Bridget Cherry, 'The "Pevsner 50": Nikolaus Pevsner and the Listing of Modern Buildings', *Transactions of the Ancient Monuments Society*, 46 (2002), 99-110

⁷² For example Neal Shasore and Jessica Kelly (eds.), *Reconstruction: Architecture, Society and the Aftermath of the First World War* (London: Bloomsbury, 2023).

⁷³ See for example Powers and Von Sternberg, *Modern: The Modern Movement in Britain*.

⁷⁴ Darling, *Re-Forming Britain*.

⁷⁵ For example, Holder and McKellar, *Neo-Georgian Architecture*; Harwood, *Art Deco Britain*.

The architectural historical discipline has increasingly embraced social context and spatial theory and has begun to adopt a broader view of authorship, calling into question the traditional veneration of prestigious projects by heroic, male 'starchitects'.⁷⁶ However, the exclusive focus on newly-built structures has largely endured. Long-embraced in such fields as historical archaeology, adapted buildings remain largely uncharted territory for many architectural historians. The layering of successive building phases often presents significant difficulties in terms of reading and interpretation. Moreover, although buildings of all types are regularly re-modelled and spaces re-configured, the processes and products of adaptive re-use are generally deemed of lower status than new build and are rarely afforded a place in architectural histories. Kenneth Powell's international survey of adapted buildings, ranging from a German munitions factory to an Edinburgh mews house, was one of the earliest to promote the idea of 'transformation' as he termed it, as a positive, forward-looking practice.⁷⁷ In the last few years, the growing appreciation for adaptive re-use has also been reflected at the highest levels of architectural practice. In 2021, the Pritzker Architecture Prize, widely regarded as architecture's highest honour, was awarded jointly to Anne Lacaton and Jean-Philippe Vassal, architects whose body of work regularly eschews the destructive forces of demolition and reconstruction in favour of the remodelling of existing buildings.⁷⁸ Likewise, four of the seven architect-designed houses shortlisted in 2022 for RIBA's prestigious House of the Year award, constituted adaptations of existing buildings.⁷⁹

More recent studies have ventured beyond the perceived point of 'completion', centring research on the 'afterlife' of buildings and the impact of user interaction on architectural form and space.⁸⁰ The architectural dimensions and economic, social and cultural implications arising from the time-honoured practice of subdividing former single-family housing to accommodate multiple households have also begun to be interrogated in greater depth. Gillian Williamson has recently examined lodgers and lodging houses in Georgian London, exploring social relations, spatial and material conditions through advertisements, diaries and emphasising the significance of this widespread, embedded eighteenth-century practice.⁸¹ Other architectural historians have focused on women-led urban initiatives which adapt rather than re-build.⁸² Conversions of larger houses

⁷⁶ For an account see Dana Arnold, *Reading Architectural History*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2002).

⁷⁷ Kenneth Powell, *Architecture Reborn: The Conversion and Reconstruction of Old Buildings*, (London: Laurence King, 1999).

⁷⁸ The Pritzker Architecture Prize: Laureates, <<https://www.pritzkerprize.com/laureates/anne-lacaton-and-jean-philippe-vassal>> [accessed 24 Jan 2023].

⁷⁹ RIBA House of the Year 2022, shortlist, <<https://www.architecture.com/awards-and-competitions-landing-page/awards/riba-house-of-the-year>> [accessed 24 Jan 2023].

⁸⁰ For example Daniel Maudlin and Marcel Vellinga (eds.), 'Consuming Architecture: On the Occupation, Appropriation and Interpretation of Buildings', (London: Routledge, 2014).; Nora Lefa and Pavlos Lefas, *Buildings Used: Human Interactions with Architecture*, (London: Routledge, 2020).; See also Janina Gosseye, Naomi Stead, and Deborah van der Plaats (eds.), 'Speaking of Buildings: Oral History in Architectural Research', (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2020)., Introduction

⁸¹ Gillian Williamson, *Lodgers, Landlords and Landladies in Georgian London*, (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021).

⁸² Elizabeth Darling, 'An Urban Experiment in Spiritual Motherhood: Gender, Class and Reform in Edwardian Edinburgh', in *Suffragette City: Women, Politics and the Built Environment*, ed. by Elizabeth Darling and Nathaniel Walker (London:

into small flats represent a significant proportion of the women's schemes of the inter-war years; their inclusion is therefore central to creating a complete narrative. As Marta Gutman contended, '...incremental construction, renovations, alterations, additions, and repurposed structures are central to the understanding of modern cities'.⁸³ In covering and giving equal weight to adapted as well as purpose-built schemes, this thesis similarly adopts a distinctive departure in approach. It also presents conversion, not simply as a pragmatic, less desirable option, but as a crucial ground for experimentation in housing design.

The relative neglect of inter-war flats highlights issues surrounding hierarchies of value as well as broader issues surrounding the formation of the architectural historical canon, and the perceived worthiness of some buildings and types for academic analysis. Studies such as Peter Guillery's *Built From Below* challenged this perspective, expanding the traditional notion of the vernacular and encouraging research into more 'everyday' elements of the built environment, including inter-war mass housing.⁸⁴ A more recent edited collection co-authored with David Kroll, *Mobilising Housing Histories*, offered a range of analyses of less-acknowledged historical housing models, all possessing the potential to enlighten debates surrounding the current crisis in affordable housing.⁸⁵ Only one of the inter-war women's housing schemes is currently heritage-listed. Most have been altered internally to comply with raised spatial standards; a number of blocks have been demolished or are currently scheduled for re-development. This research will thus secure a place in the architectural historical record for some of the many smaller inter-war flat developments increasingly disappearing from the London landscape. Researching these neglected housing schemes will build upon these alternative approaches, thereby contributing to a more holistic understanding of London's built environment.

Methodological Strategy

The thesis draws on a wide range of archival sources and publications relating to housing providers of the period, much of which has never been closely examined. The investigation employs the case study approach, focusing on the work of three women's housing providers operating within inter-war London. Adopting a 'microhistorical' perspective has enabled close examination and comparison of each organisation's underlying aims and practices as well as detailed analysis of the architectural fabric of the various housing schemes, including the internal spatial and material conditions.⁸⁶ Research on WPH, a society founded in 1920 which specialised in the conversion of Victorian townhouses into small affordable flats for women, was based on research conducted by

Routledge, 2019), pp. 9-32.; Marta Gutman, *A City for Children: Women, Architecture, and the Charitable Landscapes of Oakland, 1850-1950*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014).

⁸³ *Ibid*, introduction.

⁸⁴ Peter Guillery (ed.), *Built from Below: British Architecture and the Vernacular*, (London: Routledge, 2011).

⁸⁵ Peter Guillery and David Kroll (eds.), *Mobilising Housing Histories: Learning from London's Past*, (London: RIBA Publishing, 2017).

⁸⁶ For the approach see István M. Sziórtó and Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon, *What Is Microhistory?*, (London: Routledge, 2013).

the author into their uncatalogued institutional archive as part of the Heritage Lottery-funded project.⁸⁷ The archival collection, since deposited in the London Metropolitan Archives, contains records such as committee minutes, annual reports, property files, correspondence and promotional literature and artwork covering their foundation and early history. This enabled a close reading of the imperatives underlying the provision of women's flats and the financial and operating constraints faced by such organisations. Demographic information consulted relating to the women tenants has been based upon England and Wales Census returns (including those recently released for 1921), electoral rolls, the 1939 War Register, medical registration and certification and shipping records.

Writing the histories of the provider organisations has been based upon archival sources, however, surviving institutional records are patchy at best; at worse virtually non-existent. These have therefore been augmented by a wide range of underused primary documentation including the public utility societies records held in The National Archives at Kew (TNA), as well related material at the London Metropolitan Archives (LMA), the Women's Library located at the London School of Economics (WL); the Royal Institute of British Architects collections (RIBA); and at local Borough archives and history centres such as Lambeth, Camden and Westminster.

The official documentary record often leaves scant traces of these types of buildings and their creators; thus, a wide range of contemporary newspapers, periodicals and ephemera has also been consulted – national, provincial and institutional; printed and digitised – as an invaluable source of information, both textual and photographic, and as a means to study the promotion of the housing schemes and their perception in the popular media. Sources include several journal articles and accounts written and delivered as talks by individuals who were instrumental in establishing and managing the organisations and housing schemes. Such authors include Alban Gordon, director of the UWHA, who documented the association's progress in their journal *Feminine Life*; and WPH founder, Anglo-Irish suffragist and housing campaigner Etheldred Browning, who regularly contributed to *The Vote* and *The Woman's Leader*. Links with the women's movement and connections with wider social and political debates have been explored through related editorials and correspondence in feminist publications including *Votes for Women*, the *Irish Citizen* and *Time and Tide*. These offered crucial insight into the socio-political motivations and principles underpinning their work. Research concerning key protagonists has also been based upon a number of published and unpublished biographies and autobiographical texts, greatly enhanced by gaining permitted access to additional, previously unseen material including diaries, photographs and correspondence held in private family collections.⁸⁸ Researching the inter-war women's flats has also entailed gaining an understanding of their historical context. The establishment of the earlier, pioneering women's housing organisations and schemes; links with the women's cause and

⁸⁷ HLF project: 'Pioneering Courage: Housing and the Working Woman, 1919-1939'. Outputs of the project included a film 'Pioneering Courage: The Women's Pioneer Story'

⁸⁸ I am grateful to the families of Gertrude Leverkus and Alban Gordon for permitting access to private family records.

women's employment; and continuities and discontinuities with the later inter-war schemes have been informed by consulting a range of late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century periodicals including *Work and Leisure*, *The Englishwoman's Review* and *The Nineteenth Century*.

Conducting fieldwork relating to the various women's schemes informed the architectural analysis of the extant buildings and their complementary landscaping schemes. This has been particularly important for those scheduled for re-development, sharing the fate of many inter-war residential blocks increasingly facing demolition. Scrutinising original architectural floorplans and elevations – many within the Building Case Files of the London County Council (LCC) Architects' Department at LMA, and within a collection of previously unseen drawings by one of the earliest professional women architects, Gertrude Leverkus, recovered at WPH headquarters by the author – has also illuminated the design process and informed questions of spatial practice and materiality. Analysis of illustrative artwork and photographic images used in promotional campaigns and company literature, or featured by the publications *The Builder*, *The Architect and Building News* and *Architecture Illustrated*, has allowed valuable insights into contemporary visual representations of the various schemes and their reception in the architectural press coverage in the national and local press and feminist journals.

The analysis of the women's schemes engages closely with the wider social context, principally in terms of women's shifting roles and expectations in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century society. Such an approach combining social historical research with architectural analysis, first pioneered in the 1970s by Mark Girouard and others, has proved particularly effective for architectural historians in understanding the formal and spatial qualities of a range of similar, related building types.⁸⁹ Readings of the schemes have been further enriched by drawing upon the methods and approaches to spatial theory and feminist critique adopted by design historians, historians of visual and material culture and literary scholars whose work explores the material conditions, cultural meanings and identities in these and similar domestic spaces from an alternative disciplinary perspective. In doing so the current thesis forges new inter-disciplinary allegiances related to this field of enquiry.

Typological classification has been used as an organising framework for analysing the architectural characteristics of the housing schemes.⁹⁰ Conventional housing histories have tended to discuss dwellings on the basis of social class, with divisions drawn between state/private and working-class/middle-class provision.⁹¹ However, this offers a less adequate strategy for assessing women's housing developments where delivery models straddled the public/private divide and the

⁸⁹ Examples include Pearson, *The Architectural and Social History of Cooperative Living.*; Birney Vickery, *Buildings for Bluestockings*.

⁹⁰ Architectural typing/classification remains current in scholarly discourse: See for example 'Type' in Adrian Forty, *Words and Buildings: A Vocabulary of Modern Architecture*, (London: Thames & Hudson, 2000)., pp.304-311; Paulette Singley, *How to Read Architecture: An Introduction to Interpreting the Built Environment*, (New York: Routledge, 2019)., pp.257-295.

⁹¹ For example John Burnett, *A Social History of Housing, 1815-1985*, 2nd edn (London: Methuen, 1986).

social class of occupants was often blurred.⁹² Analyses of the inter-war period are largely dominated by family house types; typological classification of flats remains relatively fluid. Thus, attempting to classify women's developments has inevitably resulted in some examples whose formal qualities arguably overlap the recognised categories. The once clearer architectural distinction between mansion blocks for the upper and middle classes, and tenement blocks for the working classes was certainly breaking down in this period. As Richard Dennis observed, 'the difference between philanthropic or limited-dividend block dwellings and the bottom end of the private, lower-middle-class flat market was not as clear-cut as has sometimes been suggested.'⁷⁰ Nonetheless the use of typology as a strategy has been useful in highlighting variations in such building types.

Thesis Structure

The thesis is organised into three main sections. Part I provides an outline of the historical context of inter-war women's housing provision. Chapter 1 discusses women's history and women's experience in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It explores the achievements of the women's movement and shifting attitudes towards self-supporting single women, both of which would shape the work of women's housing reformers. Chapter 2 provides a historical survey of the pioneering women's housing initiatives which emerged during this period, as well as an outline of the relevant housing typology.

Part II focuses on the new wave of women's housing providers who attempted to resolve the housing issue for single women workers after the First World War. Chapter 3 traces the institutional histories of three prominent organisations: The Lady Workers Homes (LWH); Women's Pioneer Housing (WPH); and the United Women's Homes Association (UWHA). Close attention is paid to the origins of these initiatives and the backgrounds of their key protagonists. Chapter 4 provides a detailed examination of the motivations and principles which underpinned their business practices, drawing out the connections, allegiances and contrasts between the organisations. Chapter 5 centres on their approaches to design. It examines how the various schemes were conceived, designed and produced, and considers the nature of agency and authorship in the design process.

How this set of ideas was manifested in built form is explored in Part III. The architectural characteristics of the inter-war women's housing developments are analysed through a series of case studies organised by building type. Chapter 6 examines flat conversions provided in adapted townhouses and suburban villas. Chapter 7 focuses on the purpose-built projects. It assesses the

⁹² Sydney Perks 1905 study identified three grades of middle-class flat development based on market rental value, with working-class tenement blocks treated separately: Sydney Perks, *Residential Flats of All Classes*, (London: B.T. Batsford, 1905). Richard Dennis' recent categorisation of pre-Second World War flats was based on class and type: high-end 'mansion flats' in the West End or inner West London; privately-built Edwardian and inter-war inner suburban flats and outer suburban lower-rise schemes for the lower middle classes; and philanthropic/limited dividend tenement block dwellings as a discrete category: Dennis, 'Residential Flats'.

continuity with earlier women's schemes, as well as the impact of housing policy and inter-war architectural modernism. Finally, Chapter 8 turns attention towards the lived experience of these housing schemes. This is investigated through an examination of the spatial and material conditions of these new living spaces and the less immediately tangible values and meanings embodied within them. It considers the ways in which the housing organisations responded to contemporary discourses of home efficiency, labour-saving and domesticity, and how designs were informed by prevailing norms of gender and class.

PART I: The Historical Context

Chapter 1

Women's History

In examining the provision of dwellings for London's single working women, this thesis not only engages with the history of housing and policy but also the many facets of women's history. The purpose of this chapter is to outline the social historical context of the current research from this perspective. It explores women's history and experience in the seventy years preceding the First World War, with a particular focus on the self-supporting single woman. The chapter examines changes in women's legal and political status; their access to education and training; and their opportunities to pursue voluntary and remunerative employment. It also considers the evolving status of spinsters (unmarried women) in society, who, despite their growing numbers and more active participation in the national economy, routinely faced both derision and marginalisation.

The Rise of the Single Woman in the Nineteenth Century

Marriage and motherhood were widely accepted as the 'natural destiny' for women of all classes. However, in the mid-nineteenth century the security of this assumption was called into doubt by the increasing imbalance in the ratio between men and women in the population. The uneven sex distribution, first flagged as an issue in the 1851 England and Wales census, rose steadily in successive decades, from 594,000 more women than men in 1871 to almost 900,000 by the 1890s.¹ The implications of this demographic trend, predominantly affecting the middle-classes, raised considerable anxiety amongst social commentators. Statistician and journalist W.R. Gregg denounced the alarming circumstance of hundreds of thousands of women remaining unmarried as both 'abnormal' and 'indicative of an unwholesome social state'.² With little prospect of fulfilling their vocations as wives and mothers, such unattached women were denoted as 'excess' or 'redundant' within Victorian society. Many concurred with Gregg's assertion that emigration to the British colonies where men predominated, and government-directed shipping of 'the half million from where they are redundant to where they are wanted', was one viable solution to 'the woman question'.³ Encouraging the estimated 30 per cent of twenty to forty-year-olds who remained unmarried to relinquish material and intellectual distractions in favour of matrimony, was another.

¹ Lewis, *Women in England*, p.3.

² W.R. Gregg, 'Why are Women Redundant?', *National Review*, 15(28), 1862, p.436

³ *Ibid*, p.444

Such ideas were based around a set of deeply-ingrained gender assumptions, notably the notion of 'separate spheres' where men were deemed best-suited to the 'public' arena of work and political life and women to the 'private' domestic environment.⁴ The time-honoured doctrine gained currency during the Industrial Revolution with the formal separation of home and workplace. By the mid-nineteenth century it was all-pervasive, fervently advocated by proponents like John Ruskin and Sarah Stickney Ellis. Nonetheless, everyday lived experience did not necessarily conform to such circumscribed expectations of social behaviour or gendered space.⁵ The economic necessity for the vast majority of working-class women to work, married or otherwise, had always been tacitly condoned. Furthermore, the writings of many contemporary commentators attest that in practice, the assertion of patriarchalism within middle-class family life or the balance of matrimonial power between couples, varied widely across different households. Many families were progressive, with single daughters encouraged to pursue work opportunities beyond the home and Victorian wives enjoying high levels of autonomy.⁶ Domestic boundaries were breached culturally and spatially as single women in particular continued to be active as business owners or investors.⁷ Moreover, prosperous women enjoyed less restricted access to and movement within the public spaces of the West End from the mid-nineteenth century as consumers of the fast-expanding range of department stores, restaurants and theatres.⁸ Nevertheless, rising discontent with a 'women's lot' and its imposed ideological and physical constraints from the 1850s and 1860s onwards, prompted early campaigners to pursue the means to redefine women's position within society, allowing them to break free of conventions which bound them to the domestic environment or economic dependency on fathers and male relatives.

The practice of philanthropy offered many women the crucial, initial channel through which to stake a claim in the public sphere and lead more independent and purposeful lives. Although single women were expected to remain physically and emotionally attached to home and family, altruistic endeavours within the wider community were increasingly viewed as permissible extensions of the domestic sphere where they might usefully wield their moral and maternal influence.⁹ Whilst benefitting the wider community, directing philanthropic projects allowed

⁴ The seminal text is Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850*, (London: Hutchinson, 1987). For a historiographical survey see 'Introduction', 3rd edn. (London: Routledge, 2019). Revisionist literature includes Amanda Vickery, 'Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women's History', *The Historical Journal*, 36 (1993).; Susie Steinbach, 'Can We Still Use 'Separate Spheres'? British History 25 Years after Family Fortunes', *History Compass*, 10 (2012).

⁵ Vickery, 'Golden Age to Separate Spheres?'

⁶ José Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit : A Social History of Britain 1870-1914*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp.76-79

⁷ Robert Beachy, Béatrice Craig, and Alastair Owens, *Women, Business and Finance in Nineteenth-Century Europe : Rethinking Separate Spheres*, English edn (Oxford: Berg, 2006).

⁸ Lynne Walker, 'Vistas of Pleasure: Women Consumers of Urban Space in the West End of London 1850-1900', in *Women in the Victorian Art World*, ed. by Clarissa Campbell Orr (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).

⁹ See Frank. K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century England*, (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 1980).; Dorice Williams Elliott, *The Angel out of the House: Philanthropy and Gender in Nineteenth-Century England*, (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2002). For comparable colonial developments

women to develop the sort of transferable skillset which led towards respectable, remunerative employment avenues. The pioneering working-class housing schemes organised and run by Octavia Hill and her associates from the 1860s, for instance, enabled a voluntary team of single women to eventually become a paid, skilled workforce.¹⁰ The influence of Hill's 'system', underpinned by personal attention to the needs of landlord and tenant, was far-reaching, forming the basis for a range of professional careers in housing management and social welfare actively promoted after the First World War.¹¹ Likewise, from the 1880s, the settlement houses pioneered by Samuel and Henrietta Barnett at Toynbee Hall in London's East End, and the clubs for working girls promoted by Maude Stanley and others, provided further challenging yet rewarding outlets for single, educated women, initially as volunteers but later as employees.¹² These enterprises afforded many the opportunity to live and work independently, away from the family home. Furthermore, the leadership and administrative experience gained through such activities also aided the various, hard-fought campaigns to advance women's legal and political position. The landmark Married Women's Property Acts of 1870 and 1882 for instance, which overturned long-standing legislation compelling women to surrender property and earnings to their husbands.¹³

Expertise was similarly deployed to great effect in the many strands of women's suffrage activism. Concerted efforts to secure the right to participate in local and national government and vote in elections first bore fruits with the Municipal Franchise Act of 1869. The legislation empowered unmarried women ratepayers to vote in local elections, a right eventually extended to their married counterparts as part of the more comprehensive overhaul outlined in the Local Government Act of 1894. The 1870s also witnessed the first female Poor Law Guardians and representatives on school boards. As Shelia Jeffreys and others have pointed out, spinsters provided 'the backbone of the feminist movement' during the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth, a claim borne out in the membership profile of the leading campaigning bodies. For example, 63% of the Pankhursts' Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) was comprised of single women, with much of the remainder being widows.¹⁴

see Shurlee Swain, 'Religion, Philanthropy and Social Reform: Meanings, Motivations and Interactions in the Lives of Nineteenth Century Australian Women', *Women-Church*, 23 (1998), 29-35.

¹⁰ For Hill see Gillian Darley, *Octavia Hill*, (London: Constable, 1990); Elizabeth Baigent and Ben Cowell (eds.), *Nobler Imaginings and Mightier Struggles: Octavia Hill, Social Activism and the Remaking of British Society*, (London: Institute of Historical Research, 2016).

¹¹ Hill's influence on the development of professional housing management is discussed in Marion Brion, *Women in the Housing Service*, (London; New York: Routledge, 1995).

¹² For the settlement movement see Asa Briggs and Anne Macartney, *Toynbee Hall: The First Hundred Years*, (London: Routledge, 2011, 1st edn. 1984). For girls' clubs: Iris Dove, 'Sisterhood or Surveillance?: The Development of Working Girls' Clubs in London 1880-1939', (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Greenwich, 1996).

¹³ Single women's rights to acquire, hold and dispose of property exceeded their married counterparts until 1935: Lewis, *Women in England*, p.78 and pp.121-2

¹⁴ Sheila Jeffreys, *The Spinster and Her Enemies: Feminism and Sexuality, 1880-1930*, (London: Pandora Press, 1985), pp.86-89.

Women's Education and Employment

For many of the proponents of the women's movement, the emancipation of women was also to be achieved through equality of opportunity in education, training and employment. Initial attempts to offer young women formal teaching and academic qualifications, rather than the usual feminine 'accomplishments', began with the opening of two London-based institutions in the 1840s: Queen's College founded by the Rev. F.D. Maurice, and Bedford College by Elizabeth Reid. Further secondary schools for girls followed, notably Frances Buss' North London Collegiate School, and Cheltenham Ladies' College established by Dorothea Beale.¹⁵ It was only with the first Oxbridge women's colleges – commencing at Cambridge with Girton College (1869) and Newnham College (1871), founded by Emily Davies and Henry Sidgwick respectively, that a traditional male university education, based around full-time residential study, was achieved.¹⁶ However, the path to such educational reform never ran smoothly; debates concerning the necessity for gender-specific curricula or admittance to public examinations continued, and proponents fielded a host of medically-grounded objections concerning the supposed frailer mental capacities of female students, and the purported detrimental effects to their reproductive systems.¹⁷ Many future women activists, including those operating in inter-war housing, reaped the intellectual benefits of the legacy of the pioneering educationalists.

With ever-increasing numbers of middle-class self-supporting women seeking work, either through necessity or choice, much of the efforts of the women's movement focused on expanding the range of respectable employment options for educated women. Although single women had frequently held responsible positions in family business enterprises in previous centuries, by the nineteenth century, it was unusual for even young unmarried daughters to be engaged in paid employment. The intensification of class and sex divisions rendered most remunerative employments socially unacceptable for genteel women and potential roles limited to that of governess or lady's companion. The Society for Promoting the Employment of Women represented one of the earliest attempts to challenge these conventions. Founded in 1859 by Jessie Boucherett and Adelaide Procter, members of the Langham Place circle, its aims and activities were disseminated through their publication the *English Woman's Journal*.¹⁸

¹⁵ See Sheila Fletcher, *Feminists and Bureaucrats: A Study in the Development of Girls' Education in the Nineteenth Century*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).; Ellen Jordan, "'Making Good Wives and Mothers'?: The Transformation of Middle-Class Girls' Education in Nineteenth-Century Britain', *History of Education Quarterly*, 31 (1991).

¹⁶ Further women's higher education foundations followed: Lady Margaret Hall (1878) and Somerville (1879) at Oxford; Westfield (1882) and Royal Holloway (1887) in London. Accounts include June Purvis, *A History of Women's Education in England*, (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1991).; Rita McWilliams Tullberg, *Women at Cambridge*, Rev. edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

¹⁷ For discussion see Joan N. Burstyn, *Victorian Education and the Ideal of Womanhood*, Rev. edn (Taylor and Francis, 2016).; Joan N. Burstyn, 'Education and Sex: The Medical Case against Higher Education for Women in England, 1870-1900', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 117 (1973).

¹⁸ For the Langham circle see Jane Rendall, 'Langham Place group (act. 1857-1866)', 2005, *ODNB*.

Further initiatives followed, including the Working Ladies Guild founded in 1876 by Lady Mary Feilding, whose remit was angled toward the plight of lower-middle-class, 'impoverished gentlewomen'. Practical guidance and training for paid positions in needlework or book-keeping were delivered via a proliferating, nationwide network of women's employment clubs. Employment openings were promoted in directories and periodicals such as *The Yearbook of Women's Work* and *Work and Leisure* magazine, both edited by Louisa Hubbard, initiator of the National Union of Women Workers (NUWW), a body founded to co-ordinate the concerns of women workers, both paid and voluntary.¹⁹ The employment and housing needs of self-supporting women became inextricably linked; Fielding and Hubbard would both play crucial parts in pioneering housing schemes to accommodate the burgeoning ranks of female wage-earners (see Chapter 3). This and other initiatives devoted to the cause of women's employment were informed by rigorous statistical analysis in the field, a tradition continued by Ray Strachey amongst others into the succeeding century.

By the turn of the nineteenth century, the combined efforts of the promoters of women's employment and reformers of education, health and social care had achieved a much-expanded field of potential occupations for women.²⁰ Working roles traditionally viewed as a female vocation were increasingly recognised as professions, with entry by recognised examination and certification. Substantial numbers of women had, for example, taken advantage of formalised training programmes preparing them for nursing and midwifery.²¹ Likewise, the expansion of elementary and secondary education for girls and young women elevated teaching from the humble status of the private governess or schoolmistress.²² High levels of competence in legal activism, directing voluntary and municipal social work, and in conducting investigative studies into women's working conditions for bodies like The Women's Industrial Council (WIC), facilitated the advent of the first salaried women factory inspectors in the 1890s.²³

Further impetus for change came through the rapid expansion of government bureaucracy and growth in the business and commercial arena. This opened up an array of new, 'black-coated' (white-collar) retail and office-based occupations for women including positions on the lower rungs

¹⁹ Serena Kelly, 'Hubbard, Louisa Maria (1836-1906)', 23 Sep 2004, *ODNB*. The NUWW would become the National Council of Women (NCW) after 1918: Pat Thane, 'Well-Bred and Conventional Ladies': The National Council of Women of Great Britain and Ireland/Northern Ireland', *Women's History Review*, (2022)., forthcoming.

²⁰ Gillian Sutherland, *In Search of the New Woman: Middle-Class Women and Work in Britain 1870-1914*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

²¹ 'Reformed Hospital Nursing' in Vicinus, *Independent Women*, pp.85-120.

²² Christina De Bellaigue, 'The Development of Teaching as a Profession for Women before 1870', *The Historical Journal*, 44 (2001).; Christina De Bellaigue, 'Teaching as a Profession', in *Educating Women: Schooling and Identity in England and France, 1800-1867*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 101-37.

²³ The WIC (1894) started life five years previously as the Women's Trade Union Association, founded by Clementina Black. June Hannam, 'Women's Industrial Council (act. 1894- c. 1917)', *ODNB*, 24 May 2007. For women in the factory inspectorate see Ruth Livesey, 'The Politics of Work: Feminism, Professionalisation and Women Inspectors of Factories and Workshops', *Women's History Review*, 13 (2004).; Kate Bradley and Sophie Rowland, 'A Poor Woman's Lawyer? Feminism, the Labour Movement, and Working-Class Women's Access to the Law in England, 1890-1935', *Women's History Review*, 30 (2021).

of the civil service hierarchy.²⁴ The demand for female workers within the urban economy facilitated by technological innovations such as the typewriter and telephone, went hand-in-hand with the emergence of professional training enterprises, many women-led, including Constance Hoster's well known secretarial training colleges and bureaux which specialised in shorthand typing, translation and commercial arithmetic.²⁵ Such opportunities encouraged large numbers of single women to migrate from rural and outlying districts to London and other large urban centres to train and take-up paid positions.

The dramatic shift in the type and distribution of women's employment was underlined in census returns of the early twentieth century. The newly-elevated professions of nursing, midwifery and teaching remained buoyant, but the proportion employed in the traditional female domains of domestic service or the textiles and clothing industry had declined significantly, from well over a third of women wage-earners to less than a quarter. Most of the gains were felt across the new breed of white-collar occupations, negligible before the 1880s, but by 1911 employing over 11% of the female workforce.²⁶

The field of opportunity had greatly expanded, however, unlike working-class female wage-earners, middle-class roles were largely restricted to single women. Nevertheless, 'women's work' for all was characterised by low pay and segregation, socially and spatially. The assumption that women's careers would be shorter and less significant than men's – ideally spanning a brief pre-marital interlude – was enforced by formal marriage bars, imposed across the civil service and elsewhere from the 1870s onwards.²⁷ Rates for female wage-earners were significantly lower than their male counterparts, even when performing identical roles or tasks. The gender pay gap varied but persisted in almost all occupations, and across all state benefits. Women clerical workers for instance, earned on average less than one third that of a male clerk; female shop assistants, 65% of the men's salary.²⁸ Differentials were lowest in the higher professions like medicine, but the proportion of women working at this level was still extremely low. Such marked divisions were justified in accordance with traditional gender role orientation which dictated that male breadwinners required a 'family wage', but also assumptions surrounding women's inferior quality and quantity of women's work output.²⁹ Working patterns were also erratic for women, who were more commonly engaged on a temporary or piecework basis, and experienced frequent periods of

²⁴ See Gregory Anderson (ed.), *The White-Blouse Revolution: Female Office Workers since 1870*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989); David Lockwood, *The Blackcoated Worker: A Study in Class Consciousness*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).

²⁵ Nicole Robertson, 'Hoster [née Kalisch], Constance Pauline (1864-1939), promoter of women's employment and secretarial training.', Apr 2020, *ODNB*.

²⁶ Lewis, *Women in England*, pp.156-7. For example, the proportion working in domestic service fell from 36% in 1881 to 23% by 1921.

²⁷ The Post Office was first to introduce a marriage bar in 1876; other sections of the civil service gradually followed suit thereafter: Helen Glew, *Gender, Rhetoric and Regulation: Women's Work in the Civil Service and the London County Council, 1900-55*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016)., pp.178-181.

²⁸ Lewis, *Women in England*, pp.162-7.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

unemployment. Women were routinely assigned, and confined, to lower status roles or grades within a given occupational hierarchy. Inferior status was spatially as well as economically demarcated, with female employees inhabiting such ubiquitous arrangements as the centralised 'typing pool'. Even for the few who secured a professional pupillage, custom and propriety often dictated that women be segregated from their male peers. The additional expense of a separate room in larger architectural practices, often passed on to the female apprentice, served to preclude women from less affluent backgrounds.³⁰

Resistance to the 'New Woman'

The dramatic expansion of opportunity achieved in women's education and employment in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, prompted criticism aimed squarely towards the so-called 'New Woman', who, by delaying or rejecting marriage in favour of careers, was roundly condemned for selfishly shirking family duties. Many of those who opposed the campaigns for women's suffrage in this period, including a substantial body of women, were persuaded by an impressive record of improvement in schooling, social welfare and sanitation accomplished by elected women in local government. They remained convinced that the parish rather than Parliament was the most fruitful and suitable campaigning ground for women reformers. Nonetheless, by the turn of the century, the greater presence and visibility of women in the workforce, and their contribution to the urban economy, resulted in some modification in attitudes towards women's employment and place in society more generally. Further scientific-based validation of sex difference was posited in the work of two biologists, Patrick Geddes and J. Arthur Thompson. Research findings expounded in such publications as *The Evolution of Sex* (1889) upheld the immutable basis of biologically determined gender roles, pointing for instance, to men's purported physiological inclination towards activity and women's to passivity. However, their calls for 'a new ethic of the sexes' also stressed the complementarity of men and women's roles and their potential for enhanced social harmony. The stance adopted also lent support for further enhancements to women's education, albeit of a sort which developed their innate motherly and nurturing tendencies.³¹ In a scientific climate where many aspects of Darwin's theories were being questioned, and rudimentary studies linking brain size and intellect were increasingly being discredited, their work consciously moved away from the more oppositional, negative interpretations initially propounded by Spencer and other social Darwinists.³²

These subtle, yet important changes in emphasis have also been viewed as one strand in the evolution of liberal thought at the turn of the century, characterised by historians as marking a tangible shift from Victorian individualism towards collectivism, and a new conception of citizenship

³⁰ 'Architecture as a Profession for Women', *The Journal of the Society of Architects*, July 1913, pp.338-40.

³¹ Patrick Geddes (1854-1932) also gained notoriety as a pioneer of town planning and building conservation who adapted historic buildings into residential university halls, including for women: Helen Meller, *Patrick Geddes: Social Evolutionist and City Planner*, (London: Routledge, 1993).

³² Lewis, *Women in England*, pp.97-106.

and social relations founded on notions of cooperation.³³ In the twentieth century, many aspects of Edwardian social theory were centred around the positive potential, rather than the constraining aspects, of female biology.³⁴ Fears surrounding the status of the British Empire and its standing as a world power, particularly in terms of military strength, encouraged further investment in the field of eugenics, a scientific, university-backed discipline devoted to 'improving' the racial stock and thereby the potential of the human race. The declining birth rate, particularly amongst the supposedly 'racially superior' middle and upper classes, caused considerable alarm amongst proponents of eugenic thought, prompting a backlash against any developments which might encourage women to pursue alternatives other than marriage and motherhood. Although the need for women's education was now widely accepted, many of the residual gender divisions in teaching and curricula were being actively reinforced. Efforts of those advocating for heightened equality in education were countered with medically-backed claims that excessive intellectual stimulation in young women had a detrimental physiological effect on fertility.³⁵ Women's primary duty as wives and mothers was now framed as being indispensable in the battle for the survival of both the nation and the human race.

The Impact of the First World War

The extent to which the Great War might be considered as a watershed in terms of women's emancipation remains a subject for scholarly debate, although many historians have cautioned against any simplistic conception of the conflict as a catalyst for profound social change. In her social historical study of Britain in the fifty years before the outbreak of war, José Harris for example underlined the multiple trajectories of both continuity and change which spanned this artificial, yet inevitable, juncture.³⁶ Nevertheless, the exigencies of war had a major impact on women's employment during and after the conflict. At the outbreak of hostilities, both constitutional and militant campaigns for women's suffrage were suspended, allowing members to support the war effort through such bodies as the Women's Service Bureau which opened to place women in roles which released men to serve at the Front. Single and married women of all classes took up roles supporting the war economy or in male-dominated fields like agriculture, transport and armaments. Large numbers of younger single women deployed by the Ministry of Munitions at Woolwich, London, and East Riggs, Gretna, found independent working life to be a liberating, transformative experience. Such opportunities motivated many from humble origins to veer away from re-entering domestic service in peacetime or seek daily rather than live-in positions. Women like Lily Truphet,

³³ For Liberal conceptions of society and citizenship: Sandra Den Otter, 'Thinking in Communities': Late Nineteenth-Century Liberals, Idealists and the Retrieval of Community', *Parliamentary History*, 16 (1997).; Matthew Grimley, *Citizenship, Community, and the Church of England: Liberal Anglican Theories of the State between the Wars*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004).

³⁴ Lewis, *Women in England*, pp.97-106.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit*, pp.1-4

for example, a 'maid of all work' who loathed her pre-war position in a New Cross household where she felt 'a slave to the missus', but loved the freedom and camaraderie of munitions work, not least its stable income of £2-3 per week.³⁷ The rising unpopularity of domestic service exacerbated the pre-existing 'servant problem', becoming a defining factor in the design and planning of much inter-war housing. Nevertheless, in the early 1930s, ongoing vacancies saw many older, unemployed single and widowed women encouraged to re-train for domestic work, particularly in the wake of the Depression.

The presence of women in male areas of work was bitterly resisted, both during and after the War, and the gains achieved were in most cases fleeting. In 1917, the influx of female workers training to drive trams, buses and cabs in London and the provinces was deeply resented by the licensed drivers' union, who claimed that the women's inexperience presented 'a menace to the public'.³⁸ The expectation that women step aside for men returning from the Front during demobilisation was keenly felt and, at times, vehemently professed, especially for married women. Opposition towards women's continued employment was also based on the type of work deemed appropriate for women. In 1921 *The Times* reported Field-Marshal Sir William Robertson's vocal criticism of the employment of women in government offices. Whilst he condoned the more 'suitable' roles taken up by women at the Post Office, the retention of 'even one woman' at the War Office was, he claimed, a 'monstrous injustice'.³⁹ Despite ongoing campaigns, most workplaces yielded to the intense pressure applied by the press, government committees, trade-unionists and employees. The most common rationale for compelling married women to resign was that it deprived current (or future) male breadwinners of a 'family wage' and self-dependent single women of an income. Their departure was also thought to make room for young female starters and aid large office environments where routine work was plentiful, but opportunities for promotion were insufficient. Moreover, work was a distraction from wives' primary responsibilities in the home. The formal pre-War marriage bars imposed on women employees in the civil service were reinstated and other more widely enforced, affecting female teachers, doctors and staff in large companies including Sainsbury's, Great Western Railways and the BBC.⁴⁰

The passing of the Representation of the People Act in 1918 which gave women over thirty the right to vote (subject to a property qualification), and the Parliament (Qualification of Women) Act of the same year which enabled women to stand as MPs, were both landmark victories for the women's movement. The extent to which this may be seen as a reward for women's war

³⁷ Gavin Weightman and Steve Humphries, *The Making of Modern London: 1914-1939*, (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1984), pp.123-4.

³⁸ The National Archives (hereafter TNA), HO45/11164: Correspondence, President of the London and Provincial Union of Licenced Vehicle Workers to the Home Secretary, 13 Feb 1917.

³⁹ 'War Office Women', *The Times*, 20 Jan 1921, p.7.

⁴⁰ Marriage bars were not abolished until after the Second World War (the foreign service in 1973): Glew, *Gender, Rhetoric and Regulation: Women's Work in the Civil Service and the London County Council, 1900-55.*, pp.183-6; Alison Oram, *Women Teachers and Feminist Politics, 1900-39*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996).pp.26-7; Kate Murphy, 'A Marriage Bar of Convenience? The B.B.C. And Married Women's Work 1923-39', *20th Century British History*, 25 (2014).

contribution remains debatable, however the sheer breadth of roles and responsibilities undertaken by women undoubtedly made their claims to full citizenship harder to deny. With only forty per cent of women enfranchised, activists continued to agitate for votes on an equal basis as men (finally achieved in the Act of 1928), as well as advancing women's status and position as active citizens through a bewildering array of women's organisations. Many of the leading former suffrage organisations rebranded and refocused; the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies transformed into the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship, and the London Society for Women's Suffrage into the London Society for Women's Service. Women's employment options were augmented by the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act of 1919 which removed the legal barriers existing in most professions. In the aftermath of a conflict which witnessed the loss of three-quarters of a million men, many husbands and fiancés, the number of so-called 'surplus' women jumped dramatically, reaching a peak of 1.75 million. The number of widows also rose considerably, compounding figures which had quadrupled since the 1870s, largely as a reflection of women's greater life expectancy. By 1921, when there were 1096 women for every 1000 men, around half of all single women in their late twenties were still unmarried by the end of the decade, compared with only thirty per cent of men.⁴¹ The issue was as acute for widows, with male widowers or divorcees being three times more likely to remarry than their female counterparts.⁴² The social and economic repercussions would be felt throughout the inter-war decades, with greater numbers of self-supporting women than ever before seeking work and housing.

The Status and Identity of Spinsters

The self-supporting unmarried woman, particularly the more mature spinster, thus continued to face difficulties in securing and maintaining respectable paid employment and affordable accommodation. They were also, however, confronted with overcoming further obstacles in the form of significant cultural discrimination. The contempt for such 'redundant' women expressed by commentators like W.R. Gregg in the 1860s, was typical of the dismissive attitudes often shown to single women, particularly those that remained unmarried beyond their late twenties. Much of the critique arguably came through association, with spinsters linked with the assertions of radical women activists like Maria Grey and Emily Shirreff, who had vocally advocated against marriage in the 1870s.⁴³ In the 1880s and when working women were making significant inroads into mainstream employment, criticism intensified, emanating from women and men, even pioneering working women such as the novelist Eliza Lynn Linton (1822-1898), who, despite her famed status as the first salaried female journalist was vociferous in her opposition.⁴⁴ In the 1890s stereotypes

⁴¹ Lewis, *Women in England*, pp.97-106.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Jeffreys, *The Spinster and Her Enemies*, pp.88-9.

⁴⁴ For discussions of the 'New Woman' phenomenon and contemporary representations see Sally Ledger, 'The New Woman and Feminist Fictions', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Fin De Siècle*, ed. by Gail Marshall (Cambridge:

surrounding the 'New Woman' abounded across the popular press, with many of those seeking independence no longer considered 'ladies' but branded 'wild women' who supposedly adopted 'male' codes of behaviour such as androgynous clothing, smoking habits and loose morals.⁴⁵ *The Saturday Review* presented a disparaging, sarcastic view of the attempts of 'female bachelors' to forge independent working lives, who, they claimed, 'laboriously wastes her life in elaborately worked-out un-femininity.'⁴⁶ The weight of anti-feminist criticism around the turn of the century was however countered by such commentators as the American, Mary Gay Humphreys. Her detailed observations of the lives of London's working women in *Scribner's Magazine* presented a more positive slant on London's 'women bachelors' who, despite the parodying of playwrights and the alarm of the moralists, had diligently established a range of successful, respectable women-centred 'outposts' in the form of clubs and residential chambers.⁴⁷ As explored in more detail in the coming chapters, the working out of ideas in these early prototypes would act as models for subsequent housing schemes.

Disparaging attitudes towards single working women persisted well into the twentieth century. Married women continued to enjoy a higher status than their single sisters, and spinsterhood was generally conflated with failure. The vocal defiance of the militant suffragists – including Christabel Pankhurst's stated intention to remain single as a protest against the oppression suffered by women in marital relationships – continued to be highly controversial as head-on challenges to patriarchal society.⁴⁸ During the War, a more cheerful and upbeat image, akin to the type long-afforded to their male counterparts, was propounded in publications such as Agnes Miall's popular advice manual for the younger working 'girl bachelor' or 'bach'.⁴⁹ Yet, in spite of the notable contribution made by unmarried women to the war effort and within the peacetime economy as teachers, social workers, or in business and government, the more mature spinster became a target for derision across the media, cruelly lampooned as dowdy, 'sexless', and living a pitiable, insular existence.⁵⁰ Furthermore, in the inter-war years the sexuality of spinsters came under far closer scrutiny. Close, 'romantic friendships' between woman, widely valued before the War as psychologically and spiritually beneficial, were increasingly viewed with suspicion.⁵¹ Leading scientific experts of the day perceived same-sex relationships as deviant, the pioneer of family planning, Marie Stopes amongst others, unequivocal in their disapproval of the so-called 'disease of Uranianism'.⁵² The growing sense of distaste and censure was also manifested in attempts in 1921 to bring lesbianism and the practices of those referred to as 'inverts' within the scope of criminal

Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 153-68.; Patricia Marks, *Bicycles, Bangs, and Bloomers: The New Woman in the Popular Press*, (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1990).

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ 'The Female Bachelor', *The Saturday Review*, 02 Jun 1894, pp.582-3.

⁴⁷ Mary Gay Humphreys, 'Women Bachelors in London', *Scribner's Magazine*, 19, 1896, pp.600-11.

⁴⁸ Jeffreys, *The Spinster and Her Enemies*, pp.88-9.

⁴⁹ Agnes M. Miall, *The Bachelor Girl's Guide to Everything; or, the Girl on Her Own*, (London, 1916), p.19.

⁵⁰ Nicholson, *Singled Out*, pp.37-9.

⁵¹ Vicinus, *Independent Women*, pp.34-6.

⁵² Nicholson, *Singled Out*, pp.255-262

law, and in the banning of Radclyffe Hall's novel *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) following a highly-publicised court case.

The dire financial difficulties encountered daily by self-supporting spinsters, as well as the pressure of caring responsibilities or supporting relatives on meagre wages, were at best underappreciated, at worst ignored. Women's employment was low-paid and precarious, and mature spinsters routinely encountered age discrimination in the workplace, with over-thirties deemed unemployable in most occupations, especially customer-facing retail and service roles. The lower rates of pay offered to women in mixed-gender occupations such as clerical positions, were also regularly misunderstood by contemporaries. Simon Abernethy's critical examination of the data used in the compilation of *The New Survey of London Life and Labour* in 1928 demonstrated how a significant proportion of wage data, notably for female clerks, was almost certainly approximated and overestimated based on pre-conceived assumptions. Estimates of 80s per week for male clerks and 60s for female, overstated women's earnings, thereby obscuring the true extent of the gender pay gap.⁵³ Similar misconceptions would have serious implications on the funding decisions by government officials (see Chapter 4).

The spinster's marginal status was perpetuated in a post-1918 society which increasingly prioritised the nuclear family unit over all other household formations.⁵⁴ One of the most crucial yet neglected aspects of their plight – the need for more affordable, suitable housing options – would be taken forward by women's housing reformers, many of whom are the subject of this thesis.

Conclusion

The Victorian and Edwardian periods witnessed major shifts in women's social, political and legal position. However, such forceful momentum for change did not go unchecked; reforms were consistently restrained by a set of gender norms embodied in the pervasive notion of 'separate spheres', the 'public' realm suited to men and the 'private' domestic domain to women. Such middle-class ideology was perpetually constructed and re-constructed, and bolstered by the research of leading lights in the social-scientific community. At the same time, these attempts to prescribe women's lives – notably through criticism of the so-called 'New Woman' – were contested through the multiple strands of activism of an increasingly organised and vocal women's movement. Substantial gains for women achieved in this period, including wider access to secondary and higher education and their pursuit of philanthropic work, equipped them with a new set of skills which were applied in women's activism and new remunerative employments. This and the increasing presence of single women in the workplace from the late nineteenth century, particularly in the professional and business arena, laid the foundation for the work of new housing

⁵³ Simon Abernethy, 'Deceptive Data? The Role of the Investigators in the New Survey of London Life and Labour, 1928-32', *Historical Methods*, 50 (2017).

⁵⁴ Katherine Holden, *Shadow of Marriage: Singleness in England, 1914-60*, (Manchester: Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010).

providers who focused on the housing needs of these women. Much of their efforts thereafter would focus on the more mature self-supporting spinster, who was increasingly ostracised as well as rendered invisible in family-focused housing programmes. The historical trajectory of the various housing schemes designed by and for these women in this period will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 2

Housing History

This chapter acts as both a historical survey of women's housing and a presentation of relevant housing typology. It traces the historical path of the various housing initiatives for single women workers which emerged from the mid-nineteenth century. It explores the organisations and individuals involved and the architectural characteristics of their various schemes, as well as considering new methods of housing delivery and the impact of gender and class on their design. Before doing so, it provides a brief outline of the development of housing typology in this period, specifically blocks of flats and other multi-occupancy housing types (tenement blocks, model lodging houses, mansion blocks and cottage flats) which served as the basic architectural models for women's schemes before and after the First World War.

The Development of Flats in London

At the beginning of the twentieth century, architect Sydney Perks noted the extraordinary rise to prominence in London of 'all classes of flats from the poor man's tenement of one room to the most luxurious and expensive suite'.¹ Blocks of flats were by no means a novel form of dwelling, their origins traceable to the early medieval and ancient world.² In other populous European cities such as Paris, Madrid, Berlin, Vienna or Budapest, the apartment block had persisted as a universal dwelling form. Various grades of 'tenements' in multi-storey buildings (later known simply as 'tenement blocks') were also a long-established element of the Scottish urban landscape, notably in Edinburgh.³

Yet despite their popularity elsewhere, flats took considerably longer to become established as a mainstream housing type in England. In eighteenth-century London it was commonplace for rooms in townhouses to be allocated on a relatively long-term basis to distant relatives or let out to lodgers.⁴ However, by the nineteenth century, the individual house occupied by a single family had

¹ Perks, *Residential Flats*, preface.

² For instance, multi-storey residential buildings identified in the Egyptian capital of al-Fustat (Old Cairo) or Roman *insulae* apartment blocks.

³ Henry Grey Graham, *The Social Life of Scotland in the Eighteenth Century*, (London: Black, 1889; 5th edn.1969), p.85. A number of tenement blocks survive in Edinburgh's Old Town, such as the late seventeenth-century, six-storey Blackie House, Wardrop's Court. Many were converted to university halls of residence by Patrick Geddes between 1886 and 1896: Meller, *Patrick Geddes*, pp.53-55.

⁴ See Dan Cruickshank and Neil Burton, *Life in the Georgian City*, (London: Viking, 1990), pp.60-3; Williamson, *Lodgers, Landlords and Landladies in Georgian London*.

become firmly entrenched as the 'ideal' mode of living for households of all classes. Purpose-built, flatted dwellings were not completely without precedent; 'tenement houses', three or four-storey buildings accommodating one family per floor with workshops on the uppermost level, were erected by speculative builders for the silk weavers of Spitalfields in the late seventeenth century.⁵

At the more prosperous end of the social scale, the 'Albany' development, Piccadilly (1802-3) was one of the earliest apartment developments for single bachelors in London. A venture of the speculator Alexander Copland, to plans executed by Henry Holland, the scheme involved the adaptation and extension of Melbourne House (1771-4), originally designed by Sir William Chambers for the first Lord Melbourne.⁶ The mansion house itself offered communal facilities including a dining room and bathhouse, and apartments were created by remodelling the projecting service wings and erecting two long ranges in the garden. The blocks comprised ground and first floor flats, with servant rooms in the attic and a kitchen and cellar in the basement. The two-room living spaces termed 'sets' were closely modelled on the Oxbridge Colleges and Inns of Court, with 'a room to sleep in, and a room for business'.⁷ Likewise, the upper flats were accessed via open staircases akin to the 'well system' and the lower levels connected by cloister-style walkways known as 'Ropewalk'. Purpose-built flats and communal facilities within a quadrangular residential enclave, would become a much-repeated format, including for single women.

Such examples were nonetheless isolated. When purpose-built flats began to be introduced in the mid-nineteenth century, they responded to housing imperatives at both extremes of the social spectrum; as a sanitary, high-density solution to the overcrowded, squalid living conditions endured by urban working classes, and a more convenient, cost-effective alternative for wealthy elites.

Model Tenement Blocks

Until the 1890s, the design and delivery of new housing for all social classes in England and Wales was almost exclusively in the hands of small, speculative builders.⁸ The system, rooted in eighteenth-century, laissez faire free-market capitalism, failed to supply suitable, affordable housing for poorer working-class families most in need.⁹ Being largely profit-driven, the housing needs of specific sectors of the population, including lower-paid single women workers, were also ignored.

⁵ For example, Historic England, '113 Redchurch Street', listing 1393497. For the emergence of tenement houses for refugee Huguenot silk weavers see Peter Guillery, *The Small House in Eighteenth-Century London*, (London: Yale University Press, 2004); F. H. W. Sheppard (ed.), *Survey of London: Volume 27, Spitalfields and Mile End New Town*, (London, 1957).

⁶ 'Albany', *Survey of London: Volumes 31 and 32, St James Westminster, Part II*, ed. by F. H. W. Sheppard (London, 1963), pp.367-389.

⁷ Perks, *Residential Flats*, p.16

⁸ Tenement blocks for 160 families, designed by Horace Jones and erected at Farringdon Road in 1865 by the Corporation of the City of London, were an isolated exception: Tarn, *Five Per Cent Philanthropy*, p. 61.

⁹ For an account see Burnett, *A Social History of Housing*.

Despite the Victorian ideal of the individual family house, lived reality in post-industrial London was very different. The pressure of a burgeoning population in the central districts had resulted in widespread 'tenementing', the ad-hoc, sub-division of existing townhouses into various flatted lodgings. For housing reformers, dire overcrowded, 'immoral' living conditions rendered such make-shift lodging houses 'the very hotbeds of vice and crime...a disgrace to humanity, a reproach to the Christianity of England'.¹⁰ In 1851 it was estimated that three-quarters of the capital's population either kept or dwelt in a lodging house of some sort.¹¹ Density of occupation with no infrastructure to support it produced infamous slums known as rookeries.¹² By 1871 *The Architect* reported that even in outlying suburbs like Highgate, Kensington or Clapham, whole streets full of houses were being let 'from ground-floor to attic in single rooms'.¹³ Moreover, the issue involved newly built houses for single-family occupation 'which the builders well know will each be tenanted by multiple families'.¹⁴

Developing more appropriate housing solutions became the focus of committed social visionaries including Lord Shaftesbury, William Cobbett, Angela Burdett-Coutts and Charles Dickens. The Society for Improving the Condition of the Labouring Classes (SICLC), founded in 1844 and championed by their President Prince Albert, led by built example, publishing architectural drawings and erecting a range of multi-occupancy model schemes by architect Henry Roberts. This included the well-known two-storey, four-tenement building exhibited at Hyde Park during the 1851 Great Exhibition, designed to demonstrate how greater density formats might be constructed.¹⁵ Although the premise of multiple households residing in 'one lofty pile' sharing amenities remained controversial, not least due to the prevalence of contagious disease, blocks of flats were conceded to be the best means of providing better, 'independent tenements' in the metropolis given the financial and land constraints.

The construction of such tenement blocks was taken forward by charitable housing bodies, notably the Peabody Trust, endowed in 1862 by the American businessman and financier George Peabody, whose first development opened at Commercial Road, Spitalfields (1864). However, raising sufficient capital via endowed trusts and subscription-based charities was severely limiting, thus a more effective housing delivery mechanism was adopted, fusing philanthropic endeavour with capitalist returns.¹⁶ These and subsequent 'model dwelling companies' were founded as limited liability, joint stock companies, operating principles of so-called 'five per cent philanthropy': offering private investors dividends close to market rates, whilst at the same time appealing to their

¹⁰ Roberts, *The Dwellings of the Labouring Classes*, p.8

¹¹ Donald J. Olsen, *The Growth of Victorian London*, (London: Batsford, 1976; 2nd edn. 1979), p.117

¹² The British Library, *The Rookeries of London, A Survey of London's Poorest Quality Housing*
<https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/the-rookeries-of-london-a-survey-of-londons-poorest-quality-housing>.

¹³ Olsen, *The Growth of Victorian London*, p117.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Roberts, *The Dwellings of the Labouring Classes*.

¹⁶ See Susannah Morris, 'Organizational Innovation in Victorian Social Housing', *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 31 (2002), 186-206.

social conscience.¹⁷ Sydney Waterlow's Improved Industrial Dwellings Company founded in 1863, was one of the largest model dwelling companies, specialising in buildings for the 'artisan' or skilled working classes.¹⁸ Their four to five-storey blocks owed much to the SICLC designs, with independent flats accessed via arcaded open galleries overlooking spacious internal courtyards. The principle was effective, however, by the 1880s more concerted efforts were made to reach the poorest, marginalised families, albeit with lower investor returns. The Katharine Buildings, Stepney (1884) erected by the East End Dwellings Company to accommodate families of the poorest labourers, and the Four Per Cent Industrial Dwellings Society's Rothchild Buildings, Flower and Dean Street, Spitalfields (1886-7), primarily housing Jewish migrants displaced during the pogroms of Eastern Europe, were notable examples.¹⁹

By the time of the 1885 Royal Commission, almost 30,000 families had been housed across 254 London sites but this represented barely four per cent of London's working-class population.²⁰ The Housing of the Working Classes Acts of 1885 and 1890, and the formation of the London County Council (LCC) in 1889, brought new legal powers to condemn and replace slum housing. The first major public housing scheme, the LCC's Boundary Road Estate (1900) which redeveloped the notorious Old Nichol 'rookery', offered flats in architecturally superior blocks arranged around landscaped gardens. But rentals were beyond the reach of the lowest-paid workers; 1903 statistics revealed that as few as eleven of the 5,719 people displaced during its construction returned to reap the benefits. The assumed process of 'filtering up' – poorer tenants taking over homes vacated by the re-housed – failed to materialise. Furthermore, in efforts to raise spatial standards, only fifteen of the 1,069 flats were one-room tenements.²¹ The perpetual conundrum faced by housing legislators was thus exposed; developing more suitable, commodious family housing, when most poorer households could barely afford single-rooms.

Improved Lodging Houses

The chaotic sub-division of London housing frequently resulted in properties being inhabited by both male and female unmarried tenants. Mixing of the sexes in common lodging houses ran contrary to Victorian social norms concerning propriety and gender segregation, prompting widespread calls for more respectable dwelling spaces for single workers. Though generally less well-known, much of the SICLC's exemplary prototypes also involved model lodging houses. Their scheme for working men at Charles Street (1846) encompassed three former London townhouses, the upper floors adapted to provide dormitory-style sleeping space. The new formal and spatial configurations of the ground floor included a range of communal living and eating spaces. A

¹⁷ For a detailed account of model dwelling provision see Tarn, *Five Per Cent Philanthropy*.

¹⁸ Burnett, *A Social History of Housing*, pp.176-77.

¹⁹ Jerry White, *Rothschild Buildings: Life in an East End Tenement Block, 1887-1920*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980).

²⁰ Burnett, *A Social History of Housing*, p.178.

²¹ Perks, *Residential Flats*, pp.64-5.

controlled entrance hallway facilitated a tightly prescribed management system where 'inmates' dwelt under the supervision of live-in 'superintendents', often married couples, who 'set an example of sobriety, decorum, and exemplary conduct'.²² Experimental conversions led on to the construction of a purpose-built lodging House at George Street, Bloomsbury for 104 single men (1848), with improved dormitories separated by wooden partitions, a communal kitchen, bathhouse, and a 'well-selected' library for the inmates.²³

The demand for single working men's accommodation began to be met by the Victoria Homes, a religiously-orientated initiative whose first property opened at Commercial Road, Spitalfields (1887). They offered large, spartan lodging house providing dormitories and cubicles in converted warehouses. The formation of the LCC in 1889 and a move away from overtly religious overtones was addressed by the erection of three large municipal blocks: Parker Street House, at Drury Lane (1893); Carrington House on Brookmill Road, Deptford (1903); and Bruce House at Kemble Street (1906). Between 1892 and 1905 six progressively larger model lodging houses were also constructed in London by Montagu Corry, Baron Rowton (1838-1903), a nephew of the housing reformer Lord Shaftsbury. The first development at Vauxhall provided 470 cubicles and last at Camden Town reached a capacity of 1087 men.²⁴ Rowton Houses were widely celebrated for the quality of the sleeping accommodation and extensive range of the communal facilities, earning a reputation as 'hotels for working men'. Keen to uphold their superior status, in 1899 Lord Rowton successfully defended a court action brought by the LCC who had attempted to bring the schemes under the remit of common lodging house regulation. The judge, however, dismissed the case affirming that Rowton Houses should indeed be classified as 'residential clubs'.²⁵

The Rise of 'Mansion Flats'

Interest in the potential of flatted dwellings for more affluent households was first kindled in England in the mid-nineteenth century. In 1853, *The Builder* enthusiastically covered an innovative speculation by Mr Mackenzie which aimed to supply 'what has long been a desideratum in London...complete residences on flats as in Edinburgh and Paris'.²⁶ This 'fine new set of buildings', erected in the Italianate style in Victoria Street, Westminster to the designs of Henry Ashton, comprised four storeys over six shops, with eight suites of apartments served by an entrance and stone staircase, and separate, discreet access points for staff.²⁷ Yet despite built proof that refined family residences could be configured over one level whilst maintaining appropriate social

²² Ibid, p.36.

²³ Roberts, *The Dwellings of the Labouring Classes*, pp.12-13. The Charles and George Street men's lodging houses were renamed 'Shaftsbury Chambers' and 'Bloomsbury Chambers' respectively in the 1880s and 1890s.

²⁴ Also Kings Cross (1896), Newington Butts (1897), Hammersmith (1899) and Whitechapel (1902): Hamlett and Preston, "'A Veritable Palace for the Hard-Working Labourer?": Space, Material Culture and Inmate Experience in London's Rowton Houses, 1892-1918'.

²⁵ 'Lodging House or Hotel?' *Liverpool Mercury*, 05 Aug 1899; 'Death of Lord Rowton', *The Times*, 10 Nov 1903, p.14.

²⁶ *The Builder*, 11, 03 Dec 1853, pp.721-2.

²⁷ Ibid.

segregation, such flats were slow to gain popularity. Sceptics also cited a host of issues with 'Parisienne-style' apartment-living, notably the perceived impropriety of servant arrangements and the potential mixing of social classes, particularly for ladies. The *Architect* underlined the 'distress and shame that would be occasioned by an habitual encounter on mutual step and risers between one caste and another'.²⁸ Many remained unconvinced by a dwelling form so closely associated with lower-class tenements which might pose a greater risk of burglary, or worst still the spread of infectious disease.²⁹ Although some early flat designs promoted by architectural firms such as Ashpitel and Whichcord were criticised for their lack of adequate light and ventilation, English opposition was as much underpinned by a deeply entrenched attachment to vertical rather than lateral modes of living.³⁰

In the final quarter of the nineteenth century, speculators began to tap into an emerging market of clients more receptive to urban flats with their distinctive advantages. For those residing in London for only part of the year, flats offered easily maintainable, fully-inclusive tenures free from the attendant stresses of larger houses. From the 1870s blocks, re-branded as 'mansion flats', sprung up in London around central hubs like Victoria Street, Westminster and across re-developed London estates like Cadogan and Grosvenor. The mansion block form – characterised by vertical canted bays and red brick façades enlivened with polychromatic banding, white dressings and terracotta embellishments – was conceived to differentiate them from artisan developments, and convey the visual impression of a row of substantial townhouses (Fig. 1). Generally 'mid-rise' in height, with four to eight accommodation floors sometimes raised above a frontage of shops, standards of comfort and architectural finesse varied widely, from the commodious luxury apartments of Albert Hall Mansions (1879-80) designed by Richard Norman Shaw (1831-1912) to more modest walk-up blocks like the Cornwall Residences erected near Baker Street station (1872-6).³¹

The lifestyle flexibility afforded by mansion blocks was also channelled through a popular variant known as 'catering flats'. Partly addressing the ongoing difficulty in obtaining servants, suites were planned without kitchens and other service rooms, with meals prepared in central kitchens served in dining rooms or delivered to tenants directly. Only a small 'pantry' within the suite or on the landing area was incorporated into the floorplan, 'very useful for tea cups, vases etc.'³² Queen Anne's Mansions (1873-90), London's first 'high-rise' of thirteen storeys, gained notoriety as 'the largest block of catering flats in England'.³³ Highly controversial due to its imposing

²⁸ *The Architect*, 10, 1873, p.168; Olsen, *The Growth of Victorian London*, p.116; John Nelson Tarn, 'French Flats for the English in Nineteenth-Century London', in *Multi-Storey Living*, ed. by Anthony Sutcliffe (London: Croom Helm, 1974), pp. 19-40.

²⁹ Perks, *Residential Flats*, pp.21-8.

³⁰ Arthur Ashpitel and John Whichcord, *Town Dwellings: An Essay on the Erection of Fire-Proof Houses in Flats, a Modification of the Scottish and Continental Systems*, (London, 1855).

³¹ For a detailed survey see Dennis, *Residential Flats*.

³² Perks, *Residential Flats*, p.154.

³³ *Ibid.*

height, the development was known for its novel 'Hankey system', named after the project's wealthy speculator Henry Hankey.³⁴ The concept, 'combining the advantages of a private house, the freedom of an hotel, and the luxury of a club', was based on the American 'apartment hotel' with catered flats let on both an annual and nightly basis served by extensive communal facilities.³⁵

The blurring of typological distinctions continued into the twentieth century, manifested in further mansion complexes exhibiting the 'American influence' like Strathcona Mansions, Marylebone Road, ostensibly for larger households but with public areas dominated by male-oriented smoking and billiard rooms.³⁶ Many more modest *pièds-à-terre*, close to the gentlemen's clubs of St James and affording 'the maximum of comfort and the minimum of trouble, with perfect freedom and a total absence of housekeeping cares', were constructed and marketed towards affluent bachelors.³⁷ The two-room 'chambers' plan, generally self-contained with bathroom but rarely a kitchen, remained remarkably static, barely altered since the days of the Albany scheme.³⁸ The convenience of the catered format also became as desirable for single working women and largely synonymous with the inter-war 'service flats', self-contained apartments which benefitted from meals delivered to occupants via a dedicated lift system. By 1906 the contribution made by various mansion blocks to the transformation of the capital's built landscape was palpable:

the outward and visible signs of the change which has been taking place in English home life are the hotel, the restaurant, and those lofty blocks of flats which during the last twenty years have introduced what is practically a new element into the street scenery of residential London.³⁹

Although construction would begin to peter out during the first decade of the twentieth century, between 1880 and 1919 upwards of 1000 purpose-built, privately-rented blocks with over 40,000 flats were constructed in London.⁴⁰

Cottage Flats

Although blocks of flats were well-established in the built landscape, the notion of flat-living as a mainstream dwelling form for families continued to be widely shunned; mansion flats were best suited to childless couples and singles, and family flats in tenement blocks were merely a necessary evil. The availability of cheaper land and an expanding transport infrastructure prompted low-rise, suburban cottage housing to be constructed on a large-scale by both speculators and model

³⁴ London building heights were restricted to 90 feet in 1890, 80ft in 1894: Dennis, 'Babylonian Flats'.

³⁵ *Ibid*, p.242; *The Times*, 20 May 1876, p.12. Dennis' census analysis demonstrated temporary and permanent residencies with around 59% of occupants lived in the flats for four years, and 20% for fifteen.

³⁶ Perks, *Residential Flats*, pp.132-4.

³⁷ *The Times*, 27 Oct 1879, p.14 and 27 Jan 1906, p.4; Ansonia, New York City (1899-1904), the largest residential hotel of its day, contained 200 bachelor apartments.

³⁸ Perks *Residential Flats*, p.105 and pp.154-5.

³⁹ A. E. Street, 'London Street Architecture', *The Architectural Review*, 19, 1906, p.204.

⁴⁰ Chris Hamnett and Bill Randolph, 'The Rise and Fall of London's Purpose-Built Blocks of Privately Rented Flats: 1853-1983', *The London Journal*, 11 (1985), 160-175.

dwelling companies. In the 1860s and 1870s for example, The Artizans', Labourers' and General Dwellings Company developed estates at Shaftesbury Park, Battersea and Queen's Park, Willesden. Yet despite the introduction of workmen's train services at a penny a mile via the 1883 Cheap Trains Act, the combination of rentals and commuting costs was still unaffordable for many. The vision of individual family homes for all remained elusive. By 1883 the prevalence of sub-letting was highlighted in the *Building News* with new houses 'mostly occupied by two families' with rooms frequently let to single male lodgers.⁴¹ Lessons learned were reflected in the 1890s at their third venture, Leigham Court estate, Streatham Hill, where 427 separate cottages were joined by 539 cottage flats and 18 flats.⁴² Purpose-built 'cottage-flats' – a term purportedly coined by the social reformer Octavia Hill – offered a more affordable variant of the two-storey individual cottage, where each floor accommodated a separate family flat. This overcame the issue of shared services in ad-hoc sub-division, whilst at the same time the street façade maintained the illusion of the single-family home.⁴³ The principle of adapting the cottage plan for multiple occupation, was already well-established in Scotland with English precedents in the 'double houses' for two families promoted by the SICLC in the 1850s and in the 'Tyneside flats' of northern England.⁴⁴ Designs assumed various formats, with flats four-in-a-block resembling semi-detached houses, or with paired front doors in continuous terraces, with access via internal or external staircases (Fig. 18).

The unwavering goal of an individual home with garden for each family, influenced by Ebenezer Howard's garden city planning principles and the desire to foster greener communities far from the polluted metropolis, was manifested at the LCC's pre-1914 suburban cottage estates, commencing with Totterdown Fields, Wandsworth (1901-11).⁴⁵ By the end of the First World War, the semi-detached and terraced estate cottages became yet more firmly entrenched via the findings of the Tudor Walters commission published in 1918.⁴⁶ Built in short terraces at lower density according to new, stringent spatial standards, they became the basic building block which underpinned Lloyd George's 'Homes for Heroes' programme and various public and private housing schemes thereafter. However, versions of the purpose-built cottage-flat type also persisted; a more affordable house form which served as the basis for many inter-war women's schemes (Chapter 7).

Housing Initiatives for Single Women

The evolution of flats and other multi-occupancy dwelling types from the mid-nineteenth century generally revolved around the needs of family households, childless couples or male bachelors. The

⁴¹ Correspondence, *Building News*, 1883 quoted in Olsen, *The Growth of Victorian London*, p.289.

⁴² *Ibid*, p.290.

⁴³ They were also known as 'half houses': Colin Thom, "Miles of Silly Little Dirty Houses!: The Lessons of Victorian Battersea", in *Mobilising Housing Histories: Learning from London's Past*, ed. by Peter Guillery and David Kroll (2019), pp. 37-56.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*; Roberts, *The Dwellings of the Labouring Classes*, pp.42-3 and p.77; Burnett, *A Social History of Housing*, p.78.

⁴⁵ Subsequent LCC estates were constructed pre-1914 at White Hart Lane, Tottenham; Norbury, Croydon and Old Oak, Hammersmith.

⁴⁶ For the Tudor Walters commission see Burnett, *A Social History of Housing*, pp.222-31.

housing needs of single women, particularly the increasing numbers joining the professional and business workplace in London and other urban centres, tended to be side-lined. Such women's invisibility was perpetuated by prevailing gender assumptions; that women should ideally dwell within the protective confines of the family home until marriage, and that women's independent, self-supporting status was an anomaly born of necessity rather than choice. Moreover, female workers' lower, erratic pay presented a far greater challenge for housing reformers. Nevertheless, the period witnessed a range of initiatives providing housing solutions designed solely for women.

Early Experiments

Although less documented, from the outset the SICLC's portfolio of exemplars included homes for single women as well as families and working men. The society's inaugural scheme at Bagnigge Wells, Pentonville (1844), a two-storey scheme for twenty-three families, also included a block of apartments for thirty 'widows or females of advanced age' (Figs 2 and 3).⁴⁷ Likewise, at the Thanksgiving Model Buildings, Gray's Inn Lane (1850) the society attempted to address the 'peculiar and difficult circumstances of a class of persons on whose behalf much public sympathy has been justly excited, and for whom no suitable provision had hitherto been made by the Society'; namely 128 single working women.⁴⁸ Much like Bagnigge Wells, the women's block, with a dedicated entrance, was visually integrated within the overall development also housing twenty families (Figs 4 and 5). The accommodation at 1s per week was offered in shared rooms ranged along a corridor, containing 'two bedsteads, a table, chairs and a washing-stand', with few communal facilities other than the public 'wash-house'.⁴⁹ However, unlike the SICLC's model schemes for men, it was never fully tenanted with '7 to 8 out of the 64 rooms usually remaining vacant'.⁵⁰ Affordability, enforced sharing and 'more stringent regulations as to the hours of closing and constant supervision' may well have deterred those most in need.⁵¹

The SICLC also demonstrated the optimum spatial configurations in exemplary lodging houses for single women. The conversion of 76 Hatton Garden (c.1850), billed as the 'completest example of the adaptation and arrangement of an old house with all the conveniences desirable in such an establishment', created accommodation for fifty-seven 'female emigrants', some of the thousands of 'surplus' unmarried women encouraged to relocate to the colonies at this time.⁵² The scheme comprised a ground floor communal living room with the upper floors divided into sleeping

⁴⁷ Henry Roberts, 'The Dwellings of the Labouring Classes', (London: Society for Improving the Condition of the Working Classes, 1855), pp.6-7; pp.40-1.

⁴⁸ Ibid pp.12-13 and p.54. The scheme was erected through the Bishop of London's donation fund to commemorate 'the removal of the cholera'.

⁴⁹ Ibid. The scheme was demolished following Second World War bombing. See London Metropolitan Archives (hereafter LMA), ACC/3445/SIC/08/002 - Thanksgiving Model Buildings, two watercolour panels; Architectural Press Archive/RIBA Collections, RIBA64595: photoprint, 1943.

⁵⁰ Roberts, *The Dwellings of the Labouring Classes*, p.54.

⁵¹ Ibid, p.68.

⁵² Ibid, pp.9-10; p.31; p.46; Kathrin Levitan, 'Redundancy, the 'Surplus Woman' Problem, and the British Census, 1851-1861', *Women's History Review*, 17 (2008).

compartments with access to shared washbasins (Fig. 6). As with the men's schemes, the access points and routines of 'inmates' were closely supervised by female superintendents. Compared with the 'amply remunerative' male experiments, the female version was deemed financially unviable. Thus, within a short space of time, the Hatton Garden scheme metamorphosed into a 'superior' men's lodging house. Although improved lodging houses, became a recognisable and respectable aspect of the metropolitan landscape for men, equivalent female provision was deemed untenable. In any case, such initiatives were assumed to fulfil an urgent, temporary need borne of specialised circumstances.

Homes and Clubs for Young Women

Girls and younger women wage earners were expected to live in the family home until marriage, thus the perceived moral dangers encountered by those leaving its protection in pursuit of work were of major concern.⁵³ From the 1870s Christian organisations, notably The Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) and the Girls' Friendly Society (GFS), became increasingly active in providing residential accommodation for lower-paid workers mainly under the age of twenty-five. The objective was to offer safe, homely environments, underpinned by a framework of religious and moral guidance, for vulnerable workers unfamiliar with city life. Most 'homes' or 'lodges' were provided in remodelled townhouses often procured through the assistance of wealthy benefactors. Accommodation, generally seen to serve a relatively brief interlude, was provided in shared dormitory-style bedrooms or divided compartments known as 'cubicles'. Homes catered to young women, both native and foreign born, primarily engaged in domestic service, factory work or in a range of such business occupations as shopworkers, telegraphists, or clerks. In the 1880s and 90s the All Saints Sisterhood, founded by Harriet Byron in 1851, ran St Gabriel's Home at number 34 Mortimer Street for Anglican shopgirls, aiming to save them from the 'slack' arrangements in department store residential accommodation with 'mixed company' and a lack of private space. Provision soon expanded into the upper parts of number 36, offering twenty-one beds with screens, a sitting room and a room for private prayer.⁵⁴

Homes for Working Girls in London (HWGL), founded by John Shrimpton in 1878, rallied to the same cause, opening their first home, Alexandra House, at 88 St John Street, Smithfield the same year. Rentals typically started at 2s 6d per week, 4s 6d with full-board, though the low wage-earners regularly struggled to afford more than breakfast and tea.⁵⁵ Gordon House, 8 Endsleigh Gardens (1881) was established to specifically benefit 'foreign' girls working in the Capital. Residents listed in the 1891 census were mostly German, but also of Swiss, Austrian, Bohemian,

⁵³ For younger women workers see Selina Todd, *Young Women, Work, and Family in England, 1918-1950*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Selina Todd, 'Young Women, Work, and Leisure in Interwar England', *The Historical Journal*, 48 (3), Sep 2005, 789-809.

⁵⁴ 'Chapter 26: Mortimer Street', *Survey of London: Volume 52, South-East Marylebone*, ed. by Philip Temple and Colin Thom (London, 2017), p.5.

⁵⁵ University of Warwick, Modern Records Centre - HWGL First Report 1878-1879.

Swedish, Danish, Irish, and Jamaican origin. At the HWGL's ninth home, Hyde House at 27 Somerset Street, Portman Square (1884), fifty-eight young women resided in either cubicles opening directly off the first floor sitting room, or in a variety of shared, upper-floor bedrooms. Meals were served in the basement 'refectory' adjacent to the kitchen and other offices, management and welfare of the 'inmates' placed under the maternal care of the 'matron'. The conversions sought to preserve the former middle-class family identity of the townhouses as far as possible, the communal 'drawing rooms' decorated in 'soft, bright paper' and framed illuminations, with a royal portrait hung above the mantelpiece. A maple, bible bookstand over each bed was installed to steer 'inmates' onto the appropriate path towards 'virtuous and womanly lives'.⁵⁶

Such housing initiatives grew as an adjunct to the wider girls' club movement, promoted by religious organisations, University Settlements and other philanthropic individuals to 'rescue' and 'elevate' working-class girls through a blend of protection, discipline and empowerment.⁵⁷ Accommodation functioned alongside club venues offering members a variety of activities and resources for physical and 'mental improvement'. Homes, like club culture, attempted to offer working girls an antidote to the sense of isolation and loneliness, as well an enhanced level of protection from the perceived horrors of 'White Slavery', the presumed abduction of young women and girls for prostitution publicised by W.T. Stead in the *Pall Mall Gazette*.⁵⁸ At the Soho Club and Home, 59 Greek Street, founded by girls' club pioneer Maude Stanley in 1884, classes in music and the arts, mathematics and language, bible study and gymnastics were augmented by a range of short and longer-term accommodation for forty 'Young Women engaged in business, and students'.⁵⁹ Rentals varied between 3s (shillings) and 4s per week for dormitory-style bedrooms to 7s 6d for larger private rooms, with stays on a more casual basis at 1s per night for 'Teachers or Students coming to London to pass Examinations'.⁶⁰ Though some remained for some time, with 'excellent places found for them, either in business or service' there was a relatively high turnover with a total of 768 inmates making use of the home between 1884 and 1890. Many stayed only for seasonal work; others gained live-in positions or 'moved on from the house through emigration or marriage'.⁶¹ The potential of recouping club expenses by letting out rooms, encouraged other clubs to follow Stanley's example and provide residential accommodation.

⁵⁶ Anne Beale, 'Hyde House', in *Girls Own Paper*, (London, 1884), p. 455.

⁵⁷ Iris Dove, *Sisterhood or Surveillance?*

⁵⁸ W.T. Stead, 'The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon', *Pall Mall Gazette*, July 1885; see Peter Gordon and David Doughan, *Women, Clubs, and Associations in Britain*, (London: Routledge, 2006), pp.85-105

⁵⁹ Maude Stanley, 'Homes for Working Girls', in *Clubs for Working Girls*, (London; New York: Macmillan and Co., 1890), pp. 213-30. In the 1920s The Soho Club and Home would become the Theatre Girls Club for actresses, and later a hostel for homeless women.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid, p.224.

Ladies' Residential Chambers

Housing schemes for more prosperous and mature 'working gentlewomen' began to emerge in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The change was prompted by the ever-expanding number of 'superfluous' unmarried middle-class women earning their living in the capital (see Chapter 1). In 1878 Lady Mary Feilding (1823-1896) was purportedly 'the first to open flats for ladies'.⁶² Her parallel philanthropic endeavours as founder of the Working Ladies' Guild, which assisted 'unmarried and widowed gentlewomen in need of employment, or in temporary difficulty', expanded to encompass their housing needs. The pioneering experiment, which aimed to ameliorate the lot of 'struggling or lonely ladies, whose life in lodgings is often a misery and not a home', involved the adaptation of a six-storey block at Campden Hill, Kensington, originally designed as artisan dwellings.⁶³ The broad middle-class tenant base necessitated more flexible layouts, fifty rooms being 'let in sets or singly' according to tenants needs, on both an unfurnished and furnished basis:

My tenants were of all classes, all creeds, all ages, all ranks. A squire's daughter occupied five, having her own servant. Two widows of generals each occupied a set of three or four rooms. Governesses, young students from the country, ladies earning their livelihood in various ways, occupied the rest of the building.⁶⁴

Similarly flexible service arrangements were devised for tenants working long hours in teaching and other occupations. 'Campden House' operated with one cook-housekeeper living on-site with her husband, assisted by two maids. Orders were gathered each evening and the meals served directly to tenants' rooms, thereby negating the obligation to dine or socialise with others. Tenants were expected to dust their own rooms and organise breakfast and tea, a little stove and hot tap provided on each landing, with laundry facilities felt unnecessary since 'ladies occupying the apartments give out their washing'.⁶⁵ The lack of communal spaces did, however, have its drawbacks; suggested improvements emerging from the experiment included music rooms so that piano practice might be allowed in future schemes. Charges varied between 2s 6d and 4s paid in advance weekly, Feilding making herself personally responsible for collection in the Octavia Hill mode (see Chapter 1). With lodging houses deemed unsuitable and speculatively-built mansion flats well beyond the reach of most women, it was hoped that the success of this self-supporting experiment would 'point the way' for other like-minded individuals to replicate her ideas.

The first purpose-built schemes for middle-class female workers in London were finally realised in the 1880s. The Oakley Flats at Oakley Street, Chelsea were directly inspired by Feilding's

⁶² 'Obituary: Lady Mary Feilding', *Englishwoman's Review*, 15 Jul 1896, pp.203-4. Mary was twin sister of Rudolph William, 8th Earl of Denbigh.

⁶³ Lady Mary Feilding 'Help Without Charity for Gentlewomen, by Money Invested in Flats and Producing Fair Interest', *Work and Leisure*, 12(9), 1887., pp.236-7.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Lady Mary Feilding, 'How Associated Dwellings May Be Carried Out', in *Work and Leisure*, (1887), pp. 287-9.

earlier scheme; with basic private accommodation and an absence of communal rooms.⁶⁶ The plan, which included forty-five, one to three-room 'sets', was oriented towards women in lower-paid occupations and operated on the same catered basis. Although supervised by a lady superintendent with the gateway locked at 10:30pm, tenants were afforded greater freedom than some accommodations, being 'provided with gate and door keys'.⁶⁷ The five-storey, neo-classical yellow brick building (Figs 7 and 8) with pale brick quoins and dressings, pedimented roofline and matching range accessed via an inner courtyard, was erected in 1884 by American ex-patriate, Sir Curtis Lampson (1806-1885).⁶⁸ A trustee of the Peabody Donation fund and close friend of George Peabody, the impetus behind his involvement in women's schemes is unclear and little mention is now made of the flats despite their apparent notoriety with contemporaries, both at home and across the Atlantic.⁶⁹ In 1896 Mary Gay Humphreys noted the scheme as the earliest of those purpose-designed for 'women bachelors' in London.⁷⁰

A further pioneering scheme was built by the Ladies' Residential Chambers Limited (LRC) at Chenies Street, Bloomsbury. Aimed towards prosperous professionals, it offered two to four-room, fully self-contained flats with a small 'pantry' kitchen and bathroom. For an additional fee residents, including doctors, artists and music teachers, also benefitted from large and small communal dining rooms supplied by staff from the adjacent basement kitchen. The five-storey, red-brick mansion block (Fig. 9) was designed by the Scottish architect John McKean Brydon (1840-1901) who had a close working relationship with the Garrett family, a leading force behind the venture.⁷¹ He collaborated in designing pioneering women's institutions, notably the New Hospital for Women, Euston Road (1889-90) and London School of Medicine for Women, Handel Street (1897-1900) for Dr Elizabeth Garrett Anderson (1836-1917), foundations which enabled poorer women to receive treatment from qualified female practitioners.⁷² Her sister Agnes, an LRC director, and cousin Rhoda Garrett had also both trained as apprentices at Brydon's practice in the 1870s prior to forging careers as the first women interior designers.⁷³ The opening ceremony in May 1889 was attended by aristocratic backers and leading figures in the women's movement including Clementina Black and Lydia Becker.

However, the generously proportioned plans at Chenies Street resulted in barely twenty flats and were too expensive for most women. A drive for more affordable flat types was reflected

⁶⁶ 'Obituary: Lady Mary Feilding'.

⁶⁷ 'Homes for Ladies', *Work and Leisure*, 10 Jan 1884, pp.35-6 and Apr 1884, pp.156-7.

⁶⁸ Lampson was awarded a baronetcy in recognition of his directorship of the company which laid the Atlantic telegraph cable in the 1850s.

⁶⁹ 'Obituary: Lady Mary Feilding'.

⁷⁰ Humphreys, 'Women Bachelors in London', pp.600-11.

⁷¹ 'The Ladies' Residential Chambers, Chenies Street', *The Builder*, 57, 09 Nov 1889, p.332. Chenies Street Chambers was much altered following Second World War damage.

⁷² Paul Waterhouse and Ian Dungavell, 'Brydon, John McKean (1840-1901), 2004, *ODNB* ; 'John McKean Brydon', *Dictionary of Scottish Architects*, <www.scottisharchitects.org.uk> [accessed Jan 2021]. Chenies Street Chambers are not mentioned in biographical sources.

⁷³ They lived and ran their design practice, R & A Garrett, from 2 Gower Street, Bloomsbury: Elizabeth Crawford, *Enterprising Women: The Garretts and Their Circle*, (London : Francis Boutle, 2001).

in the LRC's second development, the York Street Chambers, Marylebone (1892). Agnes Garrett was responsible for supplying the specially fitted furniture, and all matters of upkeep were referred to her.⁷⁴ Inventive layouts offered new 'co-flattening' arrangements, where clusters of one or two-room flats shared a 'joint pantry'. However, this was evidently unpopular with later structural alterations carried out to convert some to private flats.⁷⁵ The tenant base comprised mainly 'artists, authors, nurses and other workers', but also appealed to pioneering architects Ethel and Bessie Charles, the first women members of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), who operated from a York Street flat.⁷⁶ The building was built by Messrs Bovis (their first building contract) to a design commissioned from Balfour and Turner (Fig. 10), a sympathetic and well-connected firm able to lend the scheme architectural and social credibility. Eustace Balfour (1854-1911), the nephew of Prime Minister Lord Salisbury and a former pupil of Basil Champneys, was married to leading women's suffrage campaigner Lady Frances (née Campbell).⁷⁷ Since 1890 he had been surveyor to the Grosvenor estates, where a steadily expanding range of mansion flats was being erected. Partner Hugh Thackeray Turner (1853-1937), former pupil of Sir George Gilbert Scott, was brother-in-law to Christiana Herringham, another LRC director. The spare layouts at York Street contrasted with their later Campden House Chambers, Hornton Street Kensington (1905), a large block of bachelor flats benefitting from the usual self-contained comfort.⁷⁸

Architecturally, ladies' residential chambers or flats took their cues from the formal qualities of surrounding mansion blocks, whilst attempting to replicate the convenience of bachelors chambers. By the late 1880s architectural designers could reference a range of purpose-built residential precedents for women formulated at Cambridge in the 1870s by Alfred Waterhouse at Girton College and Basil Champneys at Newnham College, and more recently at Somerville College, Oxford by H.W. Moore (1885).⁷⁹ Queen Alexandra's House (1884), a six-storey, red brick block near the Royal Albert Hall, designed by C.P. Clarke and R. Down for women students at the Royal Colleges of Music, Art and Science, provided a London-based exemplar. Though institutional, design concepts similarly hinged around creating traditional domesticated settings, where women students lived 'as members of a large family under the care of a lady principal each being provided with a separate apartment fitted up as a sitting room and bedroom...plans which [corresponded] somewhat to that of an ordinary residence'.⁸⁰ The design approach at Chenies Street was praised by *The Builder*: 'as a treatment of a plain and unpretending building [it] is one of the best and most suitable pieces of modern street architecture in London'.⁸¹ The curved gables, statement chimney

⁷⁴ Elizabeth Crawford, *The Women's Suffrage Movement: A Reference Guide, 1866-1928*, (London: Routledge, 2001), pp.238-9.

⁷⁵ Zimmern, 'Ladies' Dwellings', p.98; Perks, *Residential Flats*, p.158.

⁷⁶ Walker, 'The Entry of Women into the Architectural Profession', pp.13-18.

⁷⁷ His elder brother Arthur Balfour succeeded Salisbury as Prime Minister in 1902.

⁷⁸ Perks, *Residential Flats*, pp.158-60; *The Architectural Review*, 19, 1906, pp.205-8

⁷⁹ See Birney Vickery, *Buildings for Bluestockings*.

⁸⁰ 'Somerville Hall, Oxford', *Building News*, 09 Sep 1887, p.394

⁸¹ 'The Late Mr. J.M. Brydon', *The Builder*, 80, 1901.

stacks and elaborate terracotta ornament deployed the fashionable 'Queen Anne' style, which gradually superseded the ubiquitous stuccoed Italianate in London from the mid-1870s.⁸² The distinctly domestic aesthetic suggested by the canted bays, white windows and attic dormers was perceived as appropriate for female occupants.⁸³

Ladies' Residential Clubs

The period also witnessed the development of an alternative source of urban accommodation for middle-class women, well-known to contemporaries but whose characteristics are often glossed over in historical accounts. Ladies' residential clubs emerged in the 1880s to meet a new brief in which improved affordability was felt to lie in 'associated dwellings' where corridors of more compact, keenly-priced rooms would share sanitary and catering amenities as well as an enhanced range of communal 'club' spaces.⁸⁴

Visions of a 'Castle in the Air', an idealised urban women's scheme, were discussed in the women's periodical *Work and Leisure* in 1887, spurring a group of public-spirited individuals with the requisite social standing to turn these ideas into built reality. Lady Mary Feilding was again a leading light in the development of the scheme and the limited dividend company formed to administer it. The Board of Ladies' Dwelling Company Limited (LDC) was chaired by her brother Major-General William Feilding (1836-1895), with directors including *Work and Leisure* editor and women's campaigner, Louisa Hubbard. The initial phase of Sloane Gardens House, Lower Sloane Street, was opened in August 1889. The four to five-storey building, with curved façade ranged above a row of ground floor shops, was designed by architect John T. Lee (Fig. 11). Whilst there were a handful of two-room flats, accommodation was mostly provided in bed-sitting rooms with bed recesses, with shared bathrooms and the use of one large and two small private dining rooms, a lounge, library, music room and 'studio'. An annual subscription of 5s allowed carefully vetted residents and other members to use the extensive 'club' facilities on a daily basis. The new experiment in living for ladies of small means was covered widely in the press, one male commentator amused by the model flat which demonstrated 'how they may serve at once as sitting-rooms and bedrooms, with bookcases that turn into bedsteads and other convertible furniture, almost as surprising in its way, as Miss Fenwick's famous collapsing bonnet'.⁸⁵ By the time the second phase was opened in May 1890 by Princess Mary of Teck, eighty women were in residence.⁸⁶ Twenty years later the directors reported the continuing success of the scheme, with the full 5% dividend paid to investors, all 140 rooms tenanted and only one of the shops vacant.⁸⁷

⁸² 'Settlement and building: From 1865 to 1900', in *A History of the County of Middlesex: Volume 12, Chelsea*, ed. Patricia E C Croot (London, 2004), pp.66-78. *British History Online* <http://www.british-history.ac.uk>.

⁸³ Gee, 'Where Shall She Live?', (2010).

⁸⁴ Feilding, 'How Associated Dwellings May Be Carried Out', pp.287-9.

⁸⁵ 'The Man About Town', *The Sporting Gazette*, 09 Mar 1889, p.308.

⁸⁶ *Daily News*, 20 May 1890, p.6.

⁸⁷ *The Times*, 23 May 1908, p.15.

The trend went hand-in-hand with shorter-term accommodation increasingly being offered as an extension to the 'women's clubs' which similarly surged to prominence during the same period. Men's private members clubs, a product of eighteenth-century 'coffee house' culture, grew in popularity throughout the nineteenth century principally in the 'clubland' heart of St James's Westminster. The first attempts to carve out a place for women in this exclusively male domain came in the 1860s with Bessie Parkes and Barbara Boudichon's reading room and luncheon club at the Ladies' Institute, Langham Place and Berners Club (Working Women's Club), Berners Street. These offered women convivial, intellectual spaces beyond the domestic sphere where they might foster camaraderie amongst like-minded members. Their intervention set the precedent for a host of further women's clubs in London, established in both converted and bespoke premises.⁸⁸ One strand in their evolution emulated the aristocratic gentlemen's clubs whilst establishing their own territory near the West End shopping districts, including the Alexandra, Grosvenor Street (1884) which attracted an elite female membership. Another strand viewed membership as a badge of women's emancipation. The Somerville at Oxford Street (1878) and University Club for Ladies, New Bond Street (1883), operated intellectually-charged environments for those educated at the Oxbridge and London women's colleges. The Pioneer Club founded by Emily Massingberd (1892), 'the farthest outpost of the "New Woman" ', hosted a radical programme of lectures and debates in the 'primrose-tinted drawing room' of her home and club premises at Bruton Street.⁸⁹ Some clubs served specific occupations, such as 'The Writers', Norfolk Street (1892) aimed at authors and journalists, located near the 'newspapers and the magazines, and within easy reach of the publishers'.⁹⁰ Although levels of refinement, founding ethos and membership profiles varied, the underlying spatial principles of dining, sitting and reading rooms, offering informal working, recreational and networking environments, were fundamentally the same.

With female presence in the public sphere circumscribed, club communal areas often served an additional purpose as 'waiting rooms', where members could rest in comfort before work or between business appointments: '...much better than waiting under the cold penetrating eyes of the office boys or pretending to be interested in the shop windows'.⁹¹ However, although most women's clubs were open late into the evening, few initially offered residential accommodation. By 1890 the growing demand amongst single women workers was increasingly acknowledged:

Some live in the country and visit town for business or otherwise...others though living in the town or suburbs, have no study for the pursuit of their literary, artistic, or scientific

⁸⁸ For women's clubs see Crawford, *The Women's Suffrage Movement*, pp.117-130.

⁸⁹ The University Club for Ladies (renamed the University Women's Club in 1921) is the only women's club of the period to survive. Humphreys, 'Women Bachelors in London', p.610.

⁹⁰ Sophia F. A. Caulfeild, 'Women's Clubs in London', *Girl's Own Paper*, Vol 10, Oct 1890, p.609.

⁹¹ Humphreys, 'Women Bachelors in London', p.610.

work at home; and a third party has to attend classes, and requires some more conveniently central or adjacent resting place.⁹²

Only a handful including The Victoria, Old Cavendish Street, with its ten or so upper floor shared bedrooms, were able to offer suitable, affordable rooms 'where young ladies could be respectively lodged without a chaperone'.⁹³ Mindful of members' needs, the opulent purpose-built Empress Club, Dover Street (1897) factored in a significant amount of residential space; during the 1901 census thirty women plus a fifty-strong body of domestic staff were staying at the club.⁹⁴ Likewise, the new Lyceum Club, Piccadilly (1904), provided thirty-five bedrooms for 'ladies engaged with literature, journalism, art, science and medicine' as well as a venue to meet with editors or other employers 'in surroundings that did not suggest poverty'.

Correspondingly, during the decade a series of more residentially-focussed clubs, taking their lead from Sloane Gardens House albeit on a more modest scale, sprung up in West London at Kensington, Earl's Court and Chelsea.⁹⁵ Premises typically encompassed pairs of adapted townhouses where the role of lady superintendent and housekeeper were rolled into one. The new Beechwood Club at 6 Oakley Street, Chelsea founded in 1895 by Mrs Adair in the vicinity of the Oakley Flats, was 'open to those who are employed as secretaries, clerks, and teachers, or who are training for such employment', a respectable home-from-home for hard-working professionals 'without the attendant labours of housekeeping'.⁹⁶ The screening of prospective members by the committee lent such residential schemes a 'club-like' exclusivity, but it also conveyed a sense of propriety to wider society, countering scepticism surrounding women's independence.

The residential club phenomenon was not restricted to London but repeated in other urban centres, at Leeds, Sheffield and elsewhere such as Mrs Beddoe's scheme at Clifton, Bristol which she attempted to roll-out to other provincial towns.⁹⁷ Furthermore remarkably similar developments for single working women were founded in Germany, Austria and elsewhere in Europe, such as the Heimhof (1911), established in Vienna by women's rights activist Auguste Fickert (1855-1910).⁹⁸ A parallel trajectory was also witnessed across the Atlantic with various 'club residences' for single working women established in New York City, and a series of 'Eleanor Clubs' founded in Chicago by philanthropist Ina Law Robertson from 1898.⁹⁹ Early experiments in adapted large row (terraced) houses and other structures, 'helped Robertson determine over time, the

⁹² *Ibid*, p.598.

⁹³ *Ibid*, p.599.

⁹⁴ Elizabeth Crawford, 'Rooms of Their Own: Victorian and Edwardian Women's Clubs', 2012, <<https://womanandhersphere.com/2012/10/24/rooms-of-their-own-victorian-and-edwardian-womens-clubs-hesitant-beginnings/>>, [accessed 20 Jan 2021].

⁹⁵ Pearson, *The Architectural and Social History of Cooperative Living*, p.51.

⁹⁶ 'A Club for Professional Women', *The Queen*, 07 Sep 1895, p.435.

⁹⁷ *Englishwoman's Review*, 15 Jul 1896, pp.203-4.

⁹⁸ Catherine Bauer, *Modern Housing*, 2020 edn (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1934).; p.205; Gisela Urban, 'The Problem for Housing for Self-Supporting Women', *Time and Tide*, 04 Apr 1924, pp.332-3.

⁹⁹ Lawrence, *Chicago's Eleanor Clubs*.

features and characteristics of an ideal group home for working women' for purpose-built blocks developed after 1914.¹⁰⁰ As will be shown in subsequent chapters, the premise of the women's residential club remained relevant for many inter-war women's housing schemes.

Enterprising individuals had made tangible, practical inroads into tackling the housing issue for women working and living alone in London. However, further expansion in women's employment at the turn of the century drew even greater numbers to the capital. The limited number of new Residential Chambers and Residential Clubs, housing the better-paid and prohibitively expensive for the majority, could not hope to accommodate the broadening spectrum of female wage-earners. As Emily Gee noted, the influx presented Edwardian London with 'a major spatial and moral challenge'.¹⁰¹ This necessitated an architectural response which encompassed densification and rationalisation whilst upholding the moral standards appropriate to their class and gender. What emerged was a further addition to this developing typology of multi-occupancy urban housing: the Edwardian hostel.

Edwardian Schemes: 'A wholesome existence with perfect freedom'

In 1899 a conference was organised by the Women's Industrial Council at Queen's College, Harley Street to investigate the housing problem for single women workers in London.¹⁰² A range of questions were hotly debated: should schemes be segregated by gender, occupation or class? Should servants live-in, be employed by individual tenants, or be pooled collectively along the lines of a club or hotel? A version of Queen Anne's Mansions (see pp.53-4) adapted for smaller incomes was mooted as the optimum model. The design of women's schemes established thus far began to be reconsidered by reformers. Purpose-built residential chambers were welcomed but rather than housing the self-dependent worker, some tenants were 'ladies of independent means, or such as supplement their professional income from private sources'.¹⁰³ LDC's Sloane Gardens House also attracted criticism for failing to cater to the women it claimed to target; those in lesser-paid occupations.

The following year, Emily Hobhouse (1860-1926) surveyed 600 professional working women for the Council to discover how they wished to live ideally.¹⁰⁴ Over half of the respondents lived in single rooms often in boarding houses, many citing the trials of loneliness, poor food, and the oppressive rules under which they were obliged to live, whereas all they desired was 'a wholesome existence with perfect freedom'.¹⁰⁵ Some suggested ending gender-segregation as a means to ensure financial viability and higher standards for women. Plans for an unrealised large unisex

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Gee, 'Where Shall She Live?', 2010, p.90.

¹⁰² 'The Housing of Ladies Living in London', *The Women's Industrial News*, 10 Dec 1899, pp.148-51.

¹⁰³ Zimmern, 'Ladies' Dwellings', p.99.

¹⁰⁴ Emily Hobhouse, 'Women Workers: How They Live, How They Wish to Live', *Nineteenth Century*, 1900, 47, pp.471-84.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

residential club containing 300 to 400 rooms were reported in 1891, where young men and women would be 'kept apart in their own private rooms' yet 'allowed to mix together in the reception-room, the restaurant, the library, and reading-rooms'.¹⁰⁶ Cost-effective or not, such co-habitation was deemed too progressive for Edwardian sensibilities; gender-segregation in housing for single people lasted well into the twentieth century.

The architectural solution was, however, felt to lie in greater numbers of tenants. There were persistent calls for provision for female workers on a much larger scale. Erecting a Rowton House for women – based around the successful schemes which had managed to strike the right balance between quality and affordability – was frequently suggested. The idea was contemplated on more than one occasion by Lord Rowton and co-director Sir Richard Farrant but was discounted on the grounds of financial viability. However, other reservations concerning the practical application of their system to women were also undercut by assumptions of gendered behaviour:

...the great feature of a Rowton House is that when the paying guest leaves his dormitory in the morning...he does not return. We could never manage that with women. They would never leave their sleeping apartments; they would chatter, and perhaps, dance!..how could we be certain that all we admitted were of the right class? One bad woman has far more influence than twenty bad men...¹⁰⁷

In 1899 Canadian author and MP Gilbert Parker promoted a detailed, fully-costed proposal for 400 'educated women' earning between £50 to £120 a year in single and shared double rooms, costing from 5s to 8s per week and staffed by a cook, five kitchen maids and sixteen house-parlourmaids, but despite discussions with Lord Rowton, this seemingly never came to fruition.¹⁰⁸

The challenge was taken forward by such individuals as Lady Mary Brabazon (née Maitland), Countess of Meath and her associates of the Brabazon House Company Limited. A purpose-built residential club, New Brabazon House at Moreton Street, Pimlico (1902), was erected to replace an earlier scheme of 1883 in adapted townhouses. It was designed by architect R. Stephen Ayling to accommodate 89 women on a more economical basis. This was achieved through a denser plan combining smaller cubicles and bedrooms on the upper floors rather than spacious bed-sitting rooms, with a range of first floor communal rooms and a basement dining room (Figs 12 and 13).¹⁰⁹ Four similar commissions awarded to Ayling allowed him to specialise in the building type, including an enlarged sister project, Hopkinson House, Vauxhall Bridge Road (1906) housing 139 women. Weekly charges of 7s 6d and 5s were only achievable by reducing shareholder returns to 3½ per cent.¹¹⁰ Such developments were lauded as inaugurating a new type, finally attending to the needs

¹⁰⁶ 'Residential Clubs for Young People', *The Review of Reviews*, 4, Jul 1891, p.50.

¹⁰⁷ 'Workingwomen's Hotels', *New York Times*, 02 Sep 1898, p.4.

¹⁰⁸ 'Educated Working Women: Important Housing Proposals', *Morning Post*, 03 Jul 1899, p.6.

¹⁰⁹ 'New Brabazon House', *Building News*, 14 Jul 1901, p.797.

¹¹⁰ 'House for Lady Workers', *Daily Mail*, 23 Mar 1906, p.5.

of less affluent workers, yet maintaining high-quality yet affordable living spaces. Greater spatial economy brought the residential club closer to the model lodging house or hostels generally. Despite more compact rooms, they still functioned as relatively permanent homes. Sydney March's survey of potential accommodation options for women 'club-dwellers' in the *Lady's Realm* in 1905, described how she had lived quite comfortably for two years in one such residential club.¹¹¹

The large Christian organisations also responded with more substantial, bespoke schemes catering to a wider cross-section of female worker. In 1904 the YWCA's twenty-five adapted homes across London were augmented by their first purpose-built block, Ames House, 42-44 Mortimer Street for 97 occupants, designed by Arthur Beresford Pite (1861-1964). As at Sloane Gardens House, the inclusion of four ground floor shops aided financial viability, and like the women-led 'Dorothy' restaurants pioneered nearby, their re-established 'Welbeck Restaurant' offered women cheaper, better meals.¹¹² The Edwardian women's housing schemes retained much of the formal qualities of the Victorian mansion blocks, red brick-built, four to five storeys, often cloaked in an Arts and Crafts aesthetic and retaining Flemish gables and canted bays. Others assumed fashionable Baroque styling. The HWG's newly-constructed 'Hyde House' at 8-10 Bulstrode Street, Marylebone (1906), a red brick, neo-Baroque building with elaborate carvings in Portland stone by H.C. Fehr, was designed by W. H. Seth-Smith as an upgrade on their adapted home of the same name at Somerset Street, Portman Square.¹¹³ The GFS later followed suit with their own 'Wrenaissance' styled corner block of cubicles combined with Diocesan offices at 29 Francis Street, Westminster (1914), also designed by Ayling, with Fehr's decorative embellishments.¹¹⁴

Housing a broader spectrum of middle-class women had proved feasible; the persistent difficulty was reaching the very lowest-paid. In the years preceding the Great War campaigners pressed on with the mission to offer alternatives to the dubious common lodgings. In 1910 Mary Higgs published a report on behalf of the National Association for Women's Lodging Houses examining the field of provision for self-supporting female workers.¹¹⁵ They had long petitioned the LCC and Metropolitan Boroughs to erect municipal lodging houses for women in London on a par with men's provision; since 1892 the three LCC hostels and six monumental Rowton Houses accommodated over 7,000 men.¹¹⁶ Whilst London lagged behind, in Manchester, Ashton House (1908-9), a red brick block with terracotta detailing and castellated gable end, was erected by the Manchester Corporation as a model women's lodging house. Championed by the housing

¹¹¹ Sydney March, 'Women's Residential Clubs: Why I Live in One of Them', *The Lady's Realm*, 1905, pp.333-39.

¹¹² The block replaced the YWCA property with Welbeck restaurant (1884) at 101 Mortimer Street. The first 'Dorothy' restaurant (1888), 81 Mortimer Street was founded by Girton College graduate Isabel Cooper-Oakley of the Ladies' Restaurant Association: 'Metropolitan Gossip', *Belfast News-Letter*, 09 Nov 1888; 'At a Ladies' Restaurant', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 10 Dec 1888, p.14.

¹¹³ Chapter 5: 'Marylebone Lane Area', *Survey of London: Volume 51, South-East Marylebone*, ed. Philip Temple and Colin Thom, (London, 2017), pp.43-4.

¹¹⁴ Historic England, 'Former London Diocesan Girls' Friendly Society Hostel (St Mungos), 29, Francis Street', Listing 1392546, 17 Apr 2008.

¹¹⁵ Mary Higgs, *Where Shall She Live?*, (London: P. S. King & Son, 1910).

¹¹⁶ Gee, 'Where Shall She Live?', 2010, pp.93-6.

campaigner Margaret Ashton (1856-1937) and designed by city architect Henry Price, it accommodated 222 women in individual cubicles, with occupants cooking for themselves in communal kitchens.¹¹⁷

Ada Lewis House (1913), Southwark, the first large-scale women's development, was thus warmly welcomed. Sponsored by the late philanthropist Ada Lewis, the 'imposing' neo-Baroque, six-storey building was designed by Joseph and Smithem utilising 'ultra-modern' construction techniques, including fireproof Mouchel-Hennebique ferro-concrete (Fig. 14).¹¹⁸ Red-brick façades with heavy stone dressings emphasised the building's 'distinction and individuality', the tall arched first floor windows allowing the communal sewing, reading and spacious sitting-room 'with grand piano and lounge chairs' to be lofty and impressive. Behind the French-style Mansard roof lay a garden with seating and plants.¹¹⁹ The basement with two dining rooms, the kitchen, laundry and servant quarters also contained lockers, a drying room, foot baths, and a 'brushing room for boots and clothes', amenities consciously mirroring the Rowton Houses. But strategies upping densities to house 214 women were less successful than envisaged; whilst the seven 'superior' ground floor rooms and twenty double rooms at 5s per week were continuously occupied, the rows of low-cost cubicles ranged around the U-shaped plan at 3s per week or 6d nightly proved unpopular (Fig. 15). Within four months of opening the committee of trustees commissioned the architects to close the gaps in the partitions to create more appealing rooms.¹²⁰ Women in white-collar occupations including 'missionaries, nurses, typewriters, teachers, writers, organizers, shopgirls, clerks...' were using the hostel rather than the lowest-paid. For such women, desperate for homely longer-term, dwellings, spartan cubicles lacking comfort and privacy, represented little more than a transient existence. Such women became increasingly vocal in their condemnation of the drawbacks of hostel-living: turnstile entrances, strict rules and adherence to curfews all contributing to the unwarranted 'atmosphere of oppression'.¹²¹

Women's Schemes in the Suburbs

Much like family housing, in the first decades of the twentieth century, the expanding network of rail, tube and tramways enabled women's housing initiatives to extend into the garden cities, villages and suburbs surrounding London. Lower land costs and fewer spatial constraints allowed providers to erect low-rise developments with more generously proportioned living spaces than was possible in the city. The convenience of the urban 'catering flat' which had inspired the women's residential clubs, was now translated to a suburban context.

¹¹⁷ 'Death of Miss Margaret Ashton - Women's Suffrage Pioneer: Long Record of Public Service', *Manchester Guardian*, 16 Oct 1937, p.16. Ashton House recently became a student residence for Manchester Metropolitan University.

¹¹⁸ Ada Lewis (wife of Samuel Lewis, founder of the Samuel Lewis Trust for Dwellings for the Poor) bequeathed £50,000 for erecting women's hostels in London. C. S. B., 'Ada Lewis House', *Common Cause*, 11 Sep 1914, pp.427-8.

¹¹⁹ Ibid. In 1968 it became Driscoll House, a commercial hostel (listed Grade II in 2006).

¹²⁰ Gee, 'Where Shall She Live?', 2010, pp.93-6 and pp.105-6; LMA, LMA/4318/B/03/006 - Ada Lewis House photograph album; LMA, LMA/4318/B/03/014 - News cuttings file.

¹²¹ Miall, *The Bachelor Girl's Guide to Everything*, p.17.

One of the earliest such schemes stemmed from Henrietta Barnett's determination to include homes for single working women at the Hampstead Garden Suburb. The specification, with luxuries including a bath, gas-stove and larder for each tenant, was based upon her personal experience of the uncomfortable lodgings endured by women volunteers at her London-based settlements.¹²² Waterlow Court (1909) was designed by M. H. (Mackay Hugh) Baillie Scott (1865-1945) for the Improved Industrial Dwellings Company and named after its late founder Sydney Waterlow. The two-storey building with dormered attic was in a carefully detailed Arts and Crafts style, with lime-washed façades to the inner courtyard and half-timbered external walling, exposed oak beams, inglenook fireplaces and crafted iron door latches (Fig. 16). Fifty flats, mostly one-room with some two-room, were arranged as a cloistered quadrangle, each containing a spacious living room with bedroom area, bathroom and small 'scullery'. Courtyard access to the upper flats via ten separate staircases minimised noise and ensured an enhanced level of privacy. The centrally located, communal dining hall and common rooms were staffed by a housekeeper and servants living in a separate annexe at the southern corner. As well as the central lawn area, tenants were provided with gardens, tennis courts and a croquet lawn. Monthly rather than weekly rentals of between £1 14s and £3 5s reflected the enhanced sense of permanency in such flats for better-off female tenants.¹²³

The architectural formula was repeated in a simplified vernacular style at a lesser-known development, The Quadrangle, Herne Hill, South London (1911-13). This was erected by the South London Provident Society on the site of two former nineteenth-century villas at 34 and 35 Herne Hill (Fig. 17).¹²⁴ The scheme, designed by Edward A. Ellis and developed by prominent local landowner R. A. Sanders, focused on the single mature worker with tenancy restricted to those over the age of thirty-five. Plans originally included twenty-one flats, including one for the caretaker, ranged around an open quadrangle, each with bed recess or a separate bedroom, small kitchen, toilet and shared bathrooms. Communal space was provided in a large common room above the entrance archway, with a kitchen block added at the north-west corner in 1913. Further plans in 1914 for an additional wing of fifteen bed-sitting rooms extending into the gardens, testified to the success of the initiative, but these were not completed until the early 1920s due to the outbreak of war.

The notion of the residential enclave of small flats with minimal kitchens and access to communal dining and other facilities, had been deployed for single bachelors at the 'Albany' development. At the turn of the nineteenth century, it was also intimately bound with the concept of 'cooperative housekeeping', as a wider vehicle for social cohesion and a potential remedy to the

¹²² Dame Henrietta Barnett, *The Story of the Growth of the Hampstead Garden Suburb, 1907-1928*, (London: [s.n.], 1928), pp.20-1; Pearson, *The Architectural and Social History of Cooperative Living*, pp.104-9; *The Builder*, 10 Jul 1909, p.48.

¹²³ Esther Longhurst, 'How Can I Earn a Living? The Ideal Home for the Worker', *Woman Worker*, 08 Sep 1909, p.235.

¹²⁴ The Quadrangle was listed Grade II in 2020: Historic England, 'The Quadrangle, Herne Hill', Listing 1467983.

growing 'servant-problem'.¹²⁵ Securing 'live-in' servants, even for middle-class households who generally managed with one maid, was increasingly problematic. In an expanding field of employment opportunities for young women, the drudgery of a life in domestic service became a far less attractive proposition. The premise of households cooperating to pool domestic resources became an integral part of garden city spatial philosophy manifested at a range of similar low-rise, quadrangular developments before the First World War. At Letchworth Garden City, Homesgarth (1910-13), designed by Harold Clapham Lander, was aimed towards childless couples. A subsequent scheme at Meadow Way Green North (1914-16), designed by Courtney M. (Melville) Crickner and championed by Ruth Pimm and Miss Drew, accommodated both families and single women. During the War Crickner was appointed by the Ministry of Munitions as resident architect to the new towns at Gretna and Eastriggs, where he designed accommodation blocks to house the women munitions workers.¹²⁶ The format would continue to prove influential in inter-war schemes for single women, both within garden suburban developments and elsewhere.

Conclusion

This chapter examined the nature of women's housing provision in the seventy years prior to the First World War. The discussion began with an historical overview of the housing typology which formed the basis for the designs of women's housing schemes. The ad-hoc sub-division of housing in overcrowded urban districts prompted the development of a range of purpose-built blocks of flats and other multi-occupancy building types. Victorian and Edwardian housing reform also went hand-in-hand with the introduction of new organisational types used in housing delivery; 'model dwelling companies' and later 'public utility societies', both of which were adopted as a means to supply women's housing.

The women's schemes pioneered in this period were provided in a range of formats, both newly built and adapted: early experiments in small apartments and model lodging houses in the 1840s and 1850s; residential chambers and residential clubs in the 1880s; and hostels and suburban cottage flats in the early twentieth century. The investigation also exposed a number of factors which would continue to have a significant bearing on women's housing initiatives after 1918: the perpetual problem of economic viability in schemes for lower-paid women; the difficulty of maintaining standards of comfort and propriety deemed appropriate to the occupants' gender and class; and the deep-seated resistance to flats as a mainstream dwelling form in England, particularly for the middle classes.

¹²⁵ For cooperative housekeeping see Pearson, *The Architectural and Social History of Cooperative Living*.

¹²⁶ Ibid. See also Borden, 'Social Space and Cooperative Housekeeping'.

PART II: A New Wave of Women's Housing Providers

Chapter 3

Organisations and Key Individuals

“The self-supporting woman, next to the agricultural labourer, is perhaps the worst and most badly housed person in the country”, according to a well-known social reformer, and anyone who has investigated the conditions under which tens of thousands of young women and girls are existing in London at the present time will heartily endorse the statement...¹

The two preceding chapters in Part I considered the architectural and social context of housing for single women. In the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries a range of pioneering initiatives emerged to address the housing needs of the self-supporting female worker. After the First World War, considerable efforts were made by both the state and voluntary sector to improve housing for working families, but this obscured the ongoing housing issue for low-paid single women which only intensified. The current chapter moves on to explore the nature of the women’s housing provision after the First World War. Who were the housing bodies and their main protagonists in this period, and what circumstances brought them into the sphere of women’s housing provision? What was distinctive, if anything, about these organisations? In order to address these research questions, attention will be focused on three notable providers of housing for single women in London at this time: The Lady Workers’ Homes Limited (LWH), Women’s Pioneer Housing Limited (WPH) and the United Women’s Homes Association (UWHA).

The Lady Workers’ Homes Limited

One of the earliest organisations to provide housing schemes for single women workers under the 1919 Housing Act, The Lady Workers’ Homes Limited (LWH), was founded by property developer and flat entrepreneur Abraham Davis just prior to the outbreak of the First World War. Very few LWH institutional records survive, however, architectural drawings and sketches for their schemes were submitted to the Architects Department at the London County Council (LCC) and survive in Building Act case files. As a private developer who tapped into public funding, insight into the LWH’s activities can also be found within the archives of the inter-war public utility societies held by the

¹ Helen Greig Souter, ‘Bachelor Women in London: How and Where They Live’, *Quiver*, Feb 1925, pp.381-387.

Ministry of Health. The LWH was one of several housing initiatives brought to fruition by a family building firm headed by its patriarch, Abraham Davis.

Abraham Davis

Born in Whitechapel to Polish immigrant parents, Woolf Davis and Rachel Magnus, Abraham Davis (1857-1924) was the third eldest sibling in a large Jewish family who, after initially plying their trade as cap makers and furriers, entered the sphere of speculative property development. Davis' reputation was forged during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries through the construction of various housing schemes across London, ranging from two to three-storey terraces and artisan blocks in the East End, to well-appointed service flats for the middle classes in North West London. In her exploration of the building activities of the various partnerships and working relationships formed by six of the Davis brothers, Isobel Watson concluded that it was Abraham who 'left the most notable mark on the London streetscape'.²

In common with small speculators operating in this period, Abraham Davis built largely on a commercial for-profit basis, with property retained for investment rather than sold. However, throughout his career Davis was also concerned about development with a social conscience. Such a stance was partly influenced by the practices of the larger model dwelling companies whose tenement blocks had stood alongside his own, but also through his own recognition of the tangible social benefits which could accrue from better quality housing. In the decade before the Great War, when opportunities drew building operations westwards to the Borough of St Pancras, he founded the London Housing Society (LHS), a venture which provided homes 'for clerks, shop foremen, higher-grade railway employees etc' in the vicinity of Kings Cross and St Pancras stations.³ As a public utility society, the LHS allowed Davis to obtain favourable loans from the Public Works Loan Board (PWLb) under the provisions of the Housing of the Working Classes Act 1890. From 1909 Davis and LHS associates developed a range of flats under building agreements with the Skinners' Company at the Sandhills Estate as well as the adjoining Foundling Hospital Estates to the south.⁴ This foray into a distinctly altruistic brand of development was unusual if not exceptional amongst speculative developers of his generation. As Watson argued, it was 'difficult to identify another *individual* housing provider embodying in a similar way the drive for profit plus social benefit typified by the investor-led dwellings companies of an earlier generation'.⁵ The efforts to provide such respectable lower-middle-class households, with healthy, improved housing options in convenient proximity to their workplace, culminated in Davis' election to the St Pancras Borough Council in 1912. From this time onwards construction work was undertaken by the Davis' own building firm, the Central London Building Company (CLBC) established in December 1912, with

² Watson, 'Rebuilding London', p.64.

³ Ibid, p.71.

⁴ Ibid. The LHS blocks of flats were Hastings, Sandwich, Thanet and Rashleigh Houses on the Sandhills Estate, and Knollys, Seymour, Jenner, Jessel and Hunter Houses at the Foundling Hospital Estate.

⁵ Watson, 'Rebuilding London', p.79.

Abraham and younger brother Nathaniel Davis as joint first directors.⁶ Having become perilously close to bankruptcy in the late nineteenth century, incorporation offered the Davis business model greater financial security and more control over the family business. With new confidence came an impetus to erect more architecturally ambitious mansion blocks with the assistance of trained architects – seen at Queen Alexandra Mansions, a large perimeter block of flats featuring more sophisticated brickwork façades and a complex formal structure (see Chapter 5) – and to expand the housing business, pursuing new profitable and socially-beneficial avenues.

Real Homes for Lady Workers

During 1914, Davis became alert to the acute need for more affordable and suitable accommodation for London's many badly-housed educated, single working women. Davis perceived this as a further, important middle-class housing issue affecting many 'surplus women'. In order to address this deficit, a new Davis housing venture, 'The Lady Workers' Homes Limited' was established, the stated objective being:

to provide REFINED HOSTELS (sic) and small flats for the large and ever-increasing number of women workers of gentle birth who, from force of circumstances (now greatly intensified) are compelled to earn their own livelihood.⁷

Early investor campaigns for the LWH waged in the national press were keen to identify the new venture as 'an offshoot of the London Housing Society' and to stress the stature of its all-male directorate comprising Abraham Davis as chairman, younger brother Raphael (Ralph) Davis, a surveyor by profession, and two London County Councillors: Henry Mills, former mayor of Islington, and H. R. Taylor, ex-Mayor of Camberwell.⁸ Editorials were confident in their ability to provide the answer: 'we have the solution of one of the problems of the hour, viz. the pressing needs of many thousands of women workers in London, who require a homelike place in which to reside when away from relatives and family'.⁹ Though Abraham was generally acknowledged as the founder, much of the impetus behind the women's housing initiative is thought to have stemmed from his eldest daughter Ruth May (1886-1981) who became 'a moving force in this project' as well as her university-educated sister Irene and mother Helena.¹⁰ After the War, Ruth was listed as a director of the CLBC and LWH, and appears to have been actively involved with the management of the new women's housing organisation, acting as signatory alongside company secretary John Henry

⁶ TNA, BT13/21077/125709 - Board of Trade Records, Files of Dissolved Companies, Central London Building Company (CLBC).

⁷ 'The Lady Workers' Homes, Ltd', *Daily Mirror*, 15 Feb 1915, p.11.

⁸ 'Lady Workers Homes, Ltd.', *The Financial Times*, 28 July 1914, p.12; 'Important Instalment Scheme', *Daily Express*, 12 Feb 1917, p.1.

⁹ 'Real Homes For Women Workers', *Hampstead and St John's Wood Advertiser*, 15 Mar 1915, p.6.

¹⁰ Watson, 'Rebuilding London', p.74. Helena Davis was also a LWH director.

Harvey.¹¹ Though Ruth lived at the Davis family home in West Hampstead, as a unmarried working secretary herself she was no doubt aware of the issues at hand, and had an appreciation of the yearning for independence.

Plans for the LWH's inaugural scheme, based around the women's residential club concept, commenced in the summer of 1914. The project revolved around the adaptation and extension of the former villa home of painter and Royal Academician John MacWhirter at Abbey Road, St John's Wood (see Chapter 6). The large remodelled Victorian dwelling house functioned as communal facilities for the tenants, comprising the usual 'club' combination of dining, sitting and reading rooms, with small residential bedrooms and servant accommodation provided on other floors. An additional L-shaped range of flats was bolted onto the existing house, utilising the substantial walled gardens.

Building operations of the CLBC were greatly scaled back during the conflict, but by September 1918 with the end of hostilities in sight, plans were underway for LWH's second project, Addison House, a fully purpose-built block of 124 flats, named in honour of the Minister of Health, Dr Christopher Addison. The project, on the site of another former detached Victorian villa at 22 Grove End Road, St John's Wood, was developed by LWH, a private stock company, in conjunction with the Public Utility Housing Society Limited (PUHS), first registered by Davis during the War on 6th May 1915. As with the LHS before, its status as a public utility society allowed Davis to apply for government loans, as well as access the new subsidies outlined in the Housing Act of 1919. After considerable alteration to the preliminary designs, the five-storey block of flats was approved by the Ministry of Health for financial assistance under the National Housing Scheme in Aug 1919 and eventually completed in December 1920. The LWH would go on to develop two further 'extensions' to the Addison scheme at adjacent plots in Circus Road and Elm Tree Road. Together the set of three mansion blocks formed a complex of flats for women, united by private, communal landscaped gardens (For details of the development see Chapter 7).

Always with a finger on the pulse, by 1920 Davis sought to join a rising wave of speculators expanding their property portfolio into London's outlying suburbs and tapping into the design philosophies developed by the garden city and town planning movement. The trend went hand-in-hand with the rapidly expanding transport infrastructure and growing strength of the owner-occupied family housing market. The shift in direction had been anticipated before the War with the formation of a further Davis company, London Garden Suburbs Limited. The desire to cover all and every potential avenue in terms of property development with Treasury assistance had been expressed in 1918 when re-formulating the PUHS rules, the objects of the society defined broadly as 'the promotion, formation and management of garden cities (including garden suburbs and garden villages) and the erection, improvement and management of buildings for the working

¹¹ Ruth Davis' occupation in 1918 was listed as 'secretary': TNA, BT13/21077/125709 - Board of Trade Records of Dissolved Companies, CLBC.

classes and others'.¹² The Davis firm's re-development of the Holly Lodge Estate in Highgate, North London, eventually comprising 276 family houses, mostly semi-detached, also involved the LWH's largest housing project for single women: thirty-one mansion blocks containing over 750 flats (see Chapter 7).

By March 1919 all members of the immediate family household were listed as directors or shareholders of the family building firm and a growing range of other Davis enterprises.¹³ Some were connected with housing but others ventured into the arena of cinema, the CLBC constructing theatres in Kings Cross, Islington and Peckham.¹⁴ The Social Service Educative Entertainment Company Ltd was assigned to Irene, an initiative with an 'improving' agenda which aimed to promote a range of popular film reels for cinemas 'with a refined and wholesome character'.¹⁵ Abraham's brother Nathaniel had stepped down from his involvement with the CLBC in March 1915 but inspired by the success of the LWH schemes, he and his wife Gertrude made attempts to become providers of women's housing themselves, offering to finance the fledgling public utility society WPH in 1921 (see Chapter 4).

A serious decline in Abraham's health in 1922 prompted daughter Josephine's husband, Francis (Frank) Henry Myers, an accountant by profession, to join the CLBC directorate and assist in the management of the cinema businesses. Following Abraham's death in January 1924, Frank assumed overall responsibility for the Davis building operations, becoming managing director and chairman of the CLBC. It remained very much a family concern; Ruth May, now married, continued the directorship of LWH and the Public Utility Housing Society Ltd, administering the women's schemes alongside John Harvey, with the widowed Helena and two Justices of the Peace, J.G. Head and Oliver Jones who served as chairman completing the board.¹⁶ Her husband Alexander Joseph Cohen, an engineer by trade, took over London Garden Suburbs Ltd. The youngest Davis sibling, Arthur Felix, who had been inducted into the CLBC's building operations at sites early on, was charged with taking forward the new Service Flats Ltd venture, which would produce further blocks of mansion flats. Continuing his father's legacy of adapting and realigning the firm's activities according to changing market conditions, he went on to head up Davis Estates Limited, one of the largest speculative builders of suburban housing around London and nationally in the 1930s.¹⁷ The 'Davis Built' brand was promoted in film reels extolling the advantages of owner occupation, and

¹² TNA, HLG 49/662 - Correspondence: PUHS to Ministry of Health, Mar 1920; Memorandum: LHB, 20 Mar 1919.

¹³ Shareholders included the younger twins Godfrey and Winifred Margaret. TNA, BT13/21077/125709 - Board of Trade Records of Dissolved Companies, CLBC.

¹⁴ Ibid: Ruth May was director of LWH, the Tower (Rye Lane) Cinema Company Ltd and the Peckham Property Company Ltd; Helena and Irene the Kings Cross Cinema Company Ltd.

¹⁵ Watson, 'Rebuilding London', p.65.

¹⁶ Helena and Arthur Felix Davis were the other LWH Board members in 1936: information from plaque inscription at the memorial fountain, Holly Lodge Estate; noted during a site visit Jun 2022.

¹⁷ Arthur Felix wound-up the CLBC on 20 Aug 1930, reconstituting the family building firm as the 'CLBC (1929) Ltd': TNA, BT13/21077/125709 - Board of Trade Records of Dissolved Companies, CLBC. Davis Estates began with two estates at Kingsbury, north west London in 1929; by 1935 they advertised twenty estates around London and counties such as Bedfordshire, Surrey, Kent, Sussex and Hampshire: P. Scott, *The Making of the Modern British Home : The Suburban Semi and Family Life between the Wars*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).,pp.79-80.

through full-scale showhouses, including their successful 'Jubilee' prototype, installed at the 1935 *Daily Mail* Ideal Home Exhibition and at specially designed premises in Charing Cross and Victoria.¹⁸

Women's Pioneer Housing Limited

The new public utility society 'Women's Pioneer Housing Limited', was registered on 4th October 1920, with 'the object of providing small self-contained flats or unfurnished rooms for women workers'.¹⁹ The initiative was based around Etheldred Browning's plan to acquire and convert larger London terraced townhouses into a range of small flats for single women. The idea seized upon opportunities arising in a sector of the property market now deemed less desirable, principally due to high maintenance costs and acute difficulties in employing domestic staff. As long-term WPH committee member and well-known former suffragette, Geraldine Lennox (Fig. 20) later recalled,

...Miss Browning called on me...and asked if I would help her to raise money and come in as a partner in an endeavour to provide accommodation for women. With a capital of one or two pounds she had already taken one house and filled it with Tenants... I was so keen on the idea I promised Miss Browning I would send her a list of people who I thought would be interested and who had money. She called on me some weeks later and was very pleased with the response she had received.²⁰

Being a single woman lacking any substantial capital, Browning was acutely aware that much of the success or failure of such a venture relied on a network of women reformers, who might marshal their social, political and financial connections.

Etheldred Browning

Etheldred Anna Browning (1869-1947), Anglo-Irish suffragist, feminist, and housing campaigner, was born in Dublin to an English mother, Julia Mary Smart and Irish father, Jeffery Francis Browning, solicitor to the Court of the Irish Land Commission.²¹ Other than her upbringing in a prominent Protestant family household, little is known of her early career ambitions, although in 1886, aged seventeen, she enrolled at the Metropolitan School of Art in Dublin.²² Living later with her widowed

¹⁸ Screen Archive South East, '*British Home Design 1935*', available at British Film Institute Player <<https://player.bfi.org.uk/free/film/watch-british-home-design-1935-1935-online>>, [accessed 20 Nov 2021].

¹⁹ LMA, LMA/4776/A/03/001 - WPH Annual Report, Nov 1921.

²⁰ LMA, LMA/4776/E/01/001 - Address by Geraldine Lennox to WPH tenants, 1948.

²¹ Browning ancestral homes were Dunkerrin, Glengeary and Pilotview, Dalkey, County of Dublin: Hugh Montgomery-Massingberd, *Burke's Irish Family Records*, (London: Burkes Peerage Ltd, 1976), available at www.thepeerage.com [accessed 20 Jan 2022].

²² National Irish Visual Arts Library, IE/NIVAL CR/CR156/193 - Etheldred Browning registration papers, available at www.nival.ie [accessed 21 Jan 2022].

mother, no occupation was recorded on the 1901 census, but by 1908 she was a committed Christian Scientist, practising as a Sunday School teacher at branch churches in Belfast and Dublin.²³

In the years leading up to the Great War Browning became a vigorous campaigner for the Irishwomen's Reform League (IRL), championing a range of causes linked to the women's movement.²⁴ As honorary press secretary, she was a principal speaker at conferences and published impassioned articles in the Irish press alerting readers to abuses in women's working conditions and the rise of trade unionism.²⁵ In 1913 she established a public library in the IRL offices at 29 South Anne Street, Dublin with future WPH co-founder (Florence) Lily Carre.²⁶ Browning was also a prominent figure in the Irish women's suffrage movement (Fig. 19), presiding at large open-air meetings in Phoenix Park for the more militant Irish Women's Franchise League (IWFL) and contributing to their newspaper, the *Irish Citizen*.²⁷ However, the outbreak of War in 1914 strained the 'suffrage first' allegiance fostered between unionist/nationalist, militant/non-militant women's suffrage organisations. Philosophical rifts between Browning, Carre and *Irish Citizen* editor Francis Sheehy-Skeffington were played out in its pages.²⁸ In February 1915 Browning and Carre detached from the IWFL and IRL executive to channel energies into various facets of War relief work, establishing a women's employment bureau, managing Dublin factories and organising donations for the Leinster regiments.²⁹

Thereafter Browning's precise movements are undocumented, but from late 1916 onwards, she relocated to London. As an Anglo-Irish women's activist in the midst of an increasingly volatile political climate, her departure was likely hastened by unfolding events. Her elder brother Francis Henry (1868-1916), a barrister and Examiner of Titles for the Registry of Ireland and second in command of the Irish Volunteer Training Corp, died from wounds received during the Easter Rising of 1916 while returning to Beggars Bush Barracks.³⁰ Francis Sheehy-Skeffington (1877-1946) was

²³ The family residence relocated from 28 Upper Mount Street, Dublin to 738 Mespil Road, Pembroke West. In 1911 her mother returned to England: Ireland Census 1901 and Census of England and Wales 1911; Etheldred Browning, 'Testimony of Healing', *Christian Science Sentinel*, 13 Jan 1906 and 'Letter to Editor', 02 May 1908.

²⁴ For the IRL see Rosemary Cullen Owens, 'Votes for Women', in *The Irish Women's History Reader*, ed. by Alan Hayes and Diane Urquhart (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 39-42.

²⁵ Etheldred Browning, 'Women's Work and Wages in Dublin', *Irish Citizen*, 02 Aug 1913, p.83.

²⁶ 'Irish Women's Reform League: Public Lending Library Opening', *Irish Times*, 05 May 1913, p.10. 29 South Anne Street became a hub providing offices for the IRL and ISF, and library, study and meeting rooms for the public.

²⁷ 'Ladies Prominently Identified with the Suffrage Week in Dublin', *Irish Independent*, 13 Dec 1913. The IWFL was founded in 1908 by Hanna and Francis Sheehy-Skeffington, Margaret and James Cousins. The stance to Home Rule was ostensibly neutral, but members engaged in suffrage militancy. Browning was an IWFL member until Feb 1915. See Louise Ryan, *Winning the Vote for Women: The Irish Citizen Newspaper and the Suffrage Movement in Ireland*, 2nd edn (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2018).

²⁸ See correspondence, *Irish Citizen*, issues Oct 1914.

²⁹ 'War Relief Work: Employment for Women', *Irish Times*, 30 Oct 1915, p.8; *Irish Citizen*, 04 Nov 1916, p.236; 'Leinster Regiment Comforts', *Irish Independent*, 11 Feb 1916.

³⁰ *Sinn Fein Rebellion Handbook, Easter, 1916*, (Dublin: Irish Times, 1917), p.22 and p.58.

arrested and killed by a British Army officer during the Rising, after which the *Irish Citizen* took on a more stridently nationalist stance.³¹

By the summer of 1919 she had joined the staff of the London-based Garden Cities and Town Planning Association (GCTPA), acting as secretary of the Women's Section and 'passing from place to place lecturing on various aspects of the Housing problem to local Women's Organisations'.³² Her interest in housing reform and urban planning had initially been sparked by researching working women's living conditions for the IRL, when she experienced 'the deadening environment of the slums'.³³ She also attended meetings of the recently-formed Housing and Town Planning Association of Ireland, led by president Lady Aberdeen, Patrick and Nora Geddes amongst others.³⁴ The movement's progress in Ireland, including the staging of a major civic exhibition at the old Linenhall Barracks, was stalled by the onset of War. Nevertheless, their calls for the efforts of Christian 'right-minded citizens' to be 'applied practically' to the Housing Problem, seemingly struck a chord with Browning.³⁵ Resuming such efforts with the GCTPA, from July 1919 she also wrote a range of articles on housing for the *Common Cause* and its successor the *Woman's Leader*, edited by prominent suffragist and future WPH chair Ray Strachey.³⁶

Pioneer Flats for Pioneer Tenants

The first seeds of the Women's Pioneer initiative were sown in March 1920. Enthused by the new ideas surrounding town planning and the momentum for reform enshrined in the 1919 Housing Act, Browning approached the London Housing Board (LHB) with her proposal to supply working women's flats. Following a favourable response, she convened the first WPH meeting on 30th August.³⁷ During these precarious early months of WPH Browning administered the society from an all-women household at 29 Pelham Place, Kensington headed by her mother Julia.³⁸

Browning had identified an opportunity to act on behalf of mature single working women of limited means, who, much like herself, might never marry. Although developments for such women had emerged in recent decades in London, there were simply not enough. Moreover, women over the age of thirty – deemed 'middle-aged' at this time – were rarely catered for, and cubicles and

³¹ Ibid, pp.102-108; Browning shared the platform with Hanna Sheehy Skeffington at IWFL events: 'Dublin Suffrage Societies: Joint Meeting in Dublin', *Irish Times*, 05 Nov 1913. The *Irish Citizen* printing press was destroyed in 1920 by British soldiers during the civil war.

³² Etheldred Browning, 'What Women Must Do Next: A Practical Programme for the Practical Work of a Committee on Housing', *Common Cause*, 09 Jan 1920, pp.510-11; 'Secretary and Staff', *Garden Cities and Town Planning*, (11), Mar 1921, p.74.

³³ 'The Conference Special Report: Women's Work in Ireland', *Irish Citizen*, 20 Dec 1913, p.253.

³⁴ 'Housing and Town Planning - Meeting in Dublin: A Civil Survey', *Irish Times*, 12 March 1914, p.8.

³⁵ Ibid. Ishbel Gordon, Countess of Aberdeen was wife of the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland.

³⁶ Weekly publication of the NUWSS (renamed the NUSEC).

³⁷ LMA, LMA/4776/A/01/001 - WPH Minutes, 30 Aug 1920. First attendees were Etheldred Browning, Lily Carre, Annabel Dott and Miriam Homersham.

³⁸ LMA, LMA/4776/A/01/001 - WPH Minutes, 12 Dec 1920; England Census 1921 (19 Jun 1921). Other residents were Etheldred's niece Ruth, maid Rose Stanton and Winifred Lewis, a private secretary at University College, Kensington. It seems to have been a temporary arrangement 'the Secretary had no place to keep the Society's books as she was living in a hostel': LMA, LMA/4776/A/01/001 - WPH Minutes, 23 Jun 1921.

boarding house rooms did not offer the sort of permanent ‘homes’ needed. For Browning the new legislation was already ‘being taken advantage of by men to provide houses for themselves and their families, and it will be a very grave mistake if women do not also make use of the Government’s offer and provide themselves with suitable dwellings’.³⁹ It was down to women to fill the void in housing provision left by local authorities who focussed almost exclusively on working families, and private enterprise who only built ‘High Class Service Flats’:

unless some special effort is made the self-supporting woman of small means, who at present is in great housing difficulties, will be hampered in her career for want of a proper home, and will see her standard of life and comfort reduced to vanishing point.⁴⁰

The WPH initiative also rested on the understanding that, as contributors to solving the ‘housing problem’, all public utility societies were eligible for state-assisted loans of 75% plus substantial subsidies; an assumption that would prove ill-founded for WPH and other voluntary housing providers (see Chapter 4).

The names of the seven other co-founding members appear in the company rules:⁴¹ (Florence) Lily Carre (1882-1956), her lifelong companion and fellow activist;⁴² Mabel Bruce (1877-1970), another Dublin companion from a prominent Anglo-Irish family with London connections; Sydney Bushell (1880-1959), senior colleague at the GCTPA, and scholar of social science at the London School of Economics; and Oxford-educated Miriam Homersham (1892-1936), a pioneering woman accountant and member of the Society of Incorporated Accountants and Auditors. The others were well-known public figures: Helen Archdale (1876-1949), former suffragette and editor of feminist magazine *Time and Tide* (Fig. 20); (Sarah Frances) Annabel Dott (1868-1937), a self-trained architect/builder; and Agnes Miall (1892-1977), author of *The Bachelor Girl’s Guide to Everything*, a popular manual for self-supporting women.⁴³ By the third committee meeting, they would be joined by (Constance) Dorothy Peel (1868-1934), journalist and best-selling domestic advice writer, early meetings taking place at her home in Alexander Square, Mayfair (Fig. 20). A group of busy working women with diverse ages, backgrounds and marital status, they shared a common concern for better-designed, more inclusive housing.

By January 1921, the WPH had adopted a two-tier structure, the ‘Committee of Management’ and a non-executive ‘Council’ comprising a growing group of ‘influential women’ whose names lent gravitas to the work of the nascent organisation.⁴⁴ Some were connected with

³⁹ ‘Women’s Pioneer Housing Society, Ltd – Self-Contained Flats for Professional Women’, *The Vote*, 15 Oct 1920, p.230.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ LMA, LMA/4776/A/02/001 - WPH Rules, 1920.

⁴² Whilst serving the WPH committee Carre was lecturer for the temperance movement. In 1925 she co-established a boys and girls club and from 1934-1943 was warden of the Katherine Low Settlement, Battersea: Katherine Low Settlement archives, Battersea, Annual Reports.

⁴³ Miall, *The Bachelor Girl’s Guide*.

⁴⁴ LMA, LMA/4776/A/01/001 - WPH Minutes, 19 Oct 1920 and 01 Nov 1920. Dorothy Peel drafted letters to canvass prospective Council members.

the garden city movement and central government housing policy: Lady (Mary) Gertrude Emmott (1866-1954), President of the National Council for Women and chair of the Women's Housing Subcommittee to the Ministry of Reconstruction Advisory Council and GCTPA Women's Section (Fig. 22); former Dean of the London School of Economics, Christian Scipio Mactaggart (1861-1943), member of the GCTPA executive and Sydney Bushell's aunt; and Celia Reiss (1888-1976), wife of the chair of the GCTPA executive, Captain Richard Reiss.⁴⁵ A further contingent were prominent figures in the women's movement: leading equalitarian feminist and business woman Margaret Haig Mackworth (née Thomas), Viscountess Rhondda (1883-1958), founder of the Six Point Group and *Time and Tide*, close associate of Helen Archdale; Hon. Henrietta Franklin (1866-1964), reformer of primary education, feminist and suffragist; Blanche Athena Clough (1861-1960), current Principal of Newnham College, Cambridge; and Margaret Katharine Bell (1865-1949), pioneering local councillor and Headmistress of Sutton High School for Girls.⁴⁶ It became customary for long-serving retirees of the committee to be co-opted onto the WPH council, the First President of which was Lady Shelly-Rolls (1872-1961), appointed in 1930.⁴⁷

Like the other women's housing organisations in this study, WPH let their flats to a wide profile of single female tenants, working in or retired from a range of middle-class occupations and supporting themselves on modest incomes. Tenancies were granted on a first-come, first-served basis, although to encourage larger investments in the early years, £200 of WPH loan stock allowed the purchaser to nominate tenants. With limited initial capital, investment for the first group of tenants was necessarily high, as much as £300. Complaints were fielded from women unable to afford the qualifying sums, however over time the minimum investment required was reduced to £50 then £25. A registration fee of 5s for small and 10s for larger flats was charged to go towards office expenses. Nevertheless, additional pressures after the Depression in the early 1930s prompted tenant and committee member Margaret Waldron to query 'whether priority in tenancies should not be given to British born applicants'; it was agreed the secretary 'should use her discretion in the matter'.⁴⁸ When WPH acquired three blocks of flats from the UWHA following their financial crisis, they waived the requirement for qualifying shares for the sitting tenants but

⁴⁵ Sue Donnelly, 'LSE's "Deputy director, hostess, accountant, and lady of all work" – Christian Scipio Mactaggart, 1861-1943', 01 Mar 2016, available at <<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/lsehistory/2016/03/01/lse-deputy-director-hostess-accountant-and-lady-of-all-work-christian-scipio-mactaggart-1861-1943/>> [accessed 07 Jan 2022]; Celia Reiss, *The Health Association, Welwyn Garden City 1921-1948*, (Swindon, 1968).

⁴⁶ Deirdre Beddoe, 'Thomas [married name Mackworth], Margaret Haig, *suo jure* Viscountess Rhondda (1883-1958), feminist and magazine proprietor', *ODNB*, 2004; Angela V. John, *Turning the Tide: The Life of Lady Rhondda*, (Llandysul, Wales: Parthian, 2013).; Sybil Oldfield, 'Franklin [née Montagu], Henrietta [Netta] (1866-1964), educationist and suffragist', *ODNB*, 2004; Gillian Sutherland, 'Clough, Blanche Athena (1861-1960), college head and educational administrator', *ODNB*, 2004; Sue James, 'Margaret Bell, "a Victorian with an open mind"', 27 Apr 2017, London Borough of Sutton Archives blog, available at: <https://pastonglass.wordpress.com/2017/04/27/margaret-bell-a-victorian-with-an-open-mind/> [accessed 07 Jan 2022].

⁴⁷ Lady Eleanor Georgiana Shelley-Rolls, (née Rolls), wealthy heiress and co-founder of the Women's Engineering Society in 1919, joined the WPH committee in 1923 and became a substantial investor. Charles, one of her late brothers, co-founded the Rolls-Royce motor company: Cheryl Law, *Women: A Modern Political Dictionary*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000), pp.129-30.

⁴⁸ LMA, LMA/4776/A/01/004 - WPH Committee Minutes 04 Mar 1930.

stipulated two weeks rather than one week's notice to leave. Indeed, there was some debate as to whether former UWHA weekly tenants should become WPH members at all.⁴⁹

By 1923, with WPH on a more secure footing, and Browning awarded a permanent salary, she moved to a flat at 64 Lexham Gardens, Kensington, which would become her home for the next decade.⁵⁰ Thereafter the property portfolio of the society and her workload as manager/secretary steadily expanded (see Chapter 6) until her retirement in September 1938.⁵¹ The work of the organisation was also driven forward by a dedicated executive committee, with three permanent serving tenant representatives, and headed successively by Ray Strachey, Violet Durand, Helen Archdale (Fig. 20) and the first male chairman, William Norman, who stayed with WPH for the next forty years.⁵²

The United Women's Homes Association

Five years after WPH was conceived, a further organisation emerged to tackle the housing needs of self-supporting women. The roots of the UWHA lay in the Approved Societies set up to administer the new social welfare provisions of the National Insurance Act of 1911. The UWHA was founded as a public utility society in March 1925 to provide small, affordable flats for members of its sister organisation, the United Women's Insurance Society (UWIS). In a sequence of events remarkably like the formation of the Ladies' Dwelling Company in the 1880s, the establishment of the UWHA was prompted by calls for more suitable housing for single women workers expressed through the pages of the insurance society's magazine, *Feminine Life*. The UWHA's range of metropolitan and provincial women's housing schemes largely owe their existence to the efforts of the principal protagonist behind both insurance and housing operations, Alban Godwin Gordon (1890-1947). As managing director and the main driving force behind the UWHA's expansion during the inter-war years, he oversaw the design and delivery of over 1000 small, affordable flats. However, the adoption of an ambitious, sometimes aggressive business stance, would bring the housing association close to its demise within seven years.

Alban Gordon

Gordon was born in Brockley, South London, son of the Scottish surgeon Dr John Gordon and his wife Edith Emily, daughter of Rev Charles Lee of St Leonard's, Bilston in Staffordshire.⁵³ After his

⁴⁹ LMA, LMA/4776/A/01/009 - WPH Committee Minutes 04 Feb 1936 and 19 Feb 1936.

⁵⁰ In 1934, Browning moved to 8 Cheltenham Terrace, Chelsea with niece Ruth, who had briefly shared the Lexham Gardens flat.

⁵¹ Browning continued to serve on the executive committee. Her retirement was an acrimonious affair, Browning pressured to step down by some members; vehemently supported by others: LMA, LMA/4776/A/07/003 - Retirement Agreement: Browning and WPH, 16 Nov 1937; LMA/4776/A/05/001 - Mr W. A. Norman's papers, correspondence on Browning's retirement, 1937-1938; LMA/4776/A/07/004 - Retirement Presentation volume, 30 Sep 1938.

⁵² Helen Archdale also served briefly early on as the first permanent chair. LMA, LMA/4776/A/05/001 - Mr W. A. Norman's papers, William Norman, *The Fiftieth Birthday of a Housing Association - by its President: Women's Pioneer Housing Limited, 1920 to 1970*, Typescript, 1970.

⁵³ 1891 England Census.

mother divorced his father for adultery and cruelty in 1897, he was raised in more modest homes, firstly in Deptford then at Bilston.⁵⁴ He was educated at King Edward's School, Birmingham (1903-1908) as a foundation scholar and exhibitor, and at the University of Birmingham (1908-1911), where he graduated with a BSc in Chemistry.⁵⁵ Setting aside a promising scientific career, Gordon then undertook a range of working roles centred upon social service. He became private secretary to Joseph Fels, the wealthy American soap manufacturer and philanthropist. A prominent advocate of the single tax movement and related land reforms, Fels had built a number of experimental rural communities in North America and England, including Nispell's Farm, Mayland, Essex (1906) with cottages designed by Charles Holden.⁵⁶ Acting as organising secretary of Fels' Vacant Land Cultivation Society, an initiative supported by George Cadbury amongst others, Gordon co-ordinated the allocation of small, disused sites in London and other cities to poorer families.⁵⁷ He founded the Wolverhampton Trades Council and Labour Representation Committee, and performed a string of lecturing posts for the National Committee for the Prevention of Destitution, the Working Men's College and the Fabian Society.⁵⁸ A track record in oratory and administration, and glowing recommendation as an 'unusually gifted speaker' from his former Vice-Principal, then secured him an appointment with the newly-formed National Health Insurance Commission (England).⁵⁹ As lecturer he toured nationwide, elucidating the provisions of Lloyd George's National Insurance Act 1911 for Friendly Societies, employers, trade unions and the public at large.

In December 1912 he joined the London-based Domestic Servants' Insurance Society (DSIS), serving as secretary and manager for fifteen years, and chairman for a further five. The founding of the DSIS, the first Approved Society to administer social insurance for women domestic workers, was championed by Lady Mary St Helier (1849-1931), a well-known philanthropist, who also chaired the employment bureau of the Domestic Servants Association.⁶⁰ The committee of

⁵⁴ TNA, J 77/621/18953 - Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Files: Gordon; 1901 and 1911 England Census. Edith described herself as widowed and living on her own means.

⁵⁵ John Malcolm Bulloch, *Bibliography of the Gordons*, Aberdeen University Studies: No. 94. "Section I." , (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1924), p.33, available at: National Libraries of Scotland, Histories of Scottish families: <<https://digital.nls.uk/histories-of-scottish-families/archive/94999542?mode=transcription> > [accessed 20 Jan 2018]; George Bernard Gordon, *Alban Godwin Gordon*, (unpublished biography, 2008); 'Biographies of New Candidates: Alban Gordon', *Fabian News*, 31, April 1920, p.1.

⁵⁶ Papers of Joseph and Mary Fels, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania (Collection 1953), pp.1-5 available at <<https://www.google.com/search?q=Joseph+and+Mary+Fels+Papers%2C+The+Historical+Society+of+Pennsylvania&oq=Joseph+and+Mary+Fels+Papers%2C+The+Historical+Society+of+Pennsylvania&aqs=chrome..69i57.1967j0j9&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8>> [accessed 17 Mar 2022].

⁵⁷ 'Vacant Land Society', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 03 October 1911, p.7; 'London Rabbit Runs', *Daily Mirror*, 18 October 1911, p.4; 'Cabbages in Corporation Street', *Birmingham Mail*, 28 February 1914. The VLCS was founded in London following a conference at Toybee Hall in 1907, and later extended to other major cities. C. Osborn, 'The Town Labourer and the Land', *Charity Organisation Review*, 34, No. 199, July 1913, pp.12-21.

⁵⁸ 'Biographies of New Candidates: Alban Gordon', *Fabian News*, April 1920, p.1.

⁵⁹ TNA, WO 339/65326 - R. S. Heath, Vice-Principal University of Birmingham, letter of recommendation, 25 May 1911; 'Biographies of New Candidates: Alban Gordon', *Fabian News*, April 1920, p.1.

⁶⁰ Lady St Helier was an outspoken commentator on women's issues, including the plight of domestic servants. See William A. Davis, 'Mary Jeune, Late-Victorian Essayist: Fallen Women, New Women, and Poor Children', *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920*, 58(2), 2015, 181-208; *Domestic News*, May 1915.

management, chaired by Sir George Herbert Murray (1849-1936), former permanent secretary to the Treasury, also comprised such upcoming political figures as the trade unionist and women's campaigner Margaret Bondfield (1873-1953), later one of the first women Labour MPs.⁶¹ As honorary secretary to the Association of Approved Societies' enquiry into medical provision and secretary of the Domestic Servants Association, Gordon advocated for women members' interests, highlighting the shortcomings in insurance and health provision.⁶²

After serving in the First World War as a second lieutenant (later captain) in the Army Service Corps, he resumed his former position with the DSIS. By then the society was rebranded as the Domestic Workers' Friendly Society (DWFS), and the management and 'permanent staff of 50 women' based at 82 Victoria Street had relocated to larger offices at 439-441 Oxford Street, directly opposite Selfridges.⁶³ Over the course of the 1920s Gordon directed a series of expansive changes within the society, a strategy which would set the tone for his management style thereafter. In 1921 the organisation's identity became more explicitly gendered and inclusive. The organ of the society, *Domestic News*, was re-invented as *Feminine Life* with Gordon editing and contributing most of the content. The following year, membership of the DWFS, already 'the largest society of its kind in existence', was expanded to encompass a broader cross-section of women's occupations and incomes.⁶⁴ Renamed the United Women's Insurance Society (UWIS), it subsumed both the Clerical and Professional Women's Insurance Society and the Trained Women Nurses' Friendly Society. Existing committee member Lady Gertrude Emmott, the women's rights and housing reformer and early WPH Council member, became chairman and Sir George Murray treasurer.⁶⁵ Now catering to around 52,000 women members, the UWIS prided itself on its medical, disability and maternity provision, plus additional benefits including dental and ophthalmic care, and access to a seaside convalescence home.⁶⁶

During the same period, Gordon's political activism also ramped up significantly, crystallising into a parallel career. His life-long allegiance to socialism began as an undergraduate, when he was speaker for the Independent Labour Party (ILP) and founder of the Birmingham University Fabian Society.⁶⁷ In 1920 he joined their executive committee, serving alongside a 'second generation' of

⁶¹ *Domestic News*, May 1915; G. C. Peden, 'Murray, Sir George Herbert (1849-1936), civil servant.', *ODNB*, 2004; Philip Williamson, 'Bondfield, Margaret Grace (1873-1953), trade unionist, campaigner for women's interests, and politician.', *ODNB*, 2004. Trustees of the DSIS included MPs Christopher Addison, future Minister of Health and Waldorf Astor (1879-1952), husband of Nancy Astor.

⁶² See for example 'The Panel Doctors', *London Evening News*, 14 Jan 1914.

⁶³ TNA, WO 339/65326 - Royal Army Service Corps: Lieutenant Alban Godwin Gordon, 1914-1922; *Domestic News*, May 1915.

⁶⁴ 'Domestic Workers' Friendly Society: Notice of Ninth AGM', *Daily Mirror*, 16 Jun 1921, p.7.

⁶⁵ United Women's Insurance Society advertisement, *Daily Mirror*, 16 August 1922.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*; The DSIS had already offered members temporary accommodation in London: 'The Hostel', *Domestic News*, May 1915, p.11.

⁶⁷ 'Biographies of New Candidates: Alban Gordon', *Fabian News*, April 1920, p.1.

Fabian thinkers, many of whom served as MPs in the first Labour governments.⁶⁸ He was elected to Brighton Town Council in 1923, yet despite the assistance of his wife Lilian, who ‘frequently spoke on the platform’ and featured prominently in campaign literature (Fig. 23 and 24), he remained unsuccessful as Brighton’s Labour Party candidate at both the 1923 and 1924 general elections.⁶⁹ Though lacking a voice in the Commons chamber, his continued lobbying for an overhauled insurance system and comprehensive national health service was widely reported in the local and national press. Gordon’s analysis of the existing branches of welfare cover, *Social Insurance: What It Is and What It Might Be* was published by the Fabian Society in 1924, ideas which informed the Royal Commission on National Health Insurance appointed by Labour Minister of Health John Wheatley in the same year.⁷⁰ He went on to publish *The Common Sense of Socialism* for the Labour Party, commended as ‘an elementary exposition of Socialism for the average man or woman’.⁷¹ Whether to forge an alternative career in legal advocacy, or to bolster his political standing more generally, at this time Gordon also focused on qualifying as a barrister, studying on a part-time basis during his daily train commute from Brighton to the London UWIS offices (Fig. 21).⁷²

‘A Home of One’s Own’

In 1925 Gordon was largely responsible for the UWIS’ diversification into a completely new arena; the provision of single working women’s housing. The notion of addressing the women members’ housing needs as well as their welfare cover was first mooted in the pages of *Feminine Life* by a member correspondent.⁷³ Inundated with support from the readership, the decision was made to form an affiliated organisation to run a new housing venture for UWIS members. The UWHA was registered as a public utility society on the 27th of March 1925, with the existing Oxford Street offices serving as premises. Lady Emmott became president and Gordon, ‘who was chiefly responsible for the inception of the scheme’, managing director, assisted by the secretary Mabel Victoria Partner (1887-1965).⁷⁴ Eleanor M. Burke, chair of the UWIS Needlework Guild, became chairman of a

⁶⁸ Fabian Society, Executive Committee minutes 1917-1922, FABIAN SOCIETY/C/15, available at: <<https://digital.library.lse.ac.uk/collections/fabiansociety/minutebooks>>. Gordons’ youngest son was named after the prominent Fabian and playwright George Bernard Shaw.

⁶⁹ Lilian Clotilde Gordon (née Bradburn) (1887-1930); Brighton Public Library - SB324 B76: Labour Party general election handbill, Brighton constituency, Oct 1924. Gordon subsequently stood unsuccessfully at Lewes (1929), Brighton (1935), and the Lewes by-election (1936).

⁷⁰ Alban Gordon, *Social Insurance: What It Is and What It Might Be*, (London: The Fabian Society and George Allen and Unwin, 1924). Lady Emmott and Gordon gave evidence to the Royal Commission: *Woman’s Leader*, 06 Mar 1925, p.2. Gordon also wrote articles on social insurance for the *New Statesman*. His contribution towards a National Health Service was recognised in 1947 by Clement Atlee’s government with an invitation to become a life peer (negated by his death in the same year): George Bernard Gordon, *Alban Godwin Gordon*, (unpublished biography, 2008).

⁷¹ Alban Gordon, *The Common Sense of Socialism*, (London: Labour Publishing Co., 1924). His approach seems inspired by George Bernard Shaw’s *The Common Sense of Municipal Trading* (1904), *Common Sense about The War* (1914) and *More Common Sense about The War* (1915).

⁷² He became the Lee Prizeman at Gray’s Inn in 1926. After his career with UWHA, he practiced in the South East England court circuit and Sussex sessions: for example ‘Park Murder’, *Daily Mirror*, 02 Jul 1931, p.7.

⁷³ *Feminine Life*, Mar 1925.

⁷⁴ LMA, A/FWA/C/D/294/001 - ‘A Home of One’s Own’, UWHA First Annual Report & Balance Sheet, 31 Dec 1925.

directorship which included solicitor Stanley Galbraith Lawrence (1887-1959) and UWHA's architect Sidney Colston Garrett (1889-1949) of the Brighton-based firm Thomas Garrett & Son.⁷⁵

Although they hoped in time to offer a wider range of flats, the declared objective of the association was 'the building of small flats (mostly of one room) to let to its members at the lowest possible rent, thus enabling persons of limited incomes to obtain 'A Home of One's Own'.⁷⁶ The envisaged programme 'worked out by' Gordon, was 'to build small houses in London and other parts of the country' containing 'specially designed "one-room flats" and a smaller number of two-room flats' each possessing 'a bed-alcove, a tiny scullerette, with sink, gas stove, etc., large cupboards, tiled window ledges, electric light, and dustless skirting'.⁷⁷ The suggestion of compact 'sculleries' signified their assumption that the flats were aimed towards tenants of more humble origins in lower status occupations. Though described as 'self-contained', bathrooms were to be shared between two or more flats. As UWIS branches were located throughout England, the geographical reach of the initiative was broader than either LWH or WPH from its inception. As the first UWHA prospectus boasted, 'flats will be built in any part of the country where there is sufficient demand for them' with 'the first districts selected' including Hampstead, Acton, Wandsworth and Letchworth, as well as Birmingham and 'seaside places' like Brighton, Leigh-on-Sea, familiar places for Gordon.⁷⁸ The initiative was promoted by Lady Emmott in *The Woman's Leader* as a 'new offshoot of that vigorous body' the UWIS, flats generally targeted women in occupations of lower pay and status.⁷⁹

Although the promotional literature focused on the purpose-built schemes, the UWHA's inaugural development, opened on the 8th of December 1925, was in fact a Victorian townhouse conversion at 18 Philbeach Gardens, Earl's Court, close to WPH's second property developed three years earlier, reconfigured to accommodate sixteen tenants sharing a common dining room. The first new-build project – a cottage-flat development at Ladysmith Road, Brighton comprising four two-storey blocks, 'St Helier', 'Emmott', 'Bronte' and 'Huntingdon' Houses – was opened on the 22nd of January 1926 at a ceremony presided over by Lady Emmott and performed by the mayoress of Brighton, Mrs J Lord Thompson. Gordon's daughter presented the flower bouquets and a telegram of congratulation from the Minister of Health, Neville Chamberlain was read aloud. The exterior illusion of large cottages belied the dense internal plan. This comprised thirty-two 'flatlets' designed to accommodate forty-eight tenants with four flats per floor, the two larger ones accommodating two single beds, and 'entirely self-contained' except for the bathroom and toilet shared with two other tenants.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ LMA, A/FWA/C/D/294/001 - 'A Home of One's Own', UWHA First prospectus, 27 Mar 1925.

⁷⁷ '5s A Week Flats: New Housing Scheme for Women', *Westminster Gazette*, 09 Apr 1925, p.1; 'A Novel Housing Scheme for Women', *The Vote*, 17 Apr 1925; *Feminine Life*, Mar 1925.

⁷⁸ LMA, A/FWA/C/D/294/001 - UWHA First prospectus, 27 Mar 1925; *Feminine Life*, special supplement, July 1925.

⁷⁹ *Woman's Leader*, 20 Aug 1926.

⁸⁰ 'Flats for Single Women', *West Sussex Gazette*, 28 Jan 1926.

Initially, progress was ‘somewhat slower than was hoped’, with negotiations for building leases problematic, not simply in terms of cost but also owing to the historic resistance to flats: ‘It has been found extremely difficult to secure land in the right situation at a reasonable figure which at the same time is not burdened with covenants preventing the erection of flats...’.⁸¹ Despite this, over the course of the decade, the UWHA delivered a variety of newly built and adapted schemes for women workers, in London and other locations across England (see Appendix -Table C). A report of the UWHA’s progress was published every month in *Feminine Life*. Much like others interested in housing reform including Dorothy Peel and Sydney Bushell, and likely via Lady Emmott’s influence, Gordon was able to harness the medium of radio broadcast to promote the work of the UWHA.⁸² A model of a typical UWHA flat was also exhibited at Olympia.⁸³

With £25 in qualifying shares payable by instalments, and very affordable inclusive rentals of 5s to 6s quoted in advertisements, demand was understandably high and the waiting lists long.⁸⁴ In bold attempts to raise the necessary capital to supply more flats for the long list of waiting shareholders, Gordon began to speculate via the United Citizens Investment Trust on behalf of the UWHA. Some investments went well beyond the safer bounds of the gilt-edged securities pursued with the DSIS and UWIS. He also founded a series of further companies under the ‘United’ banner to administer various facets of the insurance and housing operations. The United Citizens Homes Association for example, was conceived to broaden the provision of flats to childless couples and single men.⁸⁵ Activities ran alongside his personal interest in stock market speculation and entrepreneurial activities which led him into novel fields such as automated vending machines and photography booths.⁸⁶ His long-term interest in dramatics also led to involvement in the construction of The Duchess theatre in London’s West End.⁸⁷ However, Gordon faced considerable opposition to his financial strategy. Following a crisis of confidence in Gordon’s stewardship of the UWIS and strategies by a faction led by committee member W.S Cameron, Lilian Gordon joined the executive committee of the UWIS in 1927.

In 1929 the UWHA relocated to prestigious new office headquarters Murray House, at Vandon Street Westminster, close to the commercial hub surrounding Victoria station. However, with the New York Stock Exchange Crash the same year and the onset of the economic Depression,

⁸¹ LMA, A/FWA/C/D/294/001 - UWHA First Annual Report and Balance Sheet, 31 Dec 1925.

⁸² Alban Gordon, ‘Housing the Lodger’, Wireless Broadcast Programme, *Daily Mail*, 16 Apr 1926, p.13. In 1926 Lady Emmott was appointed to the Central Appeals Advisory Committee for the ‘Week’s Good Cause’ radio appeals: Eve Colpus, ‘The Week’s Good Cause: Mass Culture and Cultures of Philanthropy at the Inter-War Bbc’, *Twentieth Century British History*, 22 (2011).

⁸³ A model flat is mentioned but the exhibition date unclear: LMA, A/FWA/C/D/294/001 - Charity Organisation Society (COS) case file on UWIS and UWHA, correspondence: COS and Miss Oliphant, 17 Jun 1933.

⁸⁴ Rentals for smaller Ladysmith Road flats were 10s 3d excluding rates (presumably shared between two tenants).

⁸⁵ Other companies included the United Women’s Benevolent Society, The United Women’s Loans Company.

⁸⁶ Numerous press articles evidence Gordon’s entrepreneurial activities. See for example ‘Auto-Dore’, *The Financial Times*, 06 Mar 1929, p.5.

⁸⁷ George Bernard Gordon, *Alban Godwin Gordon*. The theatre, designed by Ewen Barr, was covered by *The Builder*, *Architect and Building News* and *Architecture Illustrated* and Grade II-listed in 2005: Historic England, Listing 1391525, <<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1391525?section=official-list-entry>>, [accessed 03 Jan 2023].

the combination of substantial capital outlay and open market speculation proved disastrous, and the complex web of financially interdependent companies began to unravel. Worse still, February 1930 witnessed the sudden and tragic death of Lilian Gordon.⁸⁸ Despite well-intentioned efforts to offer affordable accommodation to lower-paid women workers, by 1931 the UWHA and associated organisations descended into financial chaos resulting in a court action involving sixty-five creditors and 1241 shareholders represented by Miss Annie Pearce. A scheme of arrangement was sanctioned in the High Court as the best means to avoid a winding-up order and allow the association to continue. The existing directors were replaced by a new board including the bank's appointed receiver, representatives of the mortgagees, and share and loan stockholders. Lengthy reports relating to the inquiry reveal the full extent of potential losses, the UWHA owing substantial sums to the Public Works Loan Board, as well as the architects Harry Duncan Hendry and Stanley Schooling.⁸⁹ Questions were raised in the House of Commons over the demise of the UWHA.⁹⁰ The directors, who by then included Amy St Loe Strachey (wife of John, editor of *The Spectator*), Lady Ida Hall and Surgeon Rear-Admiral Richard Adolphus Ross, also bore the brunt of the mismanagement, being ordered to jointly cover costs of £2087. The reason for the tragedy was firmly attributed to the incompatible mix of philanthropy and business practice, a quality inherent to every public utility society. *The Financial Times* reported Mr Justice Bennett's words proposing a board which would 'give up philanthropy and stick to business'. The blame was also felt to lie with women's lack of business acumen, the judge's understanding being that 'the old directors will retire and make room for men who will conduct matters on business lines'.⁹¹ The directorate was 'swept away', and an accountant, Mr Layton-Bennett, was appointed as chairman, 'it being most desirable that a man of proved practical ability should in future preside over the business of this company'.⁹² UWHA secretary Harold Ayres remained the one constant, staying on whilst affairs were put in order and thereafter until his retirement as managing director in 1967. Though the arrangement offered cold comfort to the thousands of women shareholders, the association's long-term future was at least secured, the UWHA continuing to let small, affordable women's flats for the remainder of the twentieth century.⁹³

⁸⁸ Lilian Gordon died of streptococcal septicaemia originating from contaminated unpasteurised milk: George Bernard Gordon, *Alban Godwin Gordon*; Obituary: Lilian Gordon, *Brighton Herald*, Feb 1930. Gordon subsequently married Iris White (1932, d.1936) and Patricia Meyer (1937): TNA, J77/3659/8631: Divorce Court File 8631, Husband's petition for divorce, 1936.

⁸⁹ TNA, J13/13079/686, High Court of Justice, Companies Court, Companies (Winding-up) Proceedings: United Women's Homes Association Ltd, Case number 686, 1932

⁹⁰ Hansard - HC Deb 26 Jul 1933, 280, c2595-6 and c2613, Miss Pickford re: Second United Women's Homes Association.

⁹¹ 'Home Company's Affairs', *The Financial Times*, 12 Jan 1933, p.8.

⁹² 'High Court of Justice Chancery Division: Scheme of Arrangement Sanctioned', *The Times*, 24 Feb 1933, p.4.

⁹³ UWHA properties were taken over in 2005 by Circle 33 Housing Trust who merged with Affinity Sutton in 2016 to become Clarion Housing Group.

Conclusion

This chapter explored the characteristics of the provider organisations and their founders. The new housing bodies were a less homogenous group than their Victorian and Edwardian predecessors, instigated by both men and women, and with the main protagonists no longer fitting the traditional profile of wealthy philanthropists. The backgrounds of their founders were more diverse, emanating from the garden city movement and the arenas of property speculation and national insurance, as well as the organised women's movement. There were also changes in the role of women within the initiatives. Although earlier pioneering women's housing ventures were largely conceived by women, they were legitimised by the presence of male board members, often spouses or relatives. With women historically prohibited from pursuing careers as solicitors and accountants, such roles could also only be fulfilled by men. However, with legal barriers lifted in most professions by the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act of 1919, women were increasingly able to assume all executive positions within the organisations. This more visible, assertive form of female agency and greater autonomy over their living spaces was bolstered by women's enhanced political position and their official appointment to Ministry of Reconstruction and other public housing committees at the end of the War.

Chapter 4

Founding Motivations and Guiding Principles

The new inter-war women's initiatives were, in essence, a direct response to the continued deficit in suitable housing for self-supporting women. However, as was indicated in the previous chapter, there were also more specific motives and principles underpinning their work. The current chapter aims to investigate these in greater detail. What were the primary motivating forces which led them to form such housing bodies and drove their activities forward? What approaches were adopted in terms of management and expansion? These questions will be addressed by exploring more closely their connections with feminism and women's citizenship, women's employment, the garden city and town planning movement and the political arena. It then examines the *modus operandi* of each of the organisations under scrutiny and the ways in which they engaged with post-1918 housing policy.

Feminism and Women's Citizenship

As discussed in Chapter 1, women's rights campaigning of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – generally perceived as the first wave of feminism – focused on achieving social, political and legal equality, principally by promoting women's employment, enabling access to higher education and the professions, and securing the vote for women at all levels of governance. With the battle for women's suffrage partly won with the passing of The Representation of the People Act 1918, agitation for universal suffrage continued apace. As Cheryl Law and others have demonstrated, contrary to the traditional conception of the women's movement winding down in the inter-war decades, campaigning continued through a complex network of women's organisations, the agenda broadened, and a new emphasis was placed on nurturing women's active citizenship.¹ As a marker of this realignment, in 1919 the foremost suffrage campaigning body, the National Union of Suffrage Societies (NUWSS), was re-branded as the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship (NUSEC). The issue of housing for single women was one concrete manifestation of feminist activism in the period. Whilst housing for working families was firmly on the political agenda, the needs of unmarried women were rarely if ever considered. The close connections between the women's movement and women's housing were evident in the ongoing

¹ For a detailed account see Law, *Suffrage and Power*.

commitment of many of the protagonists to the campaign for women's suffrage and the promotion of women's employment.

After the War, however, an ideological split surfaced concerning the future scope and direction of feminist action. Divisions between traditional equalitarian feminists and adherents of the 'new' or welfare-focused feminism, became apparent within the ranks of the NUSEC. Whilst President Eleanor Rathbone championed family allowances and protectionist legislation, others deemed this as acceptance of women's place in the home and a retreat to the separate spheres doctrine which constrained women's lives. The work of the inter-war women's housing providers reflected elements of both these emerging strands of feminism. On the one hand, campaigning for dedicated women's housing with distinctive needs chimed with difference-orientated feminism. On the other, supporting female workers' housing needs as a means to place them on a more equal footing with their male counterparts, expressed equalitarian principles.

Although aiming to enhance women's lives, it would be wrong to imply that all inter-war providers were motivated by feminism. The first registered premises of Women Pioneer Housing (WPH) at the Women's Institute building was shared with feminist organisations including the Six Point Group. Many individuals involved in running WPH were also unequivocal in their support of the women's cause. However, not all described themselves as feminists. WPH's first permanent chair Helen Archdale identified strongly with feminism, whereas equally long-serving committee member Dorothy Peel noted in her autobiography: 'It may be thought that I am a feminist. I am not'.² Likewise, while United Women's Homes Association (UWHA) president Lady Emmott had long been a staunch advocate of women's rights, Lady St Helier – whose name was commemorated alongside Emmott in the society's first purpose-built scheme – was known for her opposition to women's suffrage and condemnation of the 'New Woman'.³

In the Lady Workers' Homes' (LWH) case, advertising campaigns emphasising a male directorate coming to the aid of women 'of gentle birth' and furnishing them with '...an environment corresponding to that with which they are familiar', spoke more of Victorian paternalism than feminism.⁴ Furthermore, whilst women undertook leading roles within the Davis organisation, their status remains ambiguous. Helena and eldest daughters Ruth and Irene were listed as directors of the various Davis businesses. The family were also educationally progressive, Irene, for instance, graduating from Bedford College in 1911 with a B.A. in Classics.⁵ Further freedoms are evident in Ruth being actively involved in the running of LWH after marriage.⁶ However, oral family tradition indicates a conservative Jewish household, where Ruth was

² C. S. Peel, *Life's Enchanted Cup, an Autobiography (1872-1933)*, (London: John Lane, 1933), p.266. Archdale's mother was one of the women medical student subjected to the riots at Surgeon's Hall, Edinburgh.

³ Davis, 'Mary Jeune, Late-Victorian Essayist'.

⁴ LWH Advertisement, *Daily Mirror* 22 Aug 1922, p.7.

⁵ Bedford College Student Registers, 1849-1931: Form of Entrance for Irene Davis; University of London, *The Historical Record (1836-1912)*, (London: University of London Press, 1912), p.220.

⁶ TNA, BT13/21077/125709 - Board of Trade Records of Dissolved Companies, CLBC; Birth Registers, England and Wales.

‘restrained by the family from pursuing an independent career’.⁷ Both Ruth and Josephine certainly married men ‘within the fold’, employed in the family firm.⁸ Moreover, no evidence so far suggests that the Davis women were active within the pre or post-war women’s movement, including the Jewish League for Woman Suffrage, a body whose remit extended to raising women’s status in the Jewish community.

With the 1918 Representation of the People Act enfranchising around forty per cent of the adult female population, agitation for full suffrage continued until finally realised in the Equal Franchise Act of 1928. Though less discernible in LWH, there were tangible links between participation in suffrage activism, and those individuals involved in women’s housing provision. Before the War, some of the early flat schemes were perceived as a focal point for women’s rights activism. During the census night protests of 2nd April 1911, The Ladies Residential Chambers’ 1889 development at Chenies Street was flagged by the Metropolitan Police as one of the potential centres of suffragette unrest to be closely observed.⁹ Women’s citizenship had long been a fundamental tenet within Alban Gordon’s family circle. Gordon’s mother Edith, active in the suffrage movement, was a vehement supporter of the 1911 Census boycott.¹⁰ As part of the collective protest against the Liberal Government’s continued intransigence, her return as head of the household stated that she was ‘signing this Census under protest since not possessing the rights of a Citizen’, whilst wittily recording herself and servant Margaret Watson in the disability section as ‘un-enfranchised’ and her sons Alban and John as ‘suffering from mother’s disenfranchisement’.¹¹ Gordon’s future wife Lilian and her mother Mercilla Charlotte Bradburn were also ardent participants in sympathy with suffragette tactics, with Lilian a ‘very active’ member of her Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU) branch (Fig. 23).¹² The family’s allegiance was similarly documented in the 1911 Census, with William Bradburn recording that ‘the other inmates of this house are suffragettes and have gone away’.¹³ During the WSPU’s first mass window-smashing campaign of 21st November 1911 targeting Parliament Square and the heavily cordoned Houses of Parliament, ‘Mr. Alban Gordon and Miss Lilian Bradburn successfully reached the Lobby of the House of Commons...they rushed up the steps, where they shouted, “Votes for Women, Cowards!”’.¹⁴

Connections between women’s enfranchisement and women’s housing were yet more direct within the ranks of WPH. Etheldred Browning’s prominent role in suffrage campaigning for the IWRL was widely documented in the Irish press, her activism extending to presiding at open-air

⁷ Watson, *Rebuilding London*, p.74.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ TNA, MEPO 2/2023: Metropolitan Police memoranda, 1911.

¹⁰ For the 1911 Census boycott see Jill Liddington and Elizabeth Crawford, ‘Women Do Not Count, Neither Shall They Be Counted’: Suffrage, Citizenship and the Battle for the 1911 Census’, *History Workshop Journal*, 71 (2011).

¹¹ Census of England and Wales 1911.

¹² I am grateful to Simon Clarke for photographs from the Gordon family archives.

¹³ Census of England and Wales 1911.

¹⁴ Reported in ‘The Great Protest of Women’, *Votes for Women*, pp.123-4.

rallies and authoring propaganda for the more militant Irishwomen's Suffrage Federation.¹⁵ Other long-serving members of the WPH executive were high profile campaigners imprisoned for suffrage militancy. (Laura) Geraldine Lennox (1883-1958), committee member from 1932 until at least 1948, was organiser of the WSPU Irish contingent and founder of the London-based Irish League of Women's Suffrage (Fig. 20).¹⁶ Helen Archdale, founding WPH member and chair, gained notoriety for disrupting a meeting attended by Winston Churchill in Dundee, and ran the Sheffield mass census evasion with co-WSPU organiser Adela Pankhurst. Her partner in feminist activism and personal life, Lady Rhondda, WSPU organiser for Newport, Wales, had jumped on the running board of Prime Minister Asquith's car during the 1910 election, and been imprisoned for blowing-up a post-box.¹⁷ Their Six Point Group colleague Dorothy Elizabeth Evans (1888-1944), WPH committee member from 1930 until her death in 1944, was a prolific protestor. A key WSPU organiser, she was imprisoned and forcibly fed whilst on hunger strike on numerous occasions.¹⁸ Former militant suffragettes working side-by-side with constitutional suffragists like Ray Strachey, editor of *The Common Cause* and its successor *The Woman's Leader* from 1919 to 1923, and author of *The Cause*, evidences their close cooperation in the inter-war years.¹⁹ The WPH committee's engagement with the first female Scottish MP, Unionist Katharine Stewart-Murray, Duchess of Atholl as a speaker for WPH at public events, demonstrates further cooperation, even with those who had openly opposed women's suffrage.²⁰ Advocates of the women's cause of all ideological and political persuasions thus cooperated in the shared goal of bringing about lasting reform in women's housing.

Women's Employment

The aims of the women's housing providers were, and had always been, inextricably linked with developments in women's employment. Their forbears had established accommodation for women in direct response to the rise of the career-orientated 'New Woman' and the so-called 'white blouse revolution' involving ever-increasing numbers joining the burgeoning office and commercial workplace. The inter-war schemes were also addressing a fresh set of imperatives brought into clearer focus by the War: the broader-based nature of women's participation in the workforce due to the exigencies of the conflict, spurring a younger generation to reject a life in domestic service; the passing of the Sex Disqualification (Removal Act) 1919, dismantling barriers to women in

¹⁵ *The Irish Citizen*, 16 Aug 1913.

¹⁶ LMA, LMA/4776/E/01/001 - Geraldine Lennox, Address to WPH tenants, 1948; Crawford, *The Women's Suffrage Movement*. Lennox was instrumental in sourcing initial WPH investors but unable to join the committee until 1932 due to personal commitments - after serving as a military nurse in France during the Great War (where her brother was killed), she established a typing agency to financially support her widowed mother.

¹⁷ Deirdre Beddoe, 'Viscountess Rhondda', *ODNB*, 2004.

¹⁸ Catherine Blackford, 'Evans, Dorothy (1888-1944), activist and organizer', *ODNB*, 2004.

¹⁹ Ray Strachey, *The Cause: A Short History of the Women's Movement in Great Britain*, (London: G.Bell, 1928).

²⁰ Pre-1918 Murray had been opposed to women's suffrage and was vice-president to the Dundee branch of the Anti-Suffrage League.

(almost all) professions; and the increased gender-imbalance which expanded the ranks of self-supporting unmarried women. Affordable, more suitable housing would enable and sustain such careers and boost national efficiency. As Dorothy Peel argued, it made more economic sense 'to invest in a sound, well-directed company, such as Women's Pioneer Housing, which helps to keep workers healthy and able to work, than to assist them when they have been harassed into incompetence'.²¹ Etheldred Browning also negotiated for single women's built space under these terms, astutely framing her arguments under the drive for efficiency. If better family homes were crucial to improving the population's well-being and life quality, thereby ensuring the nation's economic health, then likewise, 'the efficiency of women's work will suffer unless women can keep up their standard of living'.²²

Further interrelationships were evident with many protagonists being campaigners within organisations seeking to promote and reform women's employment. Etheldred Browning had conducted detailed research for the IRL in Dublin and during the War coordinated the female workforce under the auspices of the Central Committee for Women's Employment. For Browning gaining the vote would not be sufficient in itself; women needed representation in the workplace at all levels, particularly by single women:

Factory inspectors – women factory inspectors – women law makers, women police, women on the jury, women lawyers, women everywhere – that is the need of our country, that is the obvious explanation of the so-called superfluous woman – we need her! "Rise! You must free all others to be free!"²³

WPH chair Ray Strachey was also a committed campaigner, serving on the executive of the London Society for Women's Service (LSWS) and authoring a range of studies analysing women's shifting position in the workplace.²⁴ Their efforts followed an investigative tradition forged in the late nineteenth century by Louisa Hubbard for the National Union of Women Workers (NUWW), and Emily Hobhouse for the Women's Industrial Council (WIC), where analyses of women's employment needs went hand-in-hand with their housing.²⁵ The UWHA's Lady Emmott and Alban Gordon, both primary movers in inter-war women's housing, also demonstrated a lifetime commitment to the welfare of women workers. Emmott chaired committees for both the LSWS and NUWW (renamed

²¹ Peel, *Life's Enchanted Cup*, p.245. Peel likened her work at WPH to her role in co-establishing the Pioneer Health Centre, Peckham, both initiatives being 'for the prevention of injury to humanity, rather than...for patching it up'.

²² E. A. Browning, 'Women and Homes', *The Vote*, 11 Mar 1921, p.395.

²³ E. A. Browning, 'Women's Work and Wages in Dublin', *Irish Citizen*, 09 Aug 1913, p.91.

²⁴ For example Ray Strachey, 'Current Social Statistics: The Census: Occupation of Women', *Political Quarterly*, 5 (1934), pp.549-61; Ray Strachey, *Careers and Openings for Women: A Survey of Women's Employment and a Guide for Those Seeking Work*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1935). The London Society for Woman's Suffrage was renamed the London Society for Women's Service in 1919. It later became the London & National Society for Women's Service (1926) and the Fawcett Society (1953).

²⁵ Louisa Hubbard, 'Statistics of Women's Work' in Angela Burdett-Coutts, *Woman's Mission*, (New York: Scribner's, 1893), pp.361-66.

the National Council of Women in 1918) for which she would serve as president. The interconnection between single women's employment and their housing was also embodied in her role as WIC representative on the National Association for Women's Lodging Homes. Gordon had advocated for working women's welfare provision since 1912. He had encountered first-hand the precarious financial position of women wage-earners when his mother Edith worked as a secretary and medical dispenser and they 'lived on the edge of poverty'.²⁶ Gordon's merging of insurance societies, bringing together female workers in domestic, nursing, clerical and professional roles, and the conscious affiliation between the UWIS and UWHA, underlined the alignment of women's employment and women's housing.

Other women who served the WPH executive were leading entrepreneurs, blazing a trail and heightening the status of women's careers. Lady Rhondda established the Women's Industrial League in 1918 to safeguard women's jobs during demobilisation. Assuming control of much of her late father's business empire in 1918, she served on the boards of thirty-three companies (chairs seven), becoming the first woman president of the Institute of Directors in 1926. She also became embroiled in a lifelong and very public battle to take her seat in the House of Lords, one of few male-only bastions to evade the premise of the Sex Disqualification (Removal) bill.²⁷ With Helen Archdale, Lady Rhondda also founded the Women's Provisional Club in 1921, a professional networking body akin to the all-male Rotary Club. Gertrude Leverkus, inducted by Etheldred Browning as their architect member, would become president in 1958. Constance Hoster, the well-known originator of secretarial and commercial training institutes for women, and an early committee member, published on the development of this employment field in respected journals.²⁸

The day-to-day administration of the organisations was in itself an opportunity to further women's careers in a more practical capacity. Running the LWH and the directorship of several other Davis companies, offered Ruth Davis intellectually challenging work beyond the traditional realm of nursing, teaching and charity organisation. Establishing WPH facilitated Etheldred Browning's own career in housing management. It also allowed its founders to be proactive in engaging pioneering women entering the newly accessible, hitherto male-dominated professions of law, accountancy and architecture. At the first meeting it was proposed 'that the solicitor be Miss Helena Normanton', one of the earliest women to be accepted at the Inns of Court after the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act 1919 came into force.²⁹ The committee likewise planned to instruct a

²⁶ Buk-Swienty, *Tommy Og Tanne*, pp.384-431

²⁷ John, *Turning the Tide*. Her admission plea in 1922 was initially accepted by the Committee of Privileges but subsequently revoked. Women remained barred from the House of Lords until the Life Peerages Act of 1958, enacted shortly after her death.

²⁸ Constance Hoster, 'The Training of Educated Women for Secretarial and Commercial Work, and their Permanent Employment', *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, 23 Feb 1917, pp.262-269; Nicole Robertson, 'Hoster [née Kalisch], Constance Pauline (1864-1939), promoter of women's employment and secretarial training.', *ODNB*, 2020.

²⁹ LMA, LMA/4776/A/01/001 - WPH Committee Minutes, 30 Aug 1920; Joanne Workman, 'Normanton, Helena Florence (1882-1957)', *ODNB*, 2004. Normanton (1882-1957) and Ivy Williams were the first two women called to the Bar in

female architect once qualified, interviewing Architectural Association students Winifred Ryle and Isabel Chambers, before selecting recently-elected RIBA associate Gertrude Leverkus. The commissioning of WPH accountant/auditors Miriam Homersham from 1920 to 1931, and after 1925 Ethel Watts, both pioneers in their field, provided vital long-term support in establishing their respective practices.³⁰ There was further scope to bolster female-led businesses. The Women's Printing Society Limited of Brick Street, Piccadilly supplied the society's promotional literature. The cooperative, founded in 1876 by Emma Paterson (1848-1886), advanced women composers in the printing industry, as well as women's pay and conditions more generally. Much like Emily Faithfull's (1835-1895) better-known Victoria Press operating from the 1850s, they would publish for a range of suffrage and feminist organisations.³¹ Autonomy over their housing projects also afforded WPH the opportunity to support skilled women in the male-dominated arena of building and decoration, employing sisters Wilhemina and Vera Blood, who tendered for conversion work as well as papering, varnishing and painting.³²

Town Planning and Garden City Principles

Many activists in women's housing were also proponents of the garden city movement, sharing personnel and skills with the Garden Cities and Town Planning Association (GCTPA). After her move to England, Etheldred Browning worked as a GCTPA lecturer and administrator for the Women's Section. GCTPA Council members, Lady Emmott and Sydney Bushell served as chair and honorary secretary respectively, with sub-committee members including Edith Charlesworth and Christian MacTaggart.³³ The Section was formed in May 1920, when the WPH housing venture was being conceived, prompted by a GCTPA women's conference staged at the Daily Mail Ideal Home Exhibition, Olympia on 10th February of the same year, where 600 women delegates attended and Browning spoke on 'The Need for Women on Housing Committees'.³⁴ The objective of the body was to act as an information hub 'for the benefit of women practically interested in building', reporting on such matters as labour saving devices in the home, through fieldwork and in consultation with

1922. WPH retained the legal services of John Rowlett of Torr and Co. following his assistance during the existential crisis.

³⁰ LMA, LMA/4776/A/01/002 - WPH Committee Minutes, 17 Feb 1925; J. Robinson, 'Ethel Watts: The Spirit of a Pioneer,' *Accountancy*, 85, Sep 1974, pp.54-55. Homersham qualified by examination as associate of The Society of Incorporated Accountants and Auditors in 1922, gaining fellowship in 1925. Homersham and Co. went into partnership with Ethel Watts (1895-1963) in Mar 1925 (the first woman to qualify by examination with the Institute of Chartered Accountants of England and Wales in Feb 1924). (The SIAA merged with the ICAEW in 1957). Watts established E. Watts & Co.

³¹ Elizabeth Crawford, 'The Women's Printing Society', Oct 1920 blog available at <<https://www.bl.uk/womens-rights/articles/the-womens-printing-society#:~:text=The%20Women's%20Printing%20Society%20was,greater%20control%20over%20their%20lives.>>

³² LMA, LMA/4776/A/01/002 - WPH Minutes Jan 1924-Dec 1925.

³³ TCPA - GCTPA minutes, May 1920-July 1924. TCPA - *Garden Cities and Town Planning* (11), Mar 1921, pp.73-4.

³⁴ Hardy, *From Garden Cities to New Towns*, pp.159-63; TCPA - *Garden Cities and Town Planning* (10), Jan 1920, p.20 and p.65; *ibid*, June 1920, p.140.

experts in the field.³⁵ Dorothy Peel served on the planning committee for Welwyn Garden City, working alongside Ebenezer Howard and Henrietta Barnett.³⁶

The reconstructive spirit after the Great War – the renewed optimism and momentum for housing reform, the rise of town planning and the altered status of women citizens – all converged as powerful motivators for the women’s housing providers. In 1919 Etheldred Browning painted a vivid picture in *The Common Cause* of her first GCTPA meeting which, to her dismay, was attended by forty men and only seven women. For a seasoned platform campaigner like Browning, the conspicuous absence of women in matters of housing, at all levels of society, warranted a rallying call tinged with expectations of Christian duty: ‘Oh, ghosts – ghosts of women citizens, come out of the shadows, and be visible, strong, determined...for “hereunto were you called.”’³⁷ In a follow-up article, ‘What Women Should Do Next’, Browning outlined the necessary steps women should take which included familiarisation with essential publications such as Richard Reiss’ popular book, *The Home I Want*, as well as ‘the study of “town planning” and “garden cities,” subjects which are rapidly demanding the attention of all intelligent citizens’.³⁸

The GCTPA were also tireless advocates of ‘co-partnership’ development, delivering housing in the garden cities and suburbs through cooperation with public utility societies. Fledgling housing providers benefitted directly from the GCTPA’s practical expertise in navigating the legislation and registration requirements of the Industrial and Provident Societies Acts. Both WPH and UWHA were affiliated to the GCTPA on formation and, like many other public utility societies, made use of the GCTPA’s model rule books. For a time, the office and meeting spaces at GCTPA headquarters, 3 Grays Inn Place, were made available to WPH, and Richard Reiss, chair of the GCTPA executive, accompanied WPH founding members at London Housing Board meetings (Fig. 20). Browning was also able to co-opt fellow GCTPA lecturer Evelyn Waley onto the WPH committee owing to her ‘practical knowledge of the workings of Public Utility Societies’.³⁹

Schemes for single women had already enjoyed support and a measure of success at Waterlow Court (1909), Hampstead Garden Suburb and Meadow Way Green North (1914), Letchworth, both schemes planned and facilitated by women. The garden cities and suburbs continued to be fertile ground in the inter-war decades. The UWHA would sponsor two further developments at Hampstead Garden Suburb, Queen’s Court and Emmott Close; LWH would build flats within Davis’ own garden suburb at the Holly Lodge Estate, Highgate (see Chapter 6). Many essentials of garden city philosophy – principles of cooperation, tenant participation, a preference for variety and non-uniformity and ‘leafy’ locations – also underpinned many aspects of the adapted women’s schemes. The healthy, restorative properties of garden surroundings were prioritised by each of the inter-war providers.

³⁵ Ibid, Dec 1920, p.248. GCTPA Women’s Section, *Labour Saving in Small Houses*, (London: P.S. King & Son Ltd, c.1922).

³⁶ Peel, *Life’s Enchanted Cup*, pp.239-40.

³⁷ Etheldred Browning, ‘Ghosts’, *Common Cause*, 25 Jul 1919, p.192.

³⁸ Etheldred Browning, ‘What Women Must Do Next’, pp.510-11.

³⁹ LMA, LMA/4776/A/01/001 - WPH Minutes, 01 Nov 1920.

Political Agendas and Party Affiliation

A number of the individuals involved in women's housing provision were politically active at both local and national government levels. Many stood for Parliament, albeit unsuccessfully, often on several occasions. Richard Reiss was Liberal Party candidate for Chichester in 1910 and St Pancras South-East in 1918, before crossing over to stand for Labour at Colchester in 1922, 1923, 1924 and 1929, and Preston in 1935. Lady Emmott contested the 1922 election as Oldham's Liberal candidate promoting a bold, equalitarian feminist agenda, but polled a disappointing fifth. Ray Strachey stood as an Independent Coalition candidate for Brentford and Chiswick in the General Elections of 1918, 1922 and 1923, deeming both Conservative and Liberal manifestoes 'equally unappealing'.⁴⁰ As was the case for other pioneering women candidates, a female presence in Parliament was of greater consequence than party affiliation.⁴¹ Though defeated, Strachey nevertheless wielded considerable influence as parliamentary secretary to Viscountess Nancy Astor (1879-1964), the first woman to sit in the Commons, during her first session 1919-1920, when she would 'write her memoranda and speeches...prepare her Parliamentary questions...select [what] invitations she should accept & so on' (Fig. 20).⁴² Continuing to seek Strachey's advice thereafter, Astor advocated directly on WPH's behalf both within and outside of the Chamber, firstly during their protracted battle for state-funding in 1920-21, and subsequently at such events as their inaugural public dinner of 1924.⁴³ The endorsement of high-profile women politicians, whatever their political persuasion, was considered crucial by WPH to court publicity and maximise the pool of investors. Thus, at public events Labour candidate Richard Reiss shared the platform with Louth's Liberal MP Margaret Wintringham and Conservative member for Berwick-Upon-Tweed, Mabel Hilton Philipson.⁴⁴

As a staunch Labour Party member and Fabian socialist, Alban Gordon was more partisan in terms of political slant. Though serving as a town councillor, he was never elected to Parliament, despite standing for the Party on five separate occasions. Whilst establishing the UWHA, he gained a reputation as an 'avowed socialist', ruffling feathers in Brighton's Council chamber as 'one of the younger and abler members...[who] does not always treat the bald heads of the senior members of the Council with quite the respect to which they have long become accustomed'.⁴⁵ Ever the pragmatist, Gordon was nonetheless shrewd enough to foster broad-based appeal for the UWHA, constructing a corporate identity around a less radical, cross-party directorate.

⁴⁰ Jennifer Holmes, *A Working Woman: The Remarkable Life of Ray Strachey*, (Kibworth Beauchamp: Matador, 2019), p.174.

⁴¹ The inter-war Commons saw 36 women MPs in total elected before 1939).

⁴² Strachey quoted in Holmes, *A Working Woman*, pp.182-4.

⁴³ Hansard, Sessional Papers, 1932-33, Fifth Series, Vol 146: Written answers, 19 Aug 1921, cc:1813-14; 'Homes for Professional Women: Lady Astor and the Housing Problem', *The Observer*, 10 Feb 1924, p.16. Astor served as vice-president of the Over Thirty Association in the late 1930s.

⁴⁴ *The Times*, 01 Feb 1924, p.12. Wintringham (1879-1955) and Hilton Philipson (1887-1951) were the second and third women MPs to take their seats in Parliament, in 1921 and 1923 respectively.

⁴⁵ *West Sussex Gazette*, 01 Apr 1926, p.11; information provided by Simon Clarke (Gordon's grandson).

Gordon's long-standing political beliefs had brought him into the sphere of women's housing provision. In a reversal of sorts, Abraham Davis, a life-long property speculator, was drawn into the political arena via housing. Elected as a St Pancras Borough councillor in 1911, later becoming alderman, he served as deputy chairman of the Special Housing Committee and chairman of the Public Health Committee. Though the impetus appears to stem from his efforts to speculate with a social conscience, the role likely allowed Davis to exert a degree of influence when developing flats within his own Ward.⁴⁶ Furthermore, like Gordon, his status as 'Councillor' or 'Alderman' consistently lent cachet to company literature and legitimised claims for state funding. Naming one of the blocks of flats Jessel House (1912) betrayed his allegiance to Liberal Unionist/Conservative MP Herbert Jessel (1866-1950). However, alignment with Ministry housing policy and politicians, regardless of Party colours, was regularly orchestrated at ceremonial openings of the women's schemes. Liberal Minister of Health Christopher Addison opened LWH's Addison House (1919), the first to be funded through the National Housing Scheme in 1919.⁴⁷ Despite his personal investment in municipal government and engagement with the public utility society model, Davis was resolute in his belief that speculators rather than the state could supply women with better homes. Such views were laid bare in LWH advertisements: 'The directors are convinced that only private enterprise can successfully cope with the most urgent and pressing problem of the day – the provision of good homes for the people.'⁴⁸ After the withdrawal of housing subsidies in 1921, Davis requested an audience with new Minister of Health Sir Alfred Mond. Placing his experience at the minister's 'entire disposal', he proposed a ten-year freeze on rates to assist private developers in 'making the erection of houses an economic proposition without Government financial aid.'⁴⁹ By then Davis and his associates had experienced first-hand the lengthy, fraught process of obtaining state funds and been frustrated by the stripping back of their tried and tested architectural designs. He had also failed in his attempt to persuade the Borough of St Pancras to purchase and develop the Holly Lodge Estate.⁵⁰

Conversely, despite suffering similar setbacks in their attempts to obtain loans and subsidies in 1920-21, operating thereafter without further state assistance, WPH never abandoned hope and continued to lobby for central government intervention. In December 1936, they backed the Over Thirty Association's deputation to the Minister of Health urging municipal authorities to factor single women into housing plans and calling for an investigation into the state provision of one-roomed flats (see epilogue).

Support thus cut across the political spectrum. The notion of cooperation underpinned the schemes, and the success of the women's schemes was paramount and transcended party-politics.

⁴⁶ Watson, 'Rebuilding London', p.71.

⁴⁷ Conservative Minister of Health, Neville Chamberlain publicly endorsed UWHA's developments.

⁴⁸ 'Sound and Beneficial Investment', *Daily Telegraph*, 12 Jan 1923, p.6.

⁴⁹ TNA HLG 49/663 - Correspondence: PUHS to Minister of Health, 20 Jul 1921 and 29 Jul 1921. Re-development of Victorian villas triggered a substantial increase in rates, for example at Addison House rising from £109 to £2,556.

⁵⁰ Watson, 'Rebuilding London', p.77.

Business Practices

Each of the women's housing organisations under scrutiny ostensibly delivered housing by the same means: the public utility society model. There was, however, significant disparity in terms of their approaches to organisational structure, management style and growth strategies. As discussed in Chapter 2, public utility societies were voluntary, government regulated bodies, perceived as serving the public good. They combined the characteristics of both model dwelling companies and Friendly Societies: underpinned by the premise of 'five per-cent philanthropy' and functioning as businesses rather than charitable concerns with limits placed on the distribution of profits, but at the same time distinguished by principles of cooperation, tenant ownership and participation. The organisational type evolved as a housing delivery mechanism in the early twentieth century, deployed in the delivery of numerous 'co-partnership' housing schemes in garden cities, villages and suburbs.

The circumstances of the LWH initiative, where private housing company, public utility society and building contractor were effectively all under Davis's control, was unusual and added an additional layer of structural complexity. LWH, a commercial registered company, attracted the privately subscribed capital; the Public Utility Housing Society (PUHS) acquired the building leases and public funds; and the Central London Building Company (CLBC) carried out the construction. As Isobel Watson observed, as well as aiding cash flow thereby insulating the family building firm from financial issues, the business model sometimes played to his advantage, conveying an impression of separate, more substantial organisations.⁵¹ It also separated the private and public elements enabling greater freedom with LWH investor returns. Acting as the Managing Director of a string of family companies, Abraham Davis' conceptualisation of his executive role was firmly corporate. When the Ministry of Health approved the PUHS rules in 1915, it is perhaps telling that they required Davis to 'strike out the word "Company" and substitute "Society"'.⁵² Davis' methods attracted criticism from those who suspected the public utility society concept being treated merely as a convenient medium through which to access additional funds. When Abraham Davis was criticised in *John Bull* magazine for being 'a "philanthropist" whose enterprise has been allowed to degenerate into a mere dividend-earning concern' Davis stressed that he 'never claimed to be a philanthropist', and that from the outset the LWH was 'an honest business enterprise, returning a reasonable profit'.⁵³

Operating directly as public utility societies, WPH and UWHA might be assumed to have been more structurally alike, yet their perception of public utility society administration and executive roles was quite distinct. Like Davis, Alban Gordon's identification as UWHA 'managing director' heading a 'directorship', leaned more towards the commercial world than the voluntary

⁵¹ Watson, 'Rebuilding London', p.71.

⁵² TNA, HLG49/662 - Correspondence: LHB to PUHS, 1915.

⁵³ "'A Purpose Diverted"', *John Bull*, 15 Jul 1922, p.7.

sector.⁵⁴ Although he celebrated the UWHA's unique status as 'neither a commercial concern nor a charitable body, but a self-supporting cooperative organisation', Gordon's interpretation diverged greatly from his position at the United Women's Insurance Society.⁵⁵ WPH's organisational make-up on the other hand, remained grounded in the tradition of the Friendly and Mutual Societies, consciously devised around committee-based collaboration and tenant co-operation. It was also predominately overseen by women, clauses within the rules stipulating that of the five to twelve members, 'a clear majority shall be women'.⁵⁶ Although Browning's position as 'manager and secretary' was eventually salaried, the executive committee generally perceived their role as a social service to be offered up on a voluntary basis. As Geraldine Lennox stated, 'We are not like an ordinary Board of Directors or Managers – nor do we get large Director's fees...everyone works as if the Society were – as it is – the first concern and our own.'⁵⁷ Even as founder, Browning served in a subordinate capacity, regularly in obedience to the management committee's bidding.

Public utility societies were also required to form tenant committees, thus approaches to tenant participation offer a further potential point of comparison, however a lack of institutional records makes it difficult to ascertain tenants' involvement in the case of LWH (through the PUHS) or UWHA.⁵⁸ WPH minutes demonstrate the consistent personal attention paid to tenants' needs and the active input of long-serving, tenant representatives on the committee.⁵⁹ Such principles of housing management aligned with those developed by the late Octavia Hill, whose methods remained relevant in the inter-war period.⁶⁰ As the WPH prospectus stated, 'The keynote of successful property management, and the factor which makes for the comfort and satisfaction of the tenants, is the constant personal attention given to the houses by the Society's Manager and Staff'.⁶¹ However, issues with evicting problem tenants and ongoing financial pressures rendered one of the original, fundamental tenets of the society, the provision of homes with indefinite tenure, difficult to uphold. At a Special Meeting in June 1931, Charles Peel, vice-chair during Dorothy's illness, strongly objected to a proposed change to the rules removing the assurance of lifetime tenancies.⁶²

Building work connected with the women's flats depended upon the timely advancement of capital. This was sourced through a combination of shares and loan stock purchased by tenants and small private investors, mortgage borrowing and assistance from the Treasury in the form of

⁵⁴ 'For Single Women', *Westminster & Pimlico News*, 30 Mar 1928, p.6.

⁵⁵ Browning was 'secretary' until 1925; her additional designation as 'manager' reflected her principal role in WPH housing management.

⁵⁶ LMA, LMA/4776/A/02/001 - WPH Rules, 1920.

⁵⁷ LMA, LMA/4776/E/01/001 - WPH Tenants Committee Minutes, address by Geraldine Lennox, 1948.

⁵⁸ UWHA directors Miss E. Bundy, Miss Fuller and Miss K.N. Wright may have been tenant representatives.

⁵⁹ Aline Smallwood served as tenant representative for over a decade; Margaret Waldron and Coralie Parkyn served longer, becoming full members of the executive.

⁶⁰ For example, 'Women House Property Managers: Miss Octavia Hill's System of Cottage Management from a Correspondent', *Woman's Leader*, 27th Aug 1920, pp.660-1. Hill's publications were also advertised in the pages of the GCTPA journal.

⁶¹ LMA, LMA/4776/F/01/001 - WPH Prospectus c.1936.

⁶² LMA, LMA/4776/A/01/005 - WPH Committee Minutes, Special Meeting, 16 Jun 1931.

public loans and subsidies. With careful management WPH were able to reduce the minimum outlay for prospective tenants in qualifying shares to £25 and offer instalment terms, recognising the difficulty for 'hundreds of women who have no capital'. UWHA's initial methods involved direct marketing sent to UWIS members which elicited a sizeable response, far greater than anticipated. Perhaps unsurprisingly, outline plans for flats with rentals as low as 5s rapidly drew in 1365 prospective tenant shareholders within a matter of months.⁶³ However, accumulating capital by this means was deemed dubious by *Truth* magazine who feared Gordon was 'incurring a serious responsibility in appealing for capital for this association...the shares are quite obviously anything but a suitable investment for the savings of elderly cooks or other female workers'.⁶⁴ The remarks, later retracted following Gordon's assurances of the UWHA's affiliation with the financially flourishing UWIS, would prove prophetic given the future financial issues.⁶⁵

Investments from tenants were not sufficient to cover development costs. The public utility societies depended on small private investors which necessitated an effective programme of publicity. The women's housing organisations all made copious use of press advertisements and editorials in the women's columns to highlight the new schemes and court sympathetic investment. When attracting capital for LWH, the net was spread well beyond London to a countrywide audience, with campaigns running in nationals including the *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Telegraph* plus extending to *India*, the organ of Indian National Congress.⁶⁶ As well as extolling the soundness of the investment and previous successes of the London Housing Society, LWH advertisements appealed to provincial readers' social conscience, urging them to help tackle the 'urgent problem' of women's housing which 'No government would think it their duty to handle'.⁶⁷ WPH likewise appealed to the goodwill of 'men and women already comfortably housed' but placed greater emphasis on women's employment targeting 'employers who benefit by women's work' and 'all who are interested in the careers of women workers'.⁶⁸ General publicity campaigns ran alongside more focused efforts towards like-minded women in women's organisations and interest groups, both radical and moderate. Browning's ideas on housing reform were disseminated through articles in such feminist publications as the *Woman's Leader*, *The Vote* and *Time and Tide*. An experienced speaker, she also promoted WPH through a series of talks delivered at venues including the Women's Freedom League headquarters in High Holborn and its radical offshoots, the Minerva Café and Club.⁶⁹ Gordon, a similarly convincing writer and orator, was able to promote the UWHA

⁶³ From Mar to Dec 1925: LMA, A/FWA/C/D/294/001 - UWHA First Annual Report & Balance Sheet, 31 Dec 1925.

⁶⁴ 'Women's Homes Scheme', *Truth*, 22 Apr 1925, pp.724-5.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 29 Apr 1925, p.16.

⁶⁶ For example, 'A Beneficial 6 per Cent Investment', *Daily Mirror*, 15 Feb 1915, p.11 ; 'Sound and Beneficial Investment', *Daily Telegraph*, 12 Jan 1923, p.6; 'How Can We All Help Our Country?', *India*, 11 Sep 1914, p.108.

⁶⁷ 'A Social Need: Praiseworthy Enterprise', *Devon and Exeter Gazette*, 10 Sep 1926, p.12.

⁶⁸ LMA, LMA/4776/F/01/005 - WPH Supplementary Prospectus 1924.

⁶⁹ 'Forthcoming Events. W.F.L.', *The Vote*, 20 May 1921. The Women's Freedom League agitated for full suffrage throughout the 1920s.

through their magazine *Feminine Life*, appealing directly to a large and captive audience of UWIS women subscribers.

There was never a shortage of potential women tenants for the women's schemes between the wars. As Davis and his associates stressed, LWH's 'unique' schemes were 'catering for a most deserving class of people, for whom nothing is being done whatsoever...we are absolutely overwhelmed with most distressing applications from people craving for accommodation'.⁷⁰ The demand was just as strong for adapted flats, WPH reporting that, 'if a house could be purchased every week there would be applicants enough to fill it'.⁷¹ Responses to this unabating pressure to create more flats varied starkly between the various organisations. Coming perilously close to liquidation in their first year, expansion of the WPH venture in this period was cautious and prudent. WPH accrued properties on a house-by-house basis according to investor capital, with pledges of tenant investment held in abeyance. Even during William Norman's investment-focused tenure as chair in the 1930s, speculative activity was confined to the safety of gilt-edged securities. WPH's remarkable resilience during the difficult Depression years was assisted by timely and decisive action to halt the acquisition of further properties. Though the pace of growth was relatively slow, the method was sustainable resulting in a steady uplift from 50 flats in 1923 to 250 by 1928 and 550 by the Second World War. However, limitations on up-scaling the business through incremental townhouse conversions, as well as a reliance on prosperous women investors, left WPH poorly-equipped to meet the insatiable demand for flats.

With the financial and practical resources to construct larger, denser blocks of flats, the Davis output for LWH was more substantial at around 1400 women's flats.⁷² UWHA's achievement of around 1000 flats in both new and converted schemes within three years was even more impressive.⁷³ Substantial capital accrued from prospective tenants' share purchases and loan stock investments, which enabled the organisation to build and raise substantial further mortgage capital. Though the UWHA was a public utility society, it was managed as an aggressive commercial concern, operating as part of a complex, financially interdependent web of 'United' companies, which included the United Citizens Homes Association and the Second United Women's Homes Association. In his commitment to providing large numbers of affordable flats without recourse to philanthropic capital, Gordon began to speculate on behalf of the organisation through the United Citizens Investment Trust; an ill-advised, arguably reckless strategy which left the organisation financially exposed when the Depression hit.⁷⁴ In 1932 the UWHA was forced into receivership, the scale of debt was revealed, and the number of flats was shown as being woefully inadequate to

⁷⁰ TNA, HLG49/666 - Correspondence: PUHS to London Housing Board, 16 Jun 1920.

⁷¹ LMA, LMA/4776/A/03/002 - WPH Annual Report 1925.

⁷² Based on approx. 120 flats at Abbey Road Mansions, 500 at the St John's Wood complex and 762 at the Holly Lodge Estate.

⁷³

⁷⁴ LMA, A/FWA/C/D/294/001 - Charity Organisation Society case file 30515: United Women's Insurance Society and United Women's Homes Association.

satisfy the '4000 disillusioned members', around 2800 of whom held qualifying shares but still awaited a flat (Fig. 26 and 27).⁷⁵

Branching out nationally was another potential route to expansion. Unlike LWH and WPH whose operations remained almost exclusively London-centric, UWHA had from its inception attempted to cater to single women workers in metropolitan and provincial locations. Despite opportunities to expand, WPH were more circumspect if not insular in outlook. When approached by the Mayfield Society, a fledgling Birmingham-based public utility society attempting to supply women's housing on a similar basis, Etheldred Browning was despatched to offer advice, but requests to become a new WPH branch were vetoed.⁷⁶ More modest in their ambitions and with a large list of tenants eagerly waiting to invest, WPH were vulnerable to those keen to usurp their autonomy in the women's housing arena. During WPH's existential crisis of 1920-21, Abraham Davis' brother and CLBC co-founder Nathaniel and wife Gertrude offered to finance the foundering first project, with the proviso that WPH abandon converted flats and develop in single rooms instead.⁷⁷ Mr and Mrs Davis joined the WPH committee and purchased shares, but once Ray Strachey secured alternative investment their involvement was short-lived.⁷⁸

Expansion by subsuming rival organisations was also integral to Alban Gordon's business practices. Shortly after founding the UWHA, Gordon launched two take-over bids of established women's housing providers. In October 1926, he proposed a merger between WPH and UWHA to reduce administrative overheads and streamline efficiency. If the committee agreed, the UWHA would appoint new directors, WPH investments be diverted into UWHA shares and loan stock, moves he claimed, '...would greatly enhance the security of present stockholders'.⁷⁹ It was further suggested that WPH might '...gradually merge its identity entirely in the United Women's Homes Association and ultimately a complete amalgamation be effected'.⁸⁰ Whilst Lady Shelley-Rolls seemed swayed, Lady Rhondda and Helen Archdale's motion to reject the offer was unanimously carried and the conclusion reached that they 'could not consider that amalgamation between the two societies would be in the best interests of WPH Ltd'.⁸¹ In the same month *Truth* magazine reported that the UWHA had 'lately attempted to swallow up the Ladies' Dwelling Co. Limited' (LDC), which had operated successfully since 1889.⁸² The proposal involved the LDC purchasing and developing a site acquired by the UWHA at Westminster (where the UWHA would

⁷⁵ '4000 Lonely Women Duped', *John Bull*, 19 Mar 1933.

⁷⁶ LMA, LMA/4776/A/01/005 - WPH Minutes, Feb to Dec 1931.

⁷⁷ LMA, LMA/4776/A/01/001 - WPH Minutes, May to July 1921.

⁷⁸ Mrs Davis and associate Miss Halford resigned following the decision that the Davis and WPH schemes would remain separate.

⁷⁹ LMA, LMA/4776/A/06/002 - 'Amalgamation between UWHA with WPH', A.G. Gordon to WPH, Oct 1926.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* Exclamation marks added to the proposal paperwork signify the indignation felt by some WPH committee members.

⁸¹ LMA, LMA/4776/A/06/002 - Correspondence: Lady Shelley-Rolls to Etheldred Browning, 30 Oct 1926; LMA/4776/A/01/003 - WPH minutes, 02 Nov 1926; LMA/4776/A/01/003 - WPH Special Committee meeting, 09 Mar 1927.

⁸² 'Women's Homes and Ladies' Dwellings', *Truth*, 02 Mar 1927; response from Gordon, 09 Mar 1927; response from the LDC, 16 Mar 1927.

later build Murray House: see Chapter 7). Following the LDC board's dismissal of the proposal, Gordon purportedly contacted shareholders directly offering to buy shares, which if sufficient enough would allow them to take control:

the procedure might not perhaps occasion much comment in the business world. It seems, however, rather surprising in the case of an uncommercial organisation of a quasi-philanthropic character, and the incident has excited a good deal of resentment among those interested in the work and management of the Ladies' Dwelling Co.⁸³

Whilst joining forces might have proved beneficial, such actions also constituted thinly veiled criticisms of the business acumen of women-led housing bodies. Lack of experience in both business and housing delivery was certainly felt to be an issue, even amongst WPH's own ranks. When the WPH financial crisis worsened in early 1921, some members affirmed their confidence in the society, whilst others resigned from the executive, including founding members Sydney Bushell and Edith Charlesworth who 'did not consider the Committee sufficiently business-like or the members experienced in property management.'⁸⁴ Charlesworth had recently written on housing management in *The Woman's Leader*, championing professionalisation and the combining of traditional, technical qualifications in surveying and estates management with female 'social spirit'.⁸⁵ The committee also turned to Ministry-insider Richard Reiss for assistance, appointing him as special advisor.

However, WPH were by no means alone in this regard, as would be testified by the 'hopeless financial muddle' which eventually ensued at the UWHA, despite an executive possessing considerable organising expertise. After the near financial collapse of the organisation in 1932, *Truth* magazine labelled Gordon, Lady Emmott and their directorate as 'well-meaning promoters with more philanthropic zeal than business knowledge'.⁸⁶ In contrast, by 1931 press editorials were praising the professionalism of the women-led WPH, which shattered the 'masculine inspired-illusion' that women were unable to 'manage intricate financial business entirely by themselves'.⁸⁷ Furthermore, experience and success in property development had not shielded Davis from narrowly avoiding financial disaster in the 1890s. Confusion surrounding the administration of the 1919 Housing Act legislation was in fact a much wider issue, shared by public utility societies and civil servants alike. Government memoranda was littered with queries on multiple counts regarding the funding eligibility of particular scheme types or classes of worker.⁸⁸ Indeed, Ministry-led housing schemes were themselves far from infallible and quickly ran into difficulties. Though less well-

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ LMA, LMA/4776/A/01/001 - WPH Minutes, 10 Jan 1921, 07 Mar 1921 and 16 Mar 1921.

⁸⁵ E. A. Charlesworth, 'Property Management as a Career for Women', *Woman's Leader*, 08 Oct 1920, p.780.

⁸⁶ 'Benevolence and Business', *Truth*, 01 Mar 1933.

⁸⁷ 'Women Can Manage Alone', *Market Harborough Advertiser and Midland Mail*, 30 Oct 1931, p.3

⁸⁸ TNA, HLG49/695 - Public Utility Society Records for WPH: London Housing Board and Ministry of Health memoranda.

known than the purpose-built 'Homes for Heroes', in August 1919, Minister of Health Christopher Addison announced a government-sponsored programme to convert empty London houses into flats. Although initially envisaged as a national initiative, its scope was confined to such Metropolitan Boroughs as Islington, with a goal to convert 400 houses by the end of 1920. As Tanis Hinchcliffe has demonstrated, the initiative's limited success – 157 houses converted into 512 flats at double the projected cost – was largely due to the 'muddled' process through various tiers of government, rather than the concept of adaptation.⁸⁹

How far might such variations in business practice and roles be attributed to gender? Davis and Gordon conformed to male cultural conventions surrounding men's public sphere as managing directors. The perceptions of the WPH executive were arguably still rooted in women's philanthropic tradition and 'natural' propensity for altruism. Before the War, housing management for women, much like teaching and nursing, was framed as 'a vocation, to be entered upon in a spirit of philanthropy'.⁹⁰ Moreover, notions of women's philanthropic endeavour were evolving during the inter-war decades. As Eve Colpus argued, the inter-war period was marked by a 'newly calibrated ideal of service' focusing on the 'mutability of self-fulfilment and community development'.⁹¹ Etheldred Browning frequently championed the societal benefits of women's self-fulfilment. Speaking at a debate on women and duty 'each of them was working selfishly for her own good, to bring out the "real woman", which was the greatest blessing that could be conferred on humanity'.⁹² The business practices of the WPH committee also chime with what Colpus has identified as an emphasis on 'female solidarity and collaborative principles'.⁹³

In earlier women's housing initiatives, male directors and supporters generally performed the public speaking at opening ceremonies, whilst the women protagonists remained silent in the shadows. At Sloane Gardens House, for instance, it was General Feilding rather than Lady Mary who addressed the assembled crowd.⁹⁴ The cultural expectation for women to exhibit modesty and self-effacing anonymity when commissioning aspects of the built environment had a long legacy.⁹⁵ Though post-1918 such gender norms were increasingly being contested by women housing reformers vocalising ideas conspicuously in the press, at public events and in radio broadcasts, cultural conventions were arguably perpetuated in WPH's choice of conversion rather than new-build. Adaptative re-use, a more modest spatial and visual intervention to the built landscape, was

⁸⁹ See Tanis Hinchcliffe, "'This Rather Foolish Piece of Panic Administration': The Government's Flat Conversion Programme in London 1919', *London Journal*, 19 (1994), 168-182.

⁹⁰ E. A. Charlesworth, 'Property Management as a Career for Women', *Woman's Leader*, 08 Oct 1920, p.780.

⁹¹ Eve Colpus, 'Women, Service and Self-Actualization in Inter-War Britain', *Past & Present*, 238 (2018), 197-232.

⁹² 'Suffrage Societies Meeting', *Irish Independent*, 05 Nov 1913, p.6.

⁹³ Eve Colpus, *Female Philanthropy in the Interwar World*, (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018), Introduction

⁹⁴ *Women's Penny Paper*, 02 Mar 1889, p.3

⁹⁵ Renaissance advice literature for women patrons: '...repair a ruined church or hospital that is declining through want of funds rather than building a new one, for thereby you will receive the greatest prize in heaven because you sought the least fame in this world.': Giovanni Dominici, *Regola del Governo di Cura Familiae*, 1416, (ed. by D Salvi, Florence 1860), pp.131-2.

routinely deployed in women-led housing schemes in England and further afield.⁹⁶ Female anonymity was also observed in other ways; the financial support of women such as Mary Cunliffe anonymised in annual reports and the schemes not commemorated in name.⁹⁷ However, the financial assistance of Mary Cunliffe and others was not an act of benefaction; mortgages acquired by these investors on WPH's behalf were repaid in full, and loan stocks accrued interest not far short of market rates.

Housing Policy and Reconstruction

The more favourable terms offered to public utility societies under the 1919 Housing Act and subsequent legislation was a primary motivating factor for all providers. Like other post-First World War family housing initiatives, the women's housing ventures depended on obtaining public loans and subsidies. However, gaining approval through the Ministry of Health, London Housing Board and LCC Architects' Department was a bureaucratic process, more fruitful in some cases than others.

LWH's path was initially relatively smooth, largely due to Abraham Davis applying in the earliest stages of the nascent National Housing Scheme, when the post-1918 economy was booming and reconstruction still riding on a wave of optimism. The LWH/PUHS initiative was noted by officials as being 'the first instance under the present Government scheme of a Public Utility Society aiming at housing women workers...'.⁹⁸ Davis' reputation also went before him, with Ministry inspectors impressed by his track record: 'from what I saw of his other schemes I formed the opinion that any society in which he took part would have very competent administration'.⁹⁹ However, lacking the assets and track record of a speculator like Davis, and with credit avenues closed to women, accessing loan capital for WPH was more problematic. With government assistance not as forthcoming as hoped, the earliest WPH houses relied on loans advanced by wealthy women supporters and on substantial tenant investments to cover the conversion costs (see Chapter 6).¹⁰⁰ As custodians of the public purse with a duty to prevent misappropriation of rapidly dwindling state funds, government officials became increasingly concerned over the working class credentials of the women's schemes. Although Browning assured the London Housing Board that their flats would accommodate a range of working women applicants, '...secretaries, journalists, clerks, actresses, nurses, inspectors, students, teachers, business women; older women

⁹⁶ For example, women social reformers in Scotland and North America. See Elizabeth Darling, 'Womanliness in the Slums: A Free Kindergarten in Early Twentieth-Century Edinburgh', *Gender & History*, 29 (2017), 359-386; Gutman, *A City for Children*.

⁹⁷ LMA, LMA/4776/A/03/001 - WPH Annual Report 1921. Individuals were commemorated by WPH post-1970s, for example at Archdale Court and Norman Court.

⁹⁸ TNA, HLG 49/664 - Minute B, Local Government Board, 16 Jul 1919.

⁹⁹ TNA, HLG 49/662 - E. B. Betham, Minutes, 26 Jul 1919.

¹⁰⁰ Bank of England Inflation Calculator: <https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/monetary-policy/inflation/inflation-calculator> [accessed Dec 2021].

of small, fixed incomes no longer able to work, and voluntary workers', the merits of the WPH schemes were similarly questioned:

I think we must be wary of encouraging these schemes. Whilst it is true that we admit that working classes may include some element of the 'black-coated' (in this case 'black-frocked') members of the community, I think we have in mind the family man on a small income rather than bachelors and spinsters ...who can afford to live without state subsidy.¹⁰¹

With families at the forefront of national housing policy, there was scant recognition of the housing needs of single people, nor the distinctive financial circumstances faced by self-supporting single women, with erratic working patterns and regular periods of unemployment, and earnings often a third that of their male counterparts. In these circumstances Davis fell foul, with further subsidies for an extension to the first scheme far less forthcoming. Contend with the anger of returning servicemen promised a 'Homes for Heroes' programme. In Aug 1921, a severely disabled ex-officer, who had been searching for a small flat since being discharged two and a half years previously, complained to the Ministry after being told that, with a few exceptions, the flats were 'for the benefit of working gentlewomen in reduced circumstances'.¹⁰²

WPH's treatment by the LHB was somewhat different. Despite the endorsement of Richard Reiss, the benefits of adaptive re-use as a means to create new flats held little sway. Conversions were an ill-fit with familiar housing delivery models based upon the development of urban land. Furthermore, although the LHB were willing to assist WPH in assessing potential properties, 'they bring the proposal perilously close to the provision of a hostel...accentuated by the fact that the flats are to be restricted to single professional women...'.¹⁰³ Moreover, some civil servants called into doubt the women's political motives. The LHB's awareness of the close involvement of ardent women's campaigners in the housing organisation, including militant suffragettes Helen Archdale and Lady Rhondda, prompted further fears: 'there is a chance that this particular proposition may develop into a female movement and we must endeavour to draw in our financial commitment in such cases'.¹⁰⁴

Founded later in 1925, the UWHA navigated new systems of housing policy and legislation in respect of state funding introduced by subsequent Ministries of Health – the Conservative's Chamberlain Housing Act of 1923 and Labour's Wheatley Housing Act of 1924 – which reduced the status of public utility societies, placed a renewed emphasis on the private sector and calculated the housing subsidies on a per house basis. With the UWHA being so closely affiliated to the United Women's Insurance Society, with former origins serving the social welfare of domestic servants, the thorny question of whether their schemes truly catered to the working classes or not never arose. In reality, the tenant profile in terms of women's occupations was not altogether that different

¹⁰¹ TNA, HLG49/695 - Memoranda, Ministry of Health and LHB, Mar 1921.

¹⁰² TNA, HLG49/663 - Correspondence: Lionel Flavel to Ministry Director of Building Materials and Supply, 12 Aug 1921.

¹⁰³ TNA, HLG49/695 - LHB Memoranda, 31 Dec 1920.

¹⁰⁴ TNA, HLG49/695 - Memoranda, Ministry of Health and LHB, Mar 1921.

from either the LWH or WPH; any lines which might be drawn between lower-middle and middle-class women were blurred in most schemes.

Conclusion

Much of the motivation behind the women's schemes constituted a continuation of the pre-war imperatives of the women's movement. Many of the key protagonists were active in women's rights campaigning before and after the War. Other individuals were leading exponents of the garden city movement and the emerging field of town planning. For them, improved housing was thus the concrete means to advance women's citizenship and employment, and a central component of post-1918 reconstruction. A significant contingent were also politically active, serving as local councillors and standing at successive parliamentary elections. Limited success in central government allowed their energies to be channelled into women's housing and lobbying for housing reforms. Though lacking a seat in the Commons, WPH worked closely with the first generation of incumbent female MPs, although party colours and affiliation bore little bearing on their work. Efforts were firmly rooted in an agenda based upon attaining women's rights, regardless of political slant. Likewise, Davis' participation in local government revolved around his expertise in housing delivery, rather than promoting a specific party line. His involvement was driven by a desire for affordable, improved housing and his faith in the private sector's ability to supply it. In contrast, Gordon's political activities in the Council chamber were more partisan, grounded in socialism and his commitment to the Labour Party. Such principles were reflected in his collective approach to funding UWHA housing, but are difficult to reconcile with other business practices, notably his inclination towards stock market speculation. However, high-yield, high-risk investment was felt essential to raise sufficient capital. There were tangible differences in business practice concerning management strategies and the interpretation of executive roles. The distinctly corporate stance of the men driving the ventures and the more incremental, cautious approach of the women, was partly moulded by experience of voluntary or business practice as well as more personal qualities. However this also arguably conformed to prevailing gender expectations in this 'public' sphere of activity.

Chapter 5

Design Practices, Agency and Authorship

Having explored the characteristics of and impetus behind the three inter-war housing providers currently under discussion, this chapter focuses on their design practices. How were the women's schemes commissioned, designed and constructed? What were the impacts, if any, of inter-war architectural modernism and how was this manifested in their approaches to design? This will be explored by interrogating the design process itself and considering how this compared across the various initiatives and with the approaches of their Victorian and Edwardian forebears. It also considers the effect of related developments, notably the professionalisation of architectural practice which gained pace during this period.

Professional and Non-Professional Design

Inter-war design practice benefitted from several decades of experience in the field of women's housing. The commissioning of leading architects like Brydon and Balfour & Turner, sympathetic to the women's cause, was of great magnitude in lending the pioneering enterprises respectability and social acceptance. Edwardian providers seeking denser, more innovative building types had consulted the emerging specialist Ayling. Those building for women workers in the aesthetically sensitive environs of the Hampstead Garden Suburb relied upon the expertise of Baillie Scott amongst others (see Chapter 2). Architectural production was, however, not solely attributable to professional architects. Conception, planning and delivery also constituted a concerted effort amongst those driving the ventures. Some, like Agnes and Rhoda Garrett, had undergone architectural tuition and were able to design specialist fittings into the buildings. However, even those lacking formal training such as Lady Mary Feilding and Louisa Hubbard, evidently possessed considerable technical know-how, with optimal lighting arrangements, access corridor dimensions and sanitary drainage routes becoming popular topics of debate in their journals.¹

The dominant focus on the architect (usually male) in twentieth-century architectural production has been enriched in recent decades by wider recognition of the contribution made by builders, engineers, landscape architects and interior designers.² With women historically excluded from such fields, their impact as amateur designers and self-trained practitioners or in

¹ See discussions in 'A Castle in the Air', *Work and Leisure*, 12(9), 1887, pp.231-37.

² Beatriz Colomina, 'Collaborations: The Private Life of Modern Architecture', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 58 (1999), 462-471; Hilde Heynen, 'Genius, Gender and Architecture: The Star System as Exemplified in the Pritzker Prize', *Architectural Theory Review*, 17 (2012), 331-345.

underacknowledged roles in housing consultancy or management, has also been brought to the fore.³ These more inclusive approaches, which view the shaping of the built environment as a collaborative endeavour and perceive the nuanced nature of agency and authorship, is apposite in analysing design practices in women's housing in the inter. The instructing of male architects by knowledgeable clients would remain the core mechanism for supplying housing for women in the inter-war period. However, developments such as the opening of architectural training to female students and the growing number of professionally certified women architects and the widening base of architecturally-informed clients exposed to modern design in Continental Europe, would expand the sources of agency and the potential 'authors' of the women's housing schemes, as would the arrival of experienced speculative builders in the field for the first time.

The 'Architect-Builder'

The architectural design expertise of Lady Workers' Homes (LWH) founder Abraham Davis was rooted in the construction of speculative housing for the working classes in London's East End; chiefly terraced houses in two or three storeys and blocks of artisan flats with integral workshop space. Like most speculative building partnerships or sole traders, he operated with a free hand, largely unregulated other than adhering to a few rudimentary structural and sanitary requirements, and built to his own tried and tested prototypes, taking design cues from the prevailing architectural forms of the locality.⁴ It is unclear whether he received any formal training in draughtsmanship, although younger brothers Nathaniel and Ralph, first directors in the Central London Building Company (CLBC) and LWH respectively, were both surveyors. Much like other speculators, Davis identified himself variously as 'architect', 'contractor' or 'builder', self-trained designers being fully at liberty to do so. Though intensely debated amongst the architectural bodies for several decades, the formal process of statutory registration with the Architects Registration Council (ARCUK) was not implemented until 1931.

Designing in the absence of architects was standard practice, particularly in the sphere of working-class housing, and was not just confined to smaller enterprises. Although large housing bodies such as the Peabody Trust procured the services of long-term, dedicated architects (Henry Astley Darbishire (1839-1908) throughout the 1860s and 1870s; and Victor Wilkins (1878-1972) from 1910 to 1947), other major providers like Sydney Waterlow's Improved Industrial Dwellings Company considered the appointment of professional architects an unnecessary expenditure. Instead, they entrusted builder Mathew Allen to streamline the design and construction process by replicating near-identical blocks across their estates.⁵ Likewise, although the formation of the LCC architect's department saw projects designed by in-house professionals, much public housing was built to standardised plans, tweaked according to the site by Borough surveyors and engineers

³ See for example Darling and Whitworth, *Women and the Making of Built Space in England*.

⁴ Watson, 'Rebuilding London', pp.62-84.

⁵ Burnett, *A Social History of Housing*, pp.25-7.

rather than architects.⁶ In the inter-war period the situation shifted with the appointment of permanent architects to the Ministry of Health to formulate and disseminate national standard designs to the local authorities. Likewise, speculators of mass private housing increasingly turned to professional architects to assist them in more sophisticated and technically proficient designs.⁷

The Davis brothers built for investment thus design quality became a matter of familial pride. Regularly collaborating, financially and aesthetically, an evolving signature style of quality red brickwork, prominent window keystones and mansard roofs appears to have originated in the partnership of Nathaniel and Ralph.⁸ Their adoption of higher material and stylistic specifications also marked a desire to match raised architectural standards being pursued by the larger model dwelling companies and LCC at high profile developments like the Boundary Estate in the 1890s. At 'Davis Mansions', New Goulston Street, Whitechapel (1894-5), Abraham's first major solo project of 148 flats with ground floor shops and basement workshops, the pursuit for heightened aesthetic appeal was manifested in the 'Queen Anne details, pedimented shop fronts, high-level arcading and a modest corner tourelle.'⁹ This 'steady advance from grimy utility towards a more comfortable domestic style', was also evident at the Thrawl Street, Spitalfields flats (1895-7), where each of the six dwelling blocks was named after his wife and children, in a similar fashion to the nearby Rothschild Buildings.¹⁰

Little remains of Abraham Davis' early built legacy, with most examples demolished. The blocks of flats subsequently constructed under the auspices of the London Housing Society in St Pancras from 1909 to 1914 have fared better. Few plans survive, but earlier buildings in a simplified, utilitarian classical were likely self-authored.¹¹ Davis had occasionally used architects for more complex East-End developments, but the growth in the portfolio required more permanent assistance to satisfy increasingly stringent building regulations and overcome undesirable 'institutional' effects created by repetitive fenestration and monolithic wall expanses. A.C. Hendrey Watkin, a licentiate member of the RIBA who had previously designed villas in Hampstead for his brother Maurice, became CLBC staff architect in 1912.¹² The design for a more architecturally ambitious block, Queen Alexandra Mansions, Judd Street (1912), was conceived by Watkin in consultation with William Gillbee Scott (1857-1930), a RIBA fellow with an established portfolio in

⁶ Susan Beattie, *A Revolution in London Housing : L.C.C. Housing Architects & Their Work 1893-1914*, (London: Greater London Council Architectural Press, 1980).; Burnett, *A Social History of Housing*, p.227.

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Watson, 'Rebuilding London', pp.66-70.

⁹ Survey of London, 'The Goulston Street Improvement', blog post 2019, available at <www.surveyoflondon.org> [accessed 24 Feb 2022].

¹⁰ Helena, Ruth, Irene, Godfrey, Josephine and Winifred Houses. See Sheppard (ed.), *Survey of London: Volume 27, Spitalfields and Mile End New Town.*, pp.245-251; White, *Life in an East End Tenement*, p.29.

¹¹ Watson, 'Rebuilding London', pp.72-3.

¹² Ibid; Licentiate membership (opened up in 1910-1912 and 1925) allowed practising architects to gain professional recognition in the absence of formal qualifications: Antonia Brodie, *Directory of British Architects 1834-1914, Volume 1: A-K*, (London: Continuum, 2001)., Introduction.

church and public architecture.¹³ This taller, seven to eight-storey red-brick perimeter block, with a complex plan of six separate staircases and raised walkways linking the blocks diagonally across the inner courtyard, was also made possible by Davis' pioneering use of passenger lifts, an extravagant feature in flats for wage-earners at this time (Fig. 28).¹⁴ The street-facing façades of the flats, and slightly later Jessel House (1914) – with refined ornamental brickwork, heavy cornice and herringbone banding – were virtually indistinguishable from higher class mansion flats and evidently targeted more affluent professionals. The artist Paul Nash (1889-1946) occupied flat 176 at Queen Alexandra Mansions from 1914 to 1936.¹⁵

Yet despite Watkin's arrival, authorship of most of the St Pancras flats remained obscure or ambiguous, with Davis' signature appearing on some of the drawings. Similarly, whilst further flat-building campaigns at St John's Wood and Maida Vale from 1914 onwards in an unequivocal mansion-block format were designed by Watkin, extant architectural drawings for the LWH women's schemes also dating to this period, are either unsigned or nominally attributed to the CLBC.¹⁶ The first set of drawings submitted for a LWH block at Grove End Road, St Johns Wood (which would become Addison House, see Chapter 7) suggest amateur rather than professional draughtsmanship, possibly in Davis' own hand (Fig. 53) Promotional literature took pride in its corporate design autonomy, stating that 'the Society is its own architect...'¹⁷ Given Davis' experience, it is likely that he collaborated closely with his in-house team. Further technical innovations, which Davis incorporated into the plans for LWH flat schemes, appeared more secure in origin. The 'Davis Patent System' of clustered service points, where centrally cooked meals were delivered to individual floors or specific tenants, was devised for Service Flats Limited, another Davis flat-building company founded in 1918.¹⁸ It tapped into the catered flat principles pioneered at Hankey's Queen Anne's Mansions in the 1870s, ideas which would in turn be developed by Wells Coates amongst others in service flats of the 1930s.

Homes Designed by Women for Women

As was shown in Chapter 2, though few were formally trained, women had, since at least the early-nineteenth century, delivered a variety of housing solutions, many catering for other women. The years immediately following the armistice witnessed some significant shifts in women's input to the design of the built environment, in both professional and non-professional capacities. The

¹³ Gillbee Scott was honorary secretary of the RIBA London committee campaigning for the statutory registration of architects: W. Gillbee Scott, 'The Registration of Architects', *Journal of the Institute of Architects of New South Wales*, 1(3), 01 July 1904, pp.124-5.

¹⁴ Watson, 'Rebuilding London', p.72-3.

¹⁵ English Heritage, Blue Plaque 1991: <<https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/blue-plaques/paul-nash/>>,[accessed 25 Feb 2022].

¹⁶ For example, Grove End House, LMA, GLC/ AR/BR/17 /39772; Rodney Court, LMA, GLC/ AR/BR/23/41567; 'Flats for Lady Workers' (later Addison House), LMA, GLC/AR/BR/17/044766/02.

¹⁷ 'Real Homes for Women Workers', London Housing Society pamphlet: Watson, 'Rebuilding London', p.82.

¹⁸ Ibid. Patent No.120,746.

admission of women into prestigious architectural schools like the Architectural Association (AA), and the wider awarding of bachelors' degree honours in architecture, qualified more women to sit the RIBA examinations, a pre-requisite for associate membership. Participation in housing reform committees, notably the Women's Housing Sub-committee to the Ministry of Reconstruction Advisory Council and the women's section of the GCTPA, provided another significant public-facing channel. Though arguably frustrated in their efforts and denied their due influence in public programmes, the domestic sphere offered women a fruitful and culturally acceptable outlet for their design talents.¹⁹ The ongoing housing issue for self-supporting female workers was an opportunity for women in architectural and related occupations to become primary agents of change in the built environment.

In mobilising women as active citizens, Women's Pioneer Housing's (WPH) founder Etheldred Browning also urged them to adopt a self-build mentality:

No difficulties should deter women from helping practically to solve the housing question. By building themselves, as it were, and not waiting for others to move and build for them, women will be taking one more step towards their rightful place in the human economy.²⁰

Leading by example in the field of building and renovation, early WPH member Annabel Dott likewise championed women's practical interventions into the built environment, encouraging them to take-up the building trade, it being 'no harder than learning a new language or the violin'.²¹ For WPH, the complexities involved in converting larger townhouses into flats warranted the expertise of professional architects, not least to satisfy the stipulations of the LCC architects department and funding bodies. Wishing to hedge their bets, the committee decided early on that 'two houses be proposed by two different architects'.²² Drawings for the first project at 67 Holland Park Avenue, were draughted by Charles Murray Hennell (1883-1929) of Hennell and James, a natural choice given their garden city movement connections and recent design work for Labour-Saving Houses Limited, a Welwyn Garden City public utility society, for which Dorothy Peel served as board member.²³ Sidney Burgoyne Kitchener Caulfield (1877-1964) prepared the second scheme at 28 Philbeach Gardens, an Arts and Crafts architect who, just before the War, had designed several houses at Hampstead Garden Suburb.²⁴ After somewhat sullyng their relationship with Murray Hennell during WPH's early financial crisis, plans for the next five houses were shared between

¹⁹ McFarlane, 'Homes Fit for Heroines'.

²⁰ Etheldred Browning, 'Women's Pioneer Housing Society, Ltd.', *The Vote*, 15 Oct 1920, p.230.

²¹ 'The Work of a Woman Builder', *Woman's Leader*, 16 Jul 1920, p.540.

²² LMA, LMA/4776/A/01/001 - WPH Minutes, 12 Nov 1920.

²³ C. H. (Charles Holloway) James (1893-1953) was Barry Parker's assistant at Letchworth where future partner Charles Hennell was surveyor. James' brother William was director at Welwyn Garden City. See Nick Chapple, 'C.H. James: Neo-Georgian – from the Small House to the Town Hall', in *Neo-Georgian Architecture* ed. by Holder and McKellar, pp. 94-107; Town & Country Planning Association archive (hereafter TCPA), 'Labour-Saving Houses', *Garden Cities and Town Planning Magazine*, 10, Oct-Nov 1920, pp.220-21 (available at www.tcpa.org.uk).

²⁴ Caulfield was head of the Central School of Arts and Crafts at the turn of the century.

Caulfield and another Arts and Crafts specialist Walter Cave (1863-1939).²⁵ Sympathetic to women's progress in the architectural profession, Ethel Charles the first woman RIBA associate, had joined Cave's practice after training with George & Peto.²⁶ However, consistent with their overarching policy of supporting pioneering professionals, and desire for homes designed by women for women, the WPH committee had, from its inception, intended to procure the services of a female architect as soon as the first women cohorts had qualified.

In 1921 the possibility of interviewing architect-in-training 'Miss Ryle' who was 'studying architecture and wishing to work as soon as qualified', was mooted at the fortnightly committee meeting.²⁷ Winifred Maddock (née Ryle) (1887-1987) would become one of the first four women to qualify through the AA.²⁸ The issue was addressed again in October 1923, when the committee interviewed two newly-appointed RIBA associates. Miss Leverkus, subsequently selected over Miss Chambers, was promptly trialled with drawing up plans for the conversion of 67 Ladbrooke Grove (Fig. 39).²⁹

Gertrude Leverkus

Gertrude Wilhelmine Margaret Leverkus (1889-1989) would go on to design flat developments for WPH for over two decades, the initial phase in an architectural career now largely overlooked (Fig. 29).³⁰ In 1922, Leverkus, Winifred Ryle and Eleanor K.D. Hughes became the first women to be elected RIBA associates since Ethel Charles in 1898 and her sister Bessie in 1890. As she later recalled, 'when we three first solemnly shook hands with the President, Mr Waterhouse...he looked very surprised to see us'.³¹ In 1931, Leverkus and Gillian Harrison (née Cooke) would become the first women to achieve fellowship status. Born in Oldenburg, Germany, she had emigrated with her family to Manchester, subsequently spending time in both Spain and Germany for her father's business. They eventually settled in London in 1908, where Gertrude would later attend the pioneering Sydenham High School for Girls. The impetus for her career in architecture came through her father who encouraged his daughters to pursue independent careers.³² It was whilst attending Mr Ansell's course in Gothic architecture at the South Kensington Museum, that Annie Hall, practising architect and member of the Society of Architects, advised her to enrol for the bachelors' degree in Architecture at University College London (UCL), entry into the AA being

²⁵ Cave designed for Somerville College Oxford, and is known for the Burberry headquarters building, 18-22 Haymarket.

²⁶ Walker, 'Golden Age or False Dawn?'

²⁷ LMA, LMA/4776/A/01/001 - WPH Committee Minutes, 02 Feb 1921.

²⁸ The other AA-trained pioneers were Gillian Harrison, Ruth Lowy, and Irene Graves.

²⁹ Isabel Maud Chambers (1897-1941) had just completed training through the AA.

³⁰ Recent exceptions include Rebecca Spaven's research for the *Bartlett 100* history project and Robinson, *Ladies Can't Climb Ladders*.

³¹ Women's Library (hereafter WL), 7GLE - Gertrude Leverkus Papers: 'Auntie Gertrude's Life', 1976, p.18.

³² Leverkus Family Archive, Gertrude W. M. Leverkus, 'Something About My Parents', Jan 1971, pp.2-3. Older sister Elsie trained as an artist in London and Paris; younger sister Dorothy qualified as a doctor through the London School of Medicine for Women.

barred to women until 1917.³³ Hall would visit and lend support frequently throughout her training.³⁴

Studying as an undergraduate at UCL during the First World War from 1915 to 1918, was absorbing but lonely for Leverkus, with two fellow female students leaving early on, and the few men being transient, overseas students.³⁵ During vacations she followed the student-architect tradition of producing measured illustrations for UCL lecturer Arthur Stratton's latest book on architectural design.³⁶ Declining his offer to take her on after qualifying, '...somehow I realised this would not lead to much of a future', in 1919 Leverkus joined architect Horace Field's (1861-1948) Berners Street practice, 'the luckiest thing that ever happened to me', where she continued with evening classes at the Bartlett, including two additional years study to obtain her Town Planning certification in 1925.³⁷ The architectural profession was, at least at that time, only deemed suitable to those women 'willing to renounce many of the pleasures of life and to sacrifice all to her profession'.³⁸

Over the course of the 1920s, and now based at 5 Gower Street, she assumed increasing responsibility for Field's plus her own commissions. In 1926 she spoke at a Women's conference at Dusseldorf on 'Housing in Great Britain'. Alongside the forty flat developments for WPH, she designed and built a selection of large and more modest country houses, as well as two Leverkus family homes: 'Alondra' at 18 Gerard Road, Harrow-on-the-Hill (1924), and 'Hempden Field', Chinnor (1930), a combined health centre with upper-floor flat to accommodate sister Dorothy's G.P. practice (See Figs 30-35).³⁹ Connections made through the Fields and with WPH, brought her work in Aldeburgh for the Garrett-Anderson family, and at Helen Archdale and Lady Rhondda's country house, Stone Pitt Grange at Seal, Kent.⁴⁰

³³ Likely architect William Henry Ansell (18-19), President of the AA (1928) and of the RIBA (1940-43).

³⁴ WL, 7GLE: 'Auntie Gertrude's Life'. Annie Hall trained with Thomas Overbury, Cheltenham and qualified by exam in 1912 as the first woman member of the Society of Architects (the SA merged with the RIBA in 1925.) Hall established her practice at 5 Verulam Place, Grays Inn and published in the architectural press, for example, 'Women Architects', *Journal of the Society of Architects*, Apr 1912, 5, p.235.

³⁵ In the upper year groups Clare Nuheim left before completing her course to work in Sir Edwin Lutyens' office; Faith Brooke 'deserted architecture' to become a builder. Gertrude would be the only female candidate taking her finals with inter-engineers, 'in a roomful of about 50 men': WL, 7GLE: Leverkus, 'Auntie Gertrude's Life', pp.16-17.

³⁶ Leverkus was credited in Arthur Stratton, *Elements of Form and Design in Classic Architecture, Shown in Exterior & Interior Motives Collated from Fine Buildings of All Time on One Hundred Plates*, (London: B.T. Batsford; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925).

³⁷ WL, 7GLE: Leverkus, 'Auntie Gertrude's Life', pp.16-17. Field was famed for his neo-Baroque Lloyds banks, and designed country houses at Letchworth Garden City, Hampstead Garden Suburb and elsewhere: Timothy Brittain-Catlin, 'Horace Field and Lloyds Bank', *Architectural History*, 53 (2010).

³⁸ Annie Hall, 'Building the Right Kind of House', *Journal of the Society of Architects*, 13, Feb 1920, p.150.

³⁹ See for example 'House at Crooksbury Hill for A.G. Mardon Esq', *The Architect*, 12 May 1922. Sole projects included houses for Rev. Edwin Tongue, her former minister, at Pinner, Middlesex and for Gerry Asher and Justin Baker at Rickmansworth, Herts (both featured in *Country Life's* 1928 'The £1000 house') and rectories at Billericay and Wickham Bishops, Essex. A house at Tilford, Surrey was exhibited at the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition 1928: RA Exhibition catalogue, 1928, no.1272, p.79.

⁴⁰ Field had been consultant for Elizabeth Garrett-Anderson's New Hospital for Women, Euston Road, and his wife Mary Frances was part of Garrett's friendship circle. Gertrude Jekyll provided the garden design at Stone Pitts: The Kent

By the beginning of the 1930s, Leverkus' career was well-established, her independence marked by taking up a one-room WPH flat at 65, Harrington Gardens, where she would reside for the next thirty years. In 1930, with Field retired, she went into partnership with Eleanor Hughes at Gower Street, practising for the next decade until Eleanor was obliged to abandon her London career to care for a relative at Bournemouth.⁴¹ The same year, she co-founded the RIBA Women Members' Committee. Acting as secretary with Gillian Cooke as chair, she established a professional support network for women architects, investigating issues of concern, fielding enquiries and co-ordinating expositions of their work.⁴² During this time she also joined the RIBA Dramatic Society, performing in plays including Sir John Vanburgh's *Virtue in Danger*, adapted by Patrick Abercrombie with stage designs by A.E. Richardson, staged to commemorate the opening of RIBA's new headquarters building at Portland Place in 1934.⁴³ Higher status began to bring higher profile commissions, notably the new Outpatients' wing at pioneering doctor Annie McCall's Maternity Hospital in Clapham (1938-9).⁴⁴ But with war fast approaching, architectural work everywhere was winding down. Although for a time Leverkus was kept busy converting basements at four WPH properties to provide air-raid shelter for tenants, she was eventually forced to place her practice into hibernation, storing papers and office furniture in a WPH basement.

Though conversions largely ground to a halt, Leverkus formally retained her position as WPH architect throughout the Second World War, during which time she joined the Women's Voluntary Service.⁴⁵ She was appointed as centre organiser for the Borough of Holborn, co-ordinating evacuees from London, inspecting stately homes for requisition, and promoting the Food Advice Bureau and National Savings joint campaigns. Bored and disillusioned, in 1943 she 'accepted with alacrity' an appointment as housing architect to the Borough Architecture and Planning Office of West Ham, procured through Elsie Rogers, a RIBA Women Member's Committee colleague. There Leverkus designed two- and ten-year prefabricated houses for the badly war-damaged area north of the London docks, an experimental ground for Patrick Abercrombie's Greater London Plan. After five years of rewarding work she was forced to resign from her post during post-war 're-organisation', an event which left her physically shaken, and one which she would later recollect as an act of 'sex discrimination'.⁴⁶ Thereafter Leverkus returned to private practice at 5 Gower Street, but as an employee of the firm Norman and Dawbarn. There she designed and oversaw substantial projects including new housing estates at Crawley and Harlow New Towns, prestigious West-End headquarters for the Atomic Energy Authority, and the Finchley Road shopping centre and flats in

Compendium of Historic Parks and Gardens for Sevenoaks District: Stone Pitts Manor, 2011 available at: <<https://www.kentgardenstrust.org.uk/researchprojects/Sevenoaks/Stonepitts%20Manor.pdf>>[accessed Feb 2022].

⁴¹ Post Office Directories, London City 1930-1940.

⁴² British Architectural Library, Royal Institute of British Architects, RIBA/MEM - Women Members' Committee papers, 1931-1942.

⁴³ *Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects*, 08 Dec 1934, pp.201-2.

⁴⁴ Historic England, 'Former Annie McCall Hospital', Listing 1402041.

⁴⁵ Owing to West Ham commitments, Leverkus' role for WPH was assumed by Henry Colbeck FRIBA of Ley Colbeck & Partners: LMA, LMA/4776/A/03/004 - WPH Annual Report 1946.

⁴⁶ WL, 7GLE - 'Auntie Gertrude's Life', pp.46-9.

north London. By the time of her retirement in 1960 she was associate partner, had been elected President to the Provisional Club and co-opted as woman governor of the Brixton School of Building.

Much of Leverkus' experience was shared by other women, at home and abroad, forging architectural careers in the inter-war years. Eleanor Raymond (1887-1989), who in 1917 enrolled at the Cambridge (Massachusetts) School of Architecture at a time when the prestigious Harvard school was closed to women, would open her own office in Boston specialising in houses.⁴⁷ By the time Jane Drew (1911-1996) entered training in 1929, the London University was thought 'old-hat' and she was directed around the corner to the 'full of life' AA. There were still very few women students and after qualifying she found it impossible to get an interview let alone a position. Once employed, her status at practice was considered lowly, confined to the detailing of sash windows. Her career finally took-off in the growing arena of scientifically planned kitchens. Rosemary Stjernstedt's (née Smith) (1912-1998) training began in the same year at the Birmingham School of Art. In the 1930s women architects' earnings were meagre, sometimes half that of their male colleagues. When joining the LCC Housing Division, her salary was automatically docked by one third.⁴⁸

Design as Collaboration

For WPH, instructing a woman architect played an important part in developing women's architectural careers in the inter-war period. The steady and reliable stream of WPH flat schemes supplied Leverkus with the backbone against which to develop her practice. Formal recognition as WPH's dedicated architect also afforded her a status difficult to attain elsewhere. When it had emerged that Walter Cave had mistakenly been approached to prepare more WPH plans, committee member Vernon Ory 'pointed out that Miss Leverkus is the architect for the Society and therefore no other architect should be employed without the special sanction of the committee of management'.⁴⁹ But the benefits were reciprocal; working with a female architect also offered WPH a more collaborative, less opaque production method, where they retained full autonomy over the design of the flats. After it became apparent that Cave had, perhaps inadvertently, bypassed WPH during the design to building tender stage, the executive insisted that 'on future occasions the specifications should be sent into the committee by the architect'.⁵⁰ It is surely no coincidence that the overdue appointment of a women architect was raised at the next meeting. The content and tone of surviving correspondence, where sketch plans and ideas were exchanged between

⁴⁷ Doris Cole, *Eleanor Raymond, Architect*, (Philadelphia: Art Alliance Press ; London : Associated University Presses, 1981).

⁴⁸ Jane Drew and Rosemary Stjernstedt in conversation: 'Pioneers: Women Architects and Their Work', RIBA headquarters, Apr 1986 available at <<https://soundcloud.com/the-riba/sets/pioneers-women-architects-and>>, [accessed 08 Mar 2021].

⁴⁹ LMA, LMA/4776/A/01/002 - WPH Committee Minutes, 16 Sep 1924.

⁵⁰ LMA, LMA/4776/A/01/001 - WPH Committee Minutes, 02 Oct 1923.

Etheldred Browning and Leverkus, evidences a more fluid design relationship for the reconfiguration of space.⁵¹

The collaborative design process also benefitted from the broad skillset of the WPH executive committee, some of whom were self-trained architects, building contractors or experienced in conversion. Early founding member Annabel Dott had achieved notoriety in the press as ‘the first woman builder’ and praised for her ingenious fitted furniture and labour-saving ideas.⁵² Her building expertise was first honed at Cape Colony, South Africa where her husband, Rev. William Patrick Dott served the community and she directed the renovation of the dilapidated treaty house and church schools.⁵³ Returning to England in 1909, she embarked on ‘systematic self-training in the theory and practice of the trade’, studying technical publications and clerk of works examination papers.⁵⁴ This equipped her with the skills to design and erect a scheme of ten cottages at Goathland, North Yorkshire the following year, draughting the architectural plans and co-ordinating a thirty-eight-strong team of local tradesmen.⁵⁵ Dott frequently published on women’s careers in architecture and – at a time before statutory registration – was freely identified as ‘architect’ as well as builder.⁵⁶ Just prior to joining the WPH committee Dott had initiated her own women’s housing venture, acquiring the leasehold of a villa at 11 Lancaster Road, Norwood and adapting rooms for female tenants.⁵⁷ Owing to further building commitments, her time on the WPH executive was short-lived.⁵⁸ However, her practical know-how in assessing potential properties and in surmounting building related issues, was mobilised in the early stages of the fledgling housing society.

Ray Strachey’s interest in housing also went considerably further than as a vehicle to facilitate women’s employment. Just prior to becoming WPH chair and one-time financial saviour, she had established a housing company specialising in pisé de terre construction.⁵⁹ Rammed Earth Houses Limited, co-founded in 1920 with her civil engineer brother-in-law, Ralph Strachey, tapped into the revival of earth building techniques which had taken on renewed significance with immediate post-1918 material and skill shortages. Hailed as an official solution to the crisis in rural housing, it was promoted by Ralph and husband Oliver’s cousin John St Loe Strachey, editor of *The Spectator*, who in the decade before the War had orchestrated a flurry of experimental cottage

⁵¹ LMA, LMA/4776/D/05/006 - Gertrude Leverkus, Browning House, caretaker flat extension, elevations and floorplan, n.d.

⁵² ‘Flats for Professional Women’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 09 Nov 1920, p.8; Annabel Dott interviewed by Agnes Miall: ‘The Work of a Woman Builder’, *Woman’s Leader*, 16 Jul 1920, p.540.

⁵³ For Dott’s career see McKellar, ‘Annabel Dott’.

⁵⁴ ‘The Work of a Woman Builder’, *Woman’s Leader*, 16 Jul 1920, p.540.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Annabel Dott, ‘The Woman Architect and Her Work’, *Architectural Review*, 44, Aug 1918, pp.31-3.

⁵⁷ The agreement, allowing previous leaseholders Mr and Mrs Woodcock to remain at the property ended in court action brought by Dott. acted for ‘philanthropic reasons, but, through want of business habits on the part of the parties, he thought it would have been almost impossible to arrive at a solution’: ‘Action Over a House’, *Norwood News*, 07 April 1922, p.7; McKellar, ‘Annabel Dott’.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* This related to a further housing initiative for War veterans, ‘Grey Wood’ at East Hoathly, Sussex.

⁵⁹ Holmes, *A Working Woman*, pp.186-8.

schemes using earth, cob and concrete as walling alternatives.⁶⁰ Its recent adoption by the board of Agriculture for houses at Amesbury, Wiltshire was bolstered by the apparent success of St Loe's trial three-bedroom pisé bungalow built at his home Newlands Corner, Surrey in May 1919. His son-in-law, the architect Clough Williams-Ellis also became an acknowledged expert in the technique.

Copse Cottage, at Fernhurst, West Sussex, built for Ray's own occupation became the prototype for the venture (Fig. 36). The two-storey, four-bedroom house, soon assuming the pseudonym 'Mud House', was swiftly erected between late May and December to qualify for the government grant of £260. Although men were employed for the brickwork and carpentry, 'Miss Clarke, an ex-agricultural labourer and Miss Brown, formerly an aircraft worker, rammed the earth'.⁶¹ Her aim, to assemble a workforce comprising unemployed ex-servicemen and women, was in tune with her championing of women in trades and industries, and also served as an outlet for her own unfulfilled ambitions in electrical engineering and developing interest in bricklaying.⁶² Although by September three houses were in progress in Devonshire, with others in the pipeline, the initiative was soon beset with difficulties: problems of winter working and transporting the right type of soil to less suitable sites; the resistance of bricklayers usurped by unskilled workers; and the ongoing lack of capital. By the summer of 1921, with anticipated cost-savings illusory, they were forced to wind-down the company and absorb heavy financial losses. Viewed in this context, Ray Strachey's success in securing WPH capital in May 1921 and averting potential liquidation, seems all the more remarkable. As Strachey wrote in hindsight, 'I've learnt a lot about "business" in this year, & now know what it involves.'⁶³

Though best-known for her expertise in household management and labour-saving techniques, WPH committee member Dorothy Peel had also amassed substantial knowledge of housing design. After the War, she served on various housing committees for the Ministry of Reconstruction and GCTPA, in the course of which she studied new and existing, working and middle-class houses and flats in Britain, America and on the Continent.⁶⁴ Her practical experience also extended to directing her own property renovations. In a chapter of her 1918 book *The Labour Saving House*, 'The House that Jack builds without the help of Jane', Peel called for more women in architecture, bemoaning the frequent need to rectify the spatial planning blunders of male architects:

....having houses built by men makes at least a great part of all the work and trouble...[architects] are concerned to provide you with a house which looks charming and which may be stoutly built, but that such details as the make of the bath, the size of the service lift, the position of the kitchen

⁶⁰ Mark Swenarton, 'Rammed Earth Revival: Technological Innovation and Government Policy in Britain, 1905-1925', *Construction History*, 19 (2003).

⁶¹ Holmes, *A Working Woman*, pp.186-9.

⁶² *Ibid*, p.98, p.10 and p.301.

⁶³ *Ibid*, correspondence 05 Oct 1921.

⁶⁴ Peel, *Life's Enchanted Cup*, pp.239-247.

range, and the arrangements for cupboards, housemaid's pantries, and so forth, concern them not at all.⁶⁵

According to Peel, fundamental design flaws abounded in the absence of women's input. It had, for instance, fallen on to her to point out the inadvisability of hot-water pipes passing through larders or the labour-saving potential of a storage room fitted with strong, cheap slatted shelves, rather than boxes stacked one upon another.

The belief that only female designers truly appreciated women's requirements was underlined in WPH's promotional literature. The prospectus emphasised how 'the Architect, Miss Leverkus F.R.I.B.A., designs each flat and knows what a woman needs'.⁶⁶ Annual reports also praised her 'skilful planning' which had resulted in 'a full measure of success, as testified to by the grateful appreciation of the occupiers', claims which were vindicated by the society's long waiting list for flats.⁶⁷ The WPH executive similarly valued the expertise of incoming committee member (later chairman) Violet Mary Durand (1869-1951), who was noted as having 'much private experience in the adaptation of large houses to the needs of professional women'.⁶⁸ Although details of her projects remain frustratingly obscure in the historical record, Durand swiftly assumed responsibility for assessing potential property conversions and negotiating their acquisition.

Tenants also played a part in WPH's collaborative design culture. With less surviving documentation, it is unclear how far tenants were able to contribute to the shaping or re-shaping of the flats provided by LWH or United Women's Homes Association (UWHA). Within WPH, however, the cooperative premise of the public utility society model was tangible with three tenant representatives active on the executive, regularly suggesting ideas and improvements. Minute books detail requests ranging from the reconfiguration of partitions to the re-design of kitchens and bathrooms.⁶⁹

The 'Client-Architect'

Over the course of their inter-war history, the UWHA turned to a number of professional architects. Their first purpose-built development at Ladysmith Road, Brighton was commissioned from local architect-surveyors Thomas Garrett and Son, but they parted company in 1927 following intractable difficulties in reaching an agreement with the Hampstead Garden Suburb board over the designs for Queen's Court (See Chapter 6). A parallel relationship with London-based firm Hendry and Schooling, who designed almost all the association's flats, endured until the UWHA faced liquidation in 1932. Stanley P. Schooling (1887-1932) was articulated to Hart and Waterhouse,

⁶⁵ Peel, *The Labour Saving House*, p.31.

⁶⁶ LMA, LMA/4776/F/01/001 - WPH prospectus c.1936.

⁶⁷ LMA, LMA/4776/A/03/002 - WPH Annual Report 1928.

⁶⁸ LMA, LMA/4776/A/03/001 - WPH Annual Report 1921; Violet's sister was Edith Picton-Turbervill, Labour MP and President of the YWCA (1928-9). Husband Ralph wrote the official history of the Nazi occupation of Guernsey: Ralph Durand, *Guernsey Under German Rule*, (Guernsey: The Guernsey Society, 1946, 2nd edn 2018).

⁶⁹ For example LMA, LMA/4776/A/01/004 -WPH Minutes, 04 Dec 1928.

completing training with the LCC Architects' Department and His Majesty's Office of Works. After serving in the First World War, he was appointed as Assistant Architect for Housing, charged with overseeing the delivery of various local authority estates. In 1921, he entered into private practice with fellow ex-serviceman and Office of Works architect, H. Duncan Hendry (1890-1974). Hendry was also a committed antiquarian, co-editing the Wren Society Volumes from 1923 to 1945 with Sir John Soane Museum curator and architect Arthur T. Bolton.⁷⁰ The firm gained a reputation as specialists in large blocks of flats and housing schemes, although their portfolio extended to factories, warehouses, shops, offices and 'a great deal of alteration and conversion work to old properties'.⁷¹ One exception, the new UWHA headquarters and residential club at Murray House, Westminster (1927-8), was designed by established family firm Searle and Searle, possibly for their specialist expertise in central London offices, or perhaps simply due to an expanding workload.⁷²

In his capacity as client, UWHA managing director Alban Gordon also played an assertive role in the design direction of the flats. Two years into the housing venture, he became convinced that more innovative architectural solutions would be needed if the UWHA were to make any substantial contribution to addressing the working women's housing issue. With this goal in mind, in June 1927 Gordon embarked on a tour of Continental Europe, seeking design inspiration from new, high-profile social housing developments. His interest in these schemes, particularly the Viennese achievement of 25,000 flats constructed since the War, had initially been sparked by a friend who had attended the League of Nations Commission in Vienna in 1926.⁷³ A series of articles in the UWHA magazine, *Feminine Life* documented Gordon's inspection of 'a large number of houses and flats' at hotbeds of contemporary domestic design: 'The Hague, Amsterdam, Vienna, Frankfurt and Essen.'⁷⁴ Much like other British housing reformers, Ernst May's *Neue Frankfurt* housing was deemed stark and alienating, but the courtyarded flat developments of 'Red Vienna' left a lasting impression, strongly influencing Gordon Court (1928) and other UWHA blocks (see Chapter 7).⁷⁵ When construction commenced in 1928, the new blocks were stated as being 'specially designed by Mr. Gordon'.⁷⁶ Without surviving documentation, it is difficult to establish the dynamics between architect and client during the design process, or the part Hendry and Schooling played in this modernising impetus. However, such assertions demonstrate Gordon's confidence in his understanding of modern design and his ability to translate the women's housing needs into new forms of built space.

⁷⁰ Jill Lever, 'A.T. Bolton, Architect', *Architectural History*, 27, 1984, pp.429-442.

⁷¹ 'Stanley P. Schooling - Obituary', *Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects*, (14 Jan 1933).; 'Stanley P. Schooling', *The Builder*, 16 Dec 1932, p.1018.

⁷² Partners then were Norman O Searle, L. Keir Hett and Arthur F. Allen.

⁷³ 'The Advance of the Flat', *Feminine Life*, July 1926, pp.26-7.

⁷⁴ 'Report by Mr Gordon', *Feminine Life*, 14 Jul 1927, pp.1-2.

⁷⁵ Ibid. For 'Red Vienna' see Eve Blau, *The Architecture of Red Vienna, 1919-1934*, (Cambridge, Mass. ; London: The MIT Press, 1999).

⁷⁶ *Feminine Life*, Jan 1928, p.11.

A similar research-orientated approach was adopted in the summer of 1927 by LCC architects who also scrutinised the European schemes as potential models for multi-storey public housing schemes. At the Ossulston Street Estate, Somers Town (1928-37), designed by an in-house team led by the Superintending Architect George Topham Forrest, complex building volumes of varied heights, monumental arched entranceways and rendered external walls were directly inspired by first-hand appreciation of Viennese complexes like the Karl Marx Hof.⁷⁷ Other major municipal authorities later followed suit. In 1930 the Birmingham Corporation sent a deputation on a three-week fact-finding tour of Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia, 'for the purpose of studying the system of tenement or flat dwellings in various towns'.⁷⁸ The Viennese schemes likewise struck a chord, with their picturesque courtyards and sun-lit balconies highlighted in reports with plans and photographs of the favoured schemes.⁷⁹ Despite the scepticism of several Council members who remained committed to the policy of suburban cottage estates, the exercise resulted in a one-off experiment, St Martin's Flats (1938), a reinforced concrete block of family dwellings closely modelled on the Vienna developments.

The Design and Industries Association (DIA), founded in 1915 and modelled on the Deutscher Werkbund, also played a key role in fostering a greater awareness of continental practice and promoting a 'modern mindset'.⁸⁰ Between 1927 and 1932, the *DIA Quarterly Journal* documented various study trips conducted by a new generation of members to such housing expositions as the Weissenhof Siedlung at Stuttgart in December 1927. These participants included such patrons of modern design as Wenman Basset-Lowke (1897-1953), who had commissioned Charles Rennie McKintosh to remodel his home at 78 Dergate, Northampton (1917) and Peter Behrens to design 'New Ways', 508 Wellingborough Road, Northampton (1925-6); and Walter Crittall of the Crittall family of innovators in mass-produced, steel windows, who show-cased innovative construction methods at their model workers village at Silver End, Essex begun in 1926.⁸¹

In assuming a similar guise as 'client-architect', Gordon was thus one actor amongst a band of design professionals and informed clients, each with diverse motivations, looking beyond Britain for new formal, material and technological possibilities in housing. The principle of bringing good design to the masses was consistent with his egalitarian principles. Significantly perhaps, a number of such clients investing in the modern movement were also fellow Fabian socialists.⁸² Gordon's active agency in UWHA architectural designs was perhaps unsurprising given his distinctly corporate and forceful brand of management. However, it also conformed to the developing notion that

⁷⁷ Pepper, 'Ossulston Street', pp.45-64; Lewis Silkin, 'London County Council, Housing: Working Class Housing on the Continent and the Application of Continental Ideas to the Housing Problem in the County of London', (London, 1936).

⁷⁸ Helen Meller, *European Cities, 1890-1930s: History, Culture, and the Built Environment*, (Chichester: Wiley, 2001), p.235

⁷⁹ City of Birmingham, 'Report to the Estates and Public Works and Town Planning Committees Respectively of the Deputation visiting Germany, Czecho-Slovakia and Austria in August, 1930', (Birmingham, 1930).

⁸⁰ Darling, *Re-Forming Britain*, pp.14-18.

⁸¹ Ibid; WPH architect Murray Hennell was one of a group of Silver End architects, his houses in Temple Lane and Valentine Way, the first constructed. Richard Reiss acted as village planner.

⁸² Ibid.

businessmen should take the lead as 'natural' patrons of the new architecture. Furthermore, ideas promoted by Le Corbusier, that adventurous architectural patronage went hand-in-hand with entrepreneurial spirit, would also have appealed to Gordon.⁸³ Before the War, Gordon was involved in domestic design innovation, collaborating with his mother-in-law Mercilla Bradburn on the patented, space-saving design for 'a form of wash hand basin for fitting on a bath' (Fig. 25).⁸⁴ As Chapter 3, this would become the first of many entrepreneurial ventures for Gordon. Though not currently acknowledged, his actions pre-date other mediators of modern architecture acting on behalf of voluntary housing associations in the mid-1930s, such as Elizabeth Denby during the design of Kensal House.⁸⁵

Conclusion

As had been the case in the earlier schemes, the inter-war women's housing pioneers turned to trusted professional architects (mostly male), many already familiar with delivering cooperative housing schemes in the garden cities and suburbs. The expansion of professional architectural training for women, however, also provided a potential pool of certified female architects. Keen to engage pioneering women professionals, this allowed WPH to commission Gertrude Leverkus, as well as support her all-woman practice with RIBA colleague Eleanor Hughes. However, the dynamics of the design process did not always fit the conventional architect/client model. Davis, an experienced speculator, acted as architect, calling upon the expertise of an in-house draughting team as and when required. Other protagonists such as Gordon, influenced by his exposure to the ideas and sources of architectural modernism, became instrumental in steering the creative direction of the schemes with UWHA architects. Rather than being passive bystanders, women committee members were also active agents, often possessing considerable, self-taught knowledge of the male-dominated arena of architectural design and construction, acquired through their own experience of building or converting property. For them, developing the flats offered the means to improve women's lives whilst actively shaping the built environment in a more collaborative, user-focused manner.

⁸³ Louise Campbell, 'Patrons of the Modern House', in *Twentieth Century Architecture: The Modern House Revisited*, (Twentieth Century Society, 1996), pp. 42-50.

⁸⁴ Patent No.3222, J. M. Bulloch, *Bibliography of the Gordons*, (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1924), p.33. The fate of their invention is unknown, but more than a decade later similar space-saving concepts were featured in inter-war housing publications: Randal Phillips, *The £1,000 House*, (London: Country Life, 1928), p.137.

⁸⁵ Ibid. For Denby see Darling, 'The Star in the Profession She Invented for Herself'.

PART III: The Women's Schemes

Chapter 6

Case Studies: Adapted Schemes

Part II of this thesis centred on the women's housing organisations and their business and design practices. Part III turns attention towards their various housing schemes. Through a series of case studies, organised by building type, the chapters in this section explore various facets of the architectural design: their formal and spatial planning; material and stylistic characteristics; amenities and other living arrangements. As a substantial number of the schemes were adaptations to existing properties rather than newly constructed, the discussion avoids the cursory treatment usually afforded to adaptive re-use in housing histories. Thus, this chapter begins by analysing case studies of conversion projects carried out by Women's Pioneer Housing (WPH) and the Lady Workers' Homes (LWH). Why would the housing organisations opt to adapt property in this period? Which London locations and building types were chosen, and what spatial strategies were employed in their conversion? This allows further consideration of the significance of adaptive-reuse, both in the women's schemes and in housing more generally.

Conversion vs New Build

As was evident in the historical survey provided in Chapter 2, the creation of flatted accommodation through the adaptation of existing buildings (whether as separately occupied floors, suites, or single rooms), long played a fundamental role in the evolution of the dwelling type. Historical analysis of the development of flats would, therefore, be a partial narrative if solely restricted to the design and construction of purpose-built schemes. This long-standing deficit in the architectural historical canon has begun to be challenged in more recent studies.¹ Indeed, it was the practice of so-called 'tenementing' – the ad-hoc sub-division of urban housing – which first provided the impetus behind the more considered design approach to multi-occupancy housing in the mid-nineteenth century.² Although famed for their purpose-designed model dwellings, the prototypes promoted by the Society for Improving the Condition of the Labouring Classes (SICLC) also extended to conversions. Moreover, the bulk of their architectural output, actually constituted adaptations of London houses.³ These exemplars went on to inspire model dwelling schemes for single working men, including the celebrated Rowton Houses.

¹ For example, Maudlin and Vellinga, *Consuming Architecture*; Williamson, *Lodgers, Landlords and Landladies*; Cartwright, 'Life Between Walls'.

² Burnett, *A Social History of Housing*, p.227, *Ibid*, pp.64-9.

³ *Ibid*, p.176.

In the realm of women's housing schemes, the re-purposing of existing buildings was likewise a long-established method of getting housing initiatives up-and-running quickly, as well as a fruitful ground for experimentation. In London and other urban centres, remodelled townhouses provided residential accommodation for women in a host of applications. From the early nineteenth century, their enduring domestic associations were felt particularly suited to offering protective, surrogate family home environments for younger or vulnerable women. Lady Mary Feilding's conversion of tenement blocks into small flats for women workers in the 1870s were lauded for inspiring bespoke flat developments such as the Oakley Flats, Chelsea (1884) and the Ladies' Dwellings Company's Sloane Gardens House (1889), as well as similar property adaptations for women nationwide.⁴ As demonstrated in Chapter 2, converted property was also frequently used for women member's clubs and residential clubs, sometimes prior to bespoke buildings, a phenomenon witnessed in cities both at home and across the Atlantic.

Adaptive re-use in housing was a tradition that continued after the First World War, where it functioned as an essential strategy to supplement purpose-built schemes erected by the London County Council and Borough authorities. With new housing policy firmly geared towards family homes with stringent spatial standards, it was often the only option to create affordable one-room flats within the reach of the very poorest tenants, or for those living alone. It continued to be standard practice for providers attempting to house marginalised groups to begin by converting existing property. Lived experience, as well as financial viability, would then inform formal and spatial arrangements of new builds as funds allowed.⁵ For the inter-war public utility societies endeavouring to resolve the housing issue for single women, London's urban housing stock continued to offer a workable solution.

Converted Townhouses

The generously proportioned, nineteenth-century terraced London house lent itself particularly well to conversion into small flats. Its basic form and structure stemmed from the standardisation of new housing after the Great Fire, its multi-storey stature – three or four floors plus attic, over a basement level – enshrined in the provisions of the Rebuilding Acts of 1667 and 1670. Thereafter this notion of urban 'vertical-living' became deeply entrenched in the national psyche. The restrained, yet elegant neo-classicism of the archetypal Georgian London townhouse, with its brick and stone-dressed façades and narrow frontage, emerged as a reliable, commercially efficient

⁴ Lady Mary Feilding 'Help Without Charity for Gentlewomen, by Money Invested in Flats and Producing Fair Interest', *Work and Leisure*, 12(9), 1887, pp.236-7; 'Obituary: Lady Mary Feilding', *Englishwoman's Review*, 15 Jul 1896, pp.203-4.

⁵ For example, Presbyterian Housing Limited and the Bethnal Green and East London Housing Society converted buildings on Poplar High Street into small flats before erecting Goodspeed House (1929) and Goodwill House (1932) on Simpson's Road: 'Poplar High Street: Public housing', in *Survey of London: Volumes 43 and 44, Poplar, Blackwall and Isle of Dogs*, ed. Hermione Hobhouse (London, 1994), pp. 90-97.

formula, perfected and replicated by property developers throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.⁶

Urban family housing of the Victorian period in many respects imitated the success of earlier Georgian speculation, although the era would witness a wider array of suburban housing built in London and elsewhere. Terraced, semi-detached and detached housing were erected in a multitude of styles and typologies, with greater variation in the layout of streets and city gardens. The Victorian's intense desire for privacy and social segregation and the expression of individualism, was deemed at odds with the anonymity and uniformity of the Georgian terrace. Thus, as the nineteenth century progressed, the detached house or 'villa' with ample plot and secluded walled garden, became increasingly seen as the ideal family home, best able to fulfil these shifting cultural expectations.⁷ Located conveniently in the suburbs, yet distanced from the pollution and chaos of the metropolis, such properties offered the nouveau riche the healthy air and country lifestyle to which they aspired. In the inner London suburbs, where the professional classes dwelt and land prices were high, redesigned semi-detached or terraced housing served as a necessary compromise. Though providing less scope than the individual villa, neo-gothic towers and asymmetry abounded; here the understated surface clarity of the Georgian-style façade was broken by projecting bays with larger expanses of glass. Terraced rows were differentiated by decorative detailing, or often mimicked the appearance of paired villas. Individuality was expressed through an eclectic stylistic palette: semi or fully-stuccoed with bold Italianate detailing; or in the latter decades, the rich red-brick and terracotta ornament of the Queen Anne domestic revival.

Although ostensibly conceived as a dwelling type for a family household with servants, the double-pile, multi-level format of the townhouse has proved sufficiently flexible and spatially efficient to be re-configured into a variety of separate lodgings for families and couples, single men or women. As discussed in Part I, intense pressure for housing in the capital during the nineteenth century saw swathes of older decaying townhouses in highly-populated central districts given over to sub-division and multi-occupancy. It was a fate which befell Victorian urban terraces far more rapidly than their Georgian counterparts. As Stefan Muthesius has argued, the waning popularity of the terraced house, which 'had ceased to be fashionable', was a phenomenon which began as early as 1840.⁸ With the widespread construction of more modest two or three-storey versions for the working classes, terraced housing swiftly lost its former social status, the perception being that 'terraces were for the lower orders; villas for the better classes'.⁹ In the boom and bust climate of Victorian suburban speculation, even newly-completed middle-class family housing was regularly divided between multiple households. In saturated housing markets such as north Kensington, whole rows 'rapidly slid into that dread of every nineteenth-century London landowner – multi-

⁶ For post-Fire London see Elizabeth McKellar, *The Birth of Modern London : The Development and Design of the City, 1660-1720*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999).

⁷ Burnett, *A Social History of Housing*, pp.204-5.

⁸ Stefan Muthesius, *The English Terraced House*, (New Haven ; London: Yale University Press, 1982).p.249.

⁹ Burnett, *A Social History of Housing*, p.227, *ibid*, p204.

occupation'.¹⁰ For them, an influx of occupants of inferior social status generally meant the deterioration of the building fabric and thus spelt disaster for property investment.

However, after the ravages of the First World War, the issue became more acute. The financial burden of death duties, the ongoing difficulty in securing domestic staff, and the growing appeal of the more easily-maintained mansion apartment, all conspired to ensure a relatively cheap and plentiful supply of larger townhouses. Even more modest types were designed and built to function through the support of domestic servants. The contingencies of the conflict accelerated social changes already set in motion before the War, bringing new and more attractive employment opportunities elsewhere. The impact of the 'servant problem' was keenly felt in densely-developed, predominantly middle-class boroughs like Kensington, where over one in six women aged over twenty years worked in domestic service, the vast majority of whom 'lived in'.¹¹ They could no longer rely on the cheap labour once readily found in the vicinity of Kensal Green and Notting Hill Gate.¹²

In the summer of 1919, the effects of rising taxation, overheads and 'the impossibility of getting servants, even at double the pre-war wage' on the larger London townhouse were debated in *The Saturday Review*. For the author, such circumstances had rendered the customary middle-class family existence in these houses – already long under threat – largely untenable. The issue even extended to houses in such prosperous areas as Belgravia, where 'two-thirds [were] apparently shut-up'.¹³ Moreover, it was difficult to envisage the average South Kensington or Bayswater house, with its standard configuration of 'three or four sitting rooms...and eight or ten bedrooms' being effectively adapted and divided:

How can you make flats out of such houses? Where are the kitchens, pantries, lavatories, to be found, as they ought to be, on each floor? Where are the separate entrances, which are necessary to secure the comparative privacy of a flat? Where are the lifts to be put? ¹⁴

Whilst it was thought to be viable 'to run joint establishments of quite a luxurious character' for prosperous bachelors, with 'two or three tenants, each on a floor, if they could agree to use a common kitchen and to use a common staff or servants', it was felt that 'the difficulty, of course is with the women'.¹⁵ Nonetheless, as had been the case in preceding decades, the vicissitudes of fortune of this built legacy would afford the inter-war women's housing organisations a ready means of providing accommodation for working women, both comfortably and economically. The

¹⁰ Simon Jenkins, *Landlords to London : The Story of a Capital and Its Growth*, (London: Constable, 1975).

¹¹ 'General introduction', in *Survey of London: Volume 37, Northern Kensington*, ed. F. H. W. Sheppard, (London, 1973), pp.1-24..

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ 'Housing the Poor', *The Saturday Review*, 05 Jul 1919, pp.4-5.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

task of remodelling into a variety of small flats would, as ever, involve negotiating considerable financial and spatial challenges, as well as deep-seated gender assumptions.

Case Study: Women's Pioneer Housing Limited

The new public utility society, WPH was founded on both the mutability of the townhouse building type, and the opportunities arising from the post-1918 housing economy. As discussed in the previous Chapter, the initiative was prompted by Etheldred Browning's proposal to capitalise on the glut of larger devalued Victorian London townhouses, many in favourable West London locations. As WPH committee member Dorothy Peel later explained, 'Miss Browning conceived the idea of converting large houses into flatlets...owing to the cost of upkeep and the difficulty of obtaining servants, there were many to be had at a moderate price'.¹⁶

In WPH's case, the decision to redevelop existing property rather than build afresh was for the most part borne of pragmatism; as a group of women housing campaigners lacking initial capital and with limited access to private development finance, the strategy provided the most viable option to progress the housing venture. With a large number of nineteenth-century property leases due to expire in this period, and speculators reluctant to invest at a time of rising costs and rent restriction, townhouses could be secured relatively cheaply. The strategy of conversion also represented a traditional, tried and tested route following the example set by pioneers like Lady Mary Feilding, the Countess of Meath and others. As discussed previously, it also aligned closely with the Ministry of Health's own flat conversion programme of 1919 – a lesser-known strand of Addison's National Housing Scheme – which actively promoted the remodelling of London townhouses into flats.¹⁷ Adaptive re-use was also sustainable and prudent at a time when small flats, as well as construction materials and labour continued to be scarce. At the society's first public dinner, Dorothy Peel highlighted the advantages of focusing on this redundant sector of London's housing stock which benefitted the economy and 'lessened the fierce competition for smaller properties'.¹⁸

Aside from the financial implications, such an approach could accrue distinctive social benefits. Adapting unfashionable or dilapidated property offered much the same benefits as now; rejuvenating townhouses in West London locations like Kensington or Chelsea opened access for tenants to parts of London that might not otherwise have been possible. Although less salubrious than in their heyday, such Boroughs were familiar territories for many WPH founding members, investors and supporters who made homes nearby. The enduring middle-class associations of these

¹⁶ Peel, C. S., *Daily Mail*, 03 Feb 1923.

¹⁷ Hinchcliffe, 'This Rather Foolish Piece of Panic Administration'.

¹⁸ *The Times*, 06 Feb 1924, p.12.

suburban places and spaces were also appealing for working women emanating from more humble backgrounds as a means to acquire cultural capital and cement their newfound social status.¹⁹

67 Holland Park Avenue

Following discussions in the Spring with the London Housing Board (LHB), and promising indications of financial support, in October 1920 the fledgling WPH committee considered a range of prospective West London properties.²⁰ When assessing building condition and conversion potential prior to formal application, Etheldred Browning consulted the expertise of fellow founding members; seasoned builder and self-trained architect Annabel Dott, and Garden Cities and Town Planning Association (GCTPA) colleague Sydney Bushell.²¹ By November, the decision was made to instruct two different architects to prepare drawings for a pair of potential schemes, 10 Barkston Gardens and 67 Holland Park Avenue, proceeding with the latter as the initial 'test case' for funding approval.

This rather unremarkable mid-Victorian part-brick, part-stucco, five-storey terraced house would become the first in a steadily expanding portfolio of London property. A vacant, private residence with frontage onto the former Uxbridge Road, it was erected at the tail end of development on the Holland Estate and occupied before the war by H.W. Brooke Esq.²² It was described by the district valuer as 'admirably adapted for conversion in the manner suggested' with 'large and lofty' rooms requiring complete redecoration (three on the ground floor, two on the first, and four on both upper levels). Of 'very substantial construction' yet lacking electric light and running hot water, it typified the sturdy but outdated middle-class family housing which had fallen from favour in the intervening decades.²³ Spatial layouts for the new flats remained at this stage, undecided, WPH's early committee members toying with a range of potential configurations. It was proposed to the LHB that the existing accommodation be re-configured to provide six rental flats:

self-contained with bathroom and water closet for each flat; 4 flats of 2 rooms, 1 of 4 rooms, 1 of 3 rooms and a basement flat of four rooms. The cooking arrangements are to be communal and therefore the basement flat is to be divided into a general dining room and kitchen, and rooms for a caretaker.²⁴

The format, common in bachelor flats, offered greater choice and privacy than boarding houses, residential clubs or hostels. The communal arrangements proposed tapped into the cooperative

¹⁹ For theories of economic, social and cultural capital see Pierre Bourdieu and Peter Collier (translator), *Forms of Capital : General Sociology, Volume 3: Lectures at the College De France 1983 - 84*, (Oxford: Polity Press, 2021).

²⁰ TNA, HLG49/69 - LHB memorandum, 11 Nov 1920. Properties inspected were 17 and 34 Roland Gardens, 52 Avonmore Road, 82 Philbeach Gardens, 64 Warwick Road and 67 Holland Park Avenue.

²¹ LMA, LMA/4776/A/01/001 - WPH Committee Minutes Aug 1920.

²² LMA, LMA/4776/D/02/014 - Inland Revenue Land Valuation, 67 Holland Park Avenue, 1914.

²³ TNA, HLG49/69 - District Valuer to Ministry of Health, 05 Jan 1921.

²⁴ TNA, HLG49/69 - WPH to the Housing Commissioner, LHB, 07 Dec 1920.

housekeeping arrangements which had been adopted for women's schemes in the garden cities and suburbs which, as members of the GCTPA, WPH founders were very familiar.

Funding, and therefore progress was dependant on LHB and Ministry approval, but civil servants expressed concerns over the economic viability of the smaller flats and considered 'the caretaker and "restaurant" arrangements' as 'doubtful features'.²⁵ As discussed in Chapter 3, a protracted battle for funding under the National Housing Scheme ensued, where the eligibility of the scheme and its tenants was questioned on a number of counts. A loan from the Public Works Loan Board was abandoned and the property was purchased freehold in May 1921 for £2850, with capital advanced by an anonymous female investor. The conversion, costing £1700, was carried out by the building firm Messrs. Chilcott and Austin, and largely funded by tenant-investors, with 'moderate' rentals supplemented later through government subsidy. Conversion plans for the property drawn by architectural firm Hennell and James have not survived in their entirety, extant blueprints frustratingly providing only glimpses of the alterations (Figs 37 and 38). Correspondence and reports demonstrate, however, that in the event, six fully self-contained flats were configured, each with a small private kitchen and bathroom.²⁶

By the Autumn, contractual agreements were drawn and signed with the first set of WPH tenants. The two-room flat on the second floor would be occupied by Dorothy Gertrude Nye (1890-1985), a secretary previously living in Mortimer Street, a long-established hub for women workers (see Chapter 2). Professional musician, former university lecturer and suffragette Stella Beatrice Fife (1874-1947), currently living at the Ladies' Residential Chambers Company's York Street Chambers, opted for one of the more desirable, and thus the slightly more expensive, first-floor two-room flats, as would GP's daughter Lucy Victoria Tonge-Smith (1893-1979). Marjorie Tufnell Strong (1900-1978), also a secretary, took the top floor flat of four-rooms, which she later shared with her mother Frances.²⁷ They were joined in January 1922 by former governess and Christian Science practitioner Isabel Beatrice King (1878-1964) who rented the three-room ground floor flat. The tenants' ages (ranging from 21 to 47 years) and occupations were representative of the women who lived together in WPH houses. But with substantial investment initially required, they would be more prosperous than most.²⁸ Investment sums, split equally between shares and loan stock, varied according to the size of flat, with the larger ones requiring £300 (equivalent to approximately £15,000 in 2020).²⁹ Lifetime tenancies varying from £32 to £90 per annum signified the tenants' middle-class status and the sort of stability lacking in the weekly rental terms generally afforded to the working classes.

²⁵ TNA, HLG49/69 - LHB memoranda.

²⁶ LMA, LMA/4776/A/03/001 - Annual Report 1921.

²⁷ LMA, LMA/4776/D/05/015 - Tenancy Agreements, Sep, Oct 1921, Jan 1922.

²⁸ Minimum investment was eventually reduced to £25 (payable in instalments where necessary).

²⁹ Bank of England Inflation Calculator: <https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/monetary-policy/inflation/inflation-calculator> [accessed Dec 2021].

Keen to overcome frequent charges of mismanagement levelled at such multi-occupancy arrangements, the committee instigated the appointment of an 'efficient caretaker' who would 'occupy the basement and keep the stairs and bathrooms in order and be responsible to the committee for the general order of the house'.³⁰ Little is known of the background of the first WPH caretaker, Alice Leonard, who occupied the basement flat at Holland Park Avenue consisting of 'one room and a scullery', at the 'reduced rent of 12s 6d' per week. Leonard would be succeeded in the role by two widows: Effie Minto (1863-1951) in 1923, a milliner's assistant; and Annie Brissenden (1887-1962) in 1927, once a domestic nursemaid, who continued to live in the flat with her daughter Helen Margaret (1919-1983) during the Second World War.

The opening ceremony of Holland Park Avenue, performed by Lady Dorothy Gladstone (1876 -1953) in November 1921, attracted favourable attention in the press.³¹ Ray Strachey helped Etheldred organise and publicise the event; Lady Rhondda advocated for the WPH housing venture to the assembled crowd.³² The women's column of *The Pall Mall and Globe* – after noting the Viscountess' fashionable 'musquash coat and small mauve toque' – reported that the new flats for women workers were 'very convenient in every way', assuring readers that 'this of course, is a business enterprise, and more funds are needed to develop the scheme'.³³

Expanding the WPH Portfolio

This investment-targeted, high-profile publicity exercise would be repeated in 1923 at the opening of the organisation's second development at 28 Philbeach Gardens, SW5, in a ceremony presided over by Lady Cynthia Mosley (1898 -1933), wife of MP Oswald, who having both 'expressed their warm interest in the work of the Society', had joined as members of the WPH Council.³⁴ The initial works accomplished at Holland Park Avenue had sparked the interest of Mary Esther Cunliffe (1853-1939), a wealthy unmarried heiress and sister of the wartime Governor of the Bank of England.³⁵ She would become one of WPH's principal investors and most forthright committee members. With the national housing scheme aborted in 1921, and the LHB funding application for 10 Barkston Gardens abandoned, Cunliffe advanced a £1000 mortgage at 6% for ten years to secure the fifty-year lease of Philbeach Gardens from the Earl of Iveagh, on condition that 'the housing should be for women only', 'no restaurant arrangement be made' and 'cooking facilities be provided for each

³⁰ LMA, LMA/4776/A/03/001 - WPH Annual Report 1921.

³¹ Dorothy Mary Paget (wife of Herbert Gladstone, former Liberal Home Secretary and youngest son of Prime Minister W. E. Gladstone). During the war she had established a hostel near Victoria Station for South African nurses serving in France.

³² WPH tenth AGM report, *Woman's Leader*, 10 Apr 1930; 'Women Workers' Homes', *Western Mail*, 18 Nov 1921.

³³ Damaris, 'The Talk of the Town: New Flats for Women Workers', *The Pall Mall and Globe*, 18 Nov 1921.

³⁴ LMA, LMA/4776/A/03/001 - WPH Annual Report 1921. Oswald Mosley (1896-1980), founder of the British Union of Fascists in 1932.

³⁵ Mary Cunliffe in 'Deaths', *The Times*, 27 Mar 1939, p.20; Kathleen Burk, 'Cunliffe, Walter, first Baron Cunliffe (1855-1920), merchant banker and governor of the Bank of England', *ODNB*, 2004. He gained a reputation for calming financial turmoil at the outbreak of War, chaired the Cunliffe Committee 1918, and was a delegate at the Versailles peace conference 1919.

tenant'.³⁶ The insistence on private kitchens cemented the society's spatial approach and marked the advent of standards which would be adopted across almost all subsequent WPH inter-war properties. Any residual notion of 'communal' cooking arrangements was set aside in favour of small 'pantry' kitchens, either partitioned or recessed into the living spaces. This more definitive direction in spatial planning also prompted a less-costly variant to the fully self-contained units created at Holland Park Avenue; one which ensured independence and privacy, whilst being cheaper in terms of sanitary provision. Subsequent properties, usually of four or five storeys, would be re-configured into so-called 'open flats', where for reasons of greater financial and spatial economy, tenants would now share their bath and toilet. Flats ranged as before, from single 'bed-sitting rooms' to more substantial three-room flats, which might function as separate sitting and bedrooms, or be occupied by two or three women.

Caretakers and caretaker flats would also become a staple of WPH's business model. The vast majority of WPH caretakers would be working-class women formerly employed in domestic service, or fields like dressmaking or retail. Whilst the caretaker position was always formally assigned to women, other WPH basement flats would be occupied by married couples, sometimes living with children or elderly relatives. With husbands often employed in manual trades including painting, decorating and plumbing, they may well have contributed to maintenance; a benefit which might have outweighed the strict 'women-only' criteria applied to tenants. Basement flats were accessed separately and fully-self-contained with 'sculleries' rather than 'kitchens', a mark of class as much as function. Physically as well as socially segregated from tenants upstairs, they dwelt in the less savoury subterranean spaces of the houses, the traditional domain of servants and service rooms. Thus, much like earlier women's schemes, where the presence of live-in servants was concealed in service areas and attic storeys, WPH basements housed a less visible group of working women and their families.³⁷

A role more commonly performed by men, the designation of a female caretaker for all subsequent WPH developments, denoted a departure from the male mansion block porter, yet elevated above the menial domestic 'housekeeper'. As the promotional brochures explained: 'One of the most valued amenities is a resident Caretaker, whose services afford protection and helpfulness not to be found in the more lonely mansion flats'.³⁸

The inherent suggestion of 'care giving' responded to cultural perceptions surrounding the vulnerability of lone women tenants, whilst avoiding the surveillance usually associated with the Victorian and Edwardian 'Lady Superintendents'. Fundamental to the spatial layout of the schemes, the strategy was another manifestation of attempts to address the 'servant problem' by pooling limited human resources in a cooperative solution. However, any thoughts of both occupiers and caretakers being brought together as 'Pioneer Tenants' within the WPH fold were short-lived. A

³⁶ LMA, LMA/4776/A/01/001 - WPH Committee Minutes Aug 1920-Dec 1923.

³⁷ Around 230 such individuals have been identified to date: analysis based on Ann Sainsbury and Anne Sharpley's research data.

³⁸ LMA, LMA/4776/F/01/001- WPH Prospectus c.1936.

series of complaints followed by the realisation of errant caretakers being ‘near impossible to dismiss’, led to a reversal of policy. Thereafter caretakers and their families gained rent-free accommodation but lost their status as WPH tenants. The charges might seem justified given the host of further incidents alleging the neglect or misconduct of caretakers discussed by the committee.³⁹ Nevertheless, in most cases loyal service was valued, with other caretaker flats secured through family connections, or offspring taking over when parents retired.

Until 1923, the committee turned to two further architects to draw up conversion plans: Walter Cave (1863-1939) and Sidney Caulfield (1877-1964).⁴⁰ In October the committee were able to fulfil their original intention of working with a female architect, commissioning recent graduate of University College London, Gertrude Leverkus (Chapter 5). Around sixty surviving architectural drawings exhibit the design elements and spatial characteristics which became hallmarks of the WPH offering.⁴¹ The continuing significance of the small private kitchen in WPH flats of all sizes throughout the period is evident in floorplans; the compact triad of cooker, sink and larder shoe-horned into the tightest of floor plans. Incorporated even into the single-roomed accommodation, it represented a major upgrade on the average boarding house room with its rudimentary, shared gas-ring. Yet despite moves towards standardisation, ‘Pioneer’ flats remained far from homogeneous, and no house conversion would be the same. Though gradable overall as one, two or three-room, flats borne of adapted houses were often difficult to rationalise and defied categorisation. WPH promotional literature, rather shrewdly, made a virtue of this lack of uniformity:

One charm of “Pioneer” flats lies in the fact that, being for the most part converted from large and beautiful houses, they are all dissimilar. The flats vary in type and arrangement, consequently in rent, and cannot always be accurately classed...⁴²

Although at times directed by the will of pivotal investors, and partly dictated by existing house configurations, the variety in the flat types was, first and foremost, designed to cater to the broad mix of salaries, rental budgets and circumstances which WPH hoped to accommodate. The hierarchical form of the typical townhouse, from the superior physical qualities of ground and especially first floors (aping the traditional *piano nobile*) to the inferior upper floors and concealed basement and attic, suited these requirements particularly well. Working around existing structural constraints, kitchens could be problematic, the modern ‘ventilated’ larders needing access to an outer wall. The acquisition of Queen Anne-style townhouses constructed in the late Victorian period – Chelsea properties 28 Barkston Gardens (1924), 15/16 Bramham Gardens (1930) and ‘a

³⁹ Examples include Stella Fife’s complaints at Holland Park Avenue in 1923 of ‘staircases not being maintained’, and ‘serious complaints’ at 21 Stanley Crescent which led to the dismissal of the caretaker in 1924: LMA/4776/A/01/001-WPH Committee Minutes Aug 1920 - Dec 1923; LMA/4776/A/01/002 - Committee Minutes Jan 1924 - Dec 1925.

⁴⁰ Drawings prepared by Cave and Caulfield do not appear to have survived.

⁴¹ LMA, LMA/4776/D/05/026 - Gertrude W.M. Leverkus, 67 Ladbroke Grove, Floorplans for conversion into flats, c.1923.

⁴² LMA, LMA/4776/F/01/001 - WPH Prospectus c.1936 .

very fine freehold' at 65 Harrington Gardens (1929), 'which has been converted into some of the best of the society's flats' – were perceived as desirable additions to the portfolio.⁴³ Yet, such typologies with numerous intermediate mezzanine levels brought considerable spatial challenges. Surviving floor plans of Harrington Gardens (which interestingly denote Leverkus' transition from Associate to Fellow of the RIBA and her own third floor bed sitting room) also serve to exemplify the considerable spatial complexities involved in successfully re-configuring these building types into rational, unified layouts (Fig. 40). WPH flats were not always 'flat'; allocated bathrooms or kitchens were sometimes located at a distance on different floor levels.⁴⁴ The interior planning of such developments as Harrington Gardens, and the implications for WPH tenants, will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 8.

All but one of WPH's properties, acquired on both a freehold and leasehold basis, were located in the County of London, almost 75 per cent in the Metropolitan Boroughs of Kensington and Chelsea. With the expansion of the transport infrastructure and building and subsequent decline of the Victorian suburbs, the geographical focus of WPH housing schemes had gravitated beyond the central and West End locations predominantly appropriated by women and women's organisations in the latter half of the nineteenth century.⁴⁵ The largest proportion of these houses, twenty-five in all, were concentrated within the north Kensington, Notting Hill area, originally constructed during the development of the Ladbroke Estate.⁴⁶ The proliferation of 'squares', 'gardens' and 'groves' lined with larger townhouses were the result of intensive Victorian suburban speculation in the 1840s and 1850s. Built on former farmland and the failed Hippodrome racecourse, the layout was based upon a partially-realised plan designed by Thomas Allason for James Ladbroke in the 1820s, comprising a grand central circus with radiating streets, concentric bands of crescents and a central thoroughfare, later 'Ladbroke Grove'.⁴⁷ Despite the shifting fortunes of the area, purchasing the decaying products of this former hive of Victorian building activity, represented an opportunity to create women's homes in a well-connected part of London. Its perception as an outlying location had increasingly been eroded since the construction of the Hammersmith and City railway line and new underground in the 1860s. Furthermore, it had still largely retained its respectable social identity. Only a few short years before the war, writer and critic Charles Marriott observed the decidedly middle-class character of 'leafy Ladbroke' which provided 'a stronger impression of social stability than any other part of London I know . . . Ladbroke upholds the proper dignity of the English middle classes'.⁴⁸ The distinctive verdant quality

⁴³ LMA, LMA/4776/A/03/003 - WPH Annual Report 1930.

⁴⁴ LMA, LMA/4776/D/05/014 - Gertrude W.M. Leverkus, 65 Harrington Gardens, floorplans, c.1931.

⁴⁵ See the 'Social maps of the West End of London' in Walker, 'Vistas of Pleasure', pp.71-2

⁴⁶ Ladbroke Estate properties acquired in the inter-war period were: 67 (now 167) Holland Park Avenue; 134 Holland Road; 11-15 (12 in 1945) and 34 Ladbroke Gardens; 62 and 67 Ladbroke Grove; 16 and 19 Ladbroke Square; 79 Ladbroke Road; 2 Horbury Crescent; 8, 21 and 24-29 Stanley Gardens; 16, 21 and 22 Stanley Crescent; and 34 Kensington Park Gardens.

⁴⁷ *Survey of London: Volume 37, Northern Kensington*, ed. by F.H.W. Sheppard (London, 1973), pp.194-251.

⁴⁸ Charles Marriott, *Now!*, 1910, p.28.

of the area was also particularly appealing. The innovation of extensive communal gardens or 'paddocks' marked an adaptation of the central garden of the Georgian Square. Gardens for the exclusive use of residents were accessed directly from the rear of houses, rather than across the roadway. Influenced by the health benefits and horticulture, they anticipated the principles of the Garden City movement half a century later.

Throughout the 1920s, the work of the society focused on courting further investment to purchase and convert more houses, repaying existing mortgages and buying up freeholds of the leased WPH properties when they became available. Strategically, they targeted rows of terraced housing, adding adjacent properties and uniting the buildings by punching openings in party walls (and closing pre-existing ones to facilitate smaller flats). This further physical concentration of property in favoured districts facilitated greater efficiency in terms of resources, with caretakers being able to take responsibility for a pair or more houses. Priced out of mansion flats, it also effectively enabled the society to bring their own quasi-block dwellings for women into being.⁴⁹ Indeed, from the earliest days, Etheldred Browning perceived that building works would amount to '...purchasing large houses and converting these houses into blocks of flats'.⁵⁰ The implications in terms of professional house management principles had been discussed by E A Charlesworth at length in the *Woman's Leader* in 1919:

The lack of openings in the past has been partly due to the individual ownership of contiguous houses. It is, as a rule, only where a sufficiently large group of houses are under the same ownership that an opportunity for good management comes.⁵¹

Considerable success in the growth of the portfolio for WPH throughout the remainder of the 1920s brought financial and organisational stability, encouraging the committee to try other London postcodes and extend the reach of the organisation beyond the Capital (for inter-war properties see Appendix: Table 2). The desire to deploy women wherever possible in the organisation was also able to extend into the realm of building and decorative works involved in the conversions themselves. In 1924 committee minutes noted that the 'Misses Blood', Wilhelmina Blood (1890-1960) and her sister Vera (1893-1976), sharing a tenancy at 29 Gledhow Gardens, were 'prepared to undertake the conversion of houses'.⁵² Invited to tender by the committee, estimates for decoration were accepted in July 1925, with payments appearing in accounts. WPH continued to employ the services of the 'Women Decorators' during the 1930s.

Such confidence in the society, its evolving brand and beneficial work for women, also prompted a return to experimentation in terms of spatial planning and facilities. In 1927, 10 West Eaton Place in affluent Belgravia, was redeveloped alongside number 12 which had originally been acquired in 1924. The new catered flats, responding to the growing popularity of 'service flats',

⁴⁹ For example LMA, LMA/4776/D/05/003 - Gertrude Leverkus, 15 and 16 Bramham Gardens, floorplans, 1930.

⁵⁰ TNA, HLG49/69 - Etheldred Browning to LHB, 31 Mar 1920.

⁵¹ E. A. Charlesworth, 'Property Management as a Career for Women', *Woman's Leader*, 08 Oct 1920, p.780.

⁵² LMA, LMA/4776/A/01/002- WPH Committee Minutes, 16 Sep 1924.

were aimed at more prosperous professional women and necessitated a departure from the established WPH standard of private kitchen space. It was an idea which required the re-institution of more traditional arrangements, with a live-in 'housekeeper' and 'parlourmaid' residing alongside tenants.⁵³ Part of the work of the society in 1929 focused on what the committee described as an 'experiment in the suburbs' with the acquisition of the freehold of a modest detached family house at 14 Oakhill Road, Putney in the Metropolitan Borough of Clapham, offering 'a good garden and a garage'.⁵⁴

The post-Depression years demanded far greater financial prudence. In 1932, 'a year of unprecedented business depression', the financial situation was deemed so precarious that it was 'considered advisable to call a halt to the purchase and conversion of houses'. The period also saw more assertive moves to address the growing demand for 'the provision of very small flats'.⁵⁵ At the beginning of the 1930s there had still been the clear expectation that larger flats would be shared by two or three women, official correspondence indicating, for instance, that the sixteen flats configured at 15 and 16 Bramham Gardens would in fact accommodate '23 professional women', and that fifteen women would take up residence in seven flats at 31 Gledhow Gardens.⁵⁶ With no surviving tenancy records, and limited electoral and census information during this period, it is difficult to accurately identify all tenant occupiers sharing the WPH flats, however the practice was commonplace. The increased demand for smaller flats thus marked a rising desire for privacy and independence, achieved through greater material and physical separation. The 1933 Annual Report reported on progress towards this goal with 'several of the earlier flats reconstructed'.⁵⁷ Many of the larger three-room flats, originally configured on the ground and first floors were sub-divided, resulting in a much greater proportion of one and two room flats than ever before. Renewed confidence in 1934 saw the suburban offering extended through the purchase of a second house in Putney at 12 Colinette Road, SW15. In the same year the benefits of the rejuvenating qualities of seaside air, and the possibility for WPH tenants to break away from the chaos of urban working life, led WPH to branch even further afield, acquiring a house in Brighton at 45 Sussex Square. Etheldred Browning had at first suggested procuring a property which she had 'seen in Folkstone', thus it seems likely that the Brighton house was sourced through the personal knowledge of committee members. Indeed, in 1871 aged seventeen, WPH investor and committee member Mary Cunliffe, had attended a private boarding school in the same square. The opening of the house, 'arousing considerable interest' allowed the short-term occupancy of 'a furnished flat available there for the benefit of members who would care to take advantage of it for limited periods'.⁵⁸ The ability of the

⁵³ LMA, LMA/4776/A/01/009 - WPH Committee Minutes 30 Mar 1938.

⁵⁴ LMA, LMA/4776/A/03/002 - WPH Annual Report 1929.

⁵⁵ LMA, LMA/4776/A/03/003 - AGM 1932: 'Chairman's Speech'.

⁵⁶ LMA, GLC/AR/BR/17/068207054654 - Gertrude Leverkus to LCC Architect's Department, 09 Mar 1931; GLC/AR/BR/06/054654 - Gertrude Leverkus to LCC Architect's Department, 03 Dec 1924.

⁵⁷ LMA, LMA/4776/A/03/003 - WPH Annual Report 1933.

⁵⁸ Ibid; LMA, LMA/4776/A/03/003 - WPH Annual Report 1934.

society to cater diverse housing needs in both leafy metropolitan and seaside locations, was encapsulated in such promotional artwork as the cover design for their prospectus (Fig. 41).

The latter half of the 1930s brought a tangible shift in direction for WPH. This would coincide with some significant changes in key personnel within the organisation, and a new leading male presence. William Norman, a committee member since 1928, replaced Helen Archdale as chair in 1933. Claude Harrison, long-term surveyor of potential WPH properties also took up a more prominent role in terms of WPH management. With assistant Winifred Martin poised to replace Etheldred Browning as manager/secretary, a significant contingent within the executive committee sought to displace the founder, an affair which eventually culminated with her reluctant retirement from the committee in September 1938. During this time, some committee members continued to underline the importance of the organisation's 'emphasis on smaller flats'; at the same time others persisted that there was an ongoing need for larger, self-contained flats. This spatial dilemma, seemingly pulling the work of the Society in opposite directions, was to be resolved in a new and ambitious development which would embody this ongoing tension.

24-29 Stanley Gardens

In February 1937 consulting surveyor and WPH committee member Claude Harrison, reported on a potential new development opportunity on the Society's favoured Ladbroke Estate. The former Twentieth Century Club, established in 1902 at 24-29 Stanley Gardens, had gained a reputation as one of 'two fine clubs' for women in the Notting Hill/Holland Park area.⁵⁹ Initial investment capital was provided by a trio of wealthy philanthropists in their twilight years: business magnates George Herring and Howard Morley, and financier Henri Louis Bischoffsheim of the Dutch-Jewish banking dynasty, the declared objective being 'to provide furnished residential rooms and board at economical prices to educated Women Workers engaged in professional, educational, literary, secretarial or other similar work.'⁶⁰ Accommodation for 112 residents with club facilities of 'dining, library and other sitting rooms', was overseen by lady superintendent Miss I. Jensen and provided in a row of adapted mid-Victorian stuccoed houses, originally designed by Thomas Allom and erected by the speculator Charles Henry Blake in the 1850s.⁶¹ Occupying 'a very choice site, high and bracing', initially at taking over numbers 25, 26 and 27, club premises thereafter expanded to encompass the two adjacent townhouses in the terrace.⁶²

By May 1937, preliminary plans prepared by Leverkus were presented for the approval of the committee. Only a partial set of drawings has survived, but these demonstrate the attention to detail lavished on this, their most ambitious project to date, a substantial investment purchased for

⁵⁹ March, 'Women's Residential Clubs', pp.333-39. The other was the London County Club at 81, Holland Road.

⁶⁰ Pat Thane, 'Bischoffsheim, Henri Louis [Henry Louis] (1829-1908), Financier', *ODNB*, 2008; Charles Welch and Carl Chinn, 'Herring, George (1832-1906), Businessman and Philanthropist', *ODNB*, 2006; TNA, BT 31/31854/72653 - Board of Trade Records, Files of Dissolved Companies: XXth Century Club Limited, 1902-1937. The club was voluntarily wound-up in 1936, balance sheets remaining healthy.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² March, 'Women's Residential Clubs', p.338.

£12,750 with conversion costs topping £10,000.⁶³ The scheme was described with pride in the 1937 annual report as ‘an innovation in the work of the Society’ marking ‘a higher standard of amenities, though, naturally, also a slightly higher scale of rentals, than has been usual in “Pioneer flats”’.⁶⁴ Configured as ‘forty Service Chambers and five Flats’, a number of the pre-existing small club bedrooms were combined to form the larger self-contained flats, supplied with more elaborate kitchens and specially designed dressers.⁶⁵ Wash basins, hitherto absent from WPH properties, were specified in the bathrooms in answer to heightened expectations of the prospective tenants who were willing to foot the bill.⁶⁶ Further luxuries included passenger lifts (already incorporated into the club’s fabric) and the first WPH restaurant housed within the basement of no. 28. Mrs Phillips, restaurant manager, would be responsible for providing lunch and dinner at ‘reasonable prices’. Although the Twentieth Century Club had been ‘open to non-residents as well as resident members’ – a familiar strategy which had regularly supplemented rental income at earlier women’s accommodations – the London County Council refused to allow the restaurant to be opened to the public.⁶⁷

WPH’s further adaptation of the townhouses at 24-29 Stanley Gardens highlights the iterative nature of property conversion by successive generations of women’s housing providers. Similarly, two houses at 3 and 4 Gliddon Road W14, united via party walls and remodelled into twenty small flats by WPH in 1931, were initially altered to serve as a boarding house for nurses in 1912, before accommodating trainee nursery teachers for the Froebel Society in 1920, an organisation dedicated to the development of kindergarten education.⁶⁸ In many respects the Stanley Gardens scheme might also be considered a *volte-face*, a retreat to traditional, Edwardian-style club accommodation, lacking either private cooking or sanitary amenities. However, the premise of the new scheme fitted with the recent trajectory of the society’s more recent acquisitions, which saw the purchase of three blocks of uniform, one-room flats let on a weekly basis from the United Women’s Homes Association (UWHA) in 1935. This finally enabled WPH to cater to less affluent workers. Conversely, the project was also a conscious attempt to modernise the WPH portfolio, offering tenants the sort of facilities increasingly being supplied as standard in the host of flat complexes springing up in and around the Capital since the mid-1930s. Although the 1937 Annual report boasted of the ongoing success of the existing WPH formula which ‘goes to prove that in spite of the invasion of London by modern luxury flats, Women’s Pioneer Housing is still an essential factor in the lives of many women’, there was evidently a new imperative to present their adapted developments in a more fashionable light.⁶⁹ In promotional artwork the

⁶³ LMA, LMA/4776/A/01/009 - WPH Committee minutes 22 Oct 1937.

⁶⁴ LMA, LMA/4776/A/03/003 - WPH Annual Reports 1937 and 1938.

⁶⁵ LMA, LMA/4776/D/05/032-037 - Gertrude Leverkus, 24-29 Stanley Gardens, floorplans and sections, c.1937

⁶⁶ LMA, LMA/4776/A/01/009 - WPH Committee minutes 04 May 1937.

⁶⁷ March, ‘Women’s Residential Clubs’, p.338.

⁶⁸ LMA, LMA/4776/D/02/012-013 - Leases and licenses, 3 and 4 Gliddon Road; LMA/4776/D/05/013 - Gertrude Leverkus, 3 and 4 Gliddon Road, floorplans, c.1931.

⁶⁹ LMA, LMA/4776/A/03/003 - WPH Annual Report 1937.

newly-converted Stanley Gardens scheme was portrayed with extraordinary artistic licence. The pen and ink illustration engaged in an architectural fiction whereby much of the formal and stylistic complexity of the 1850s townhouses was simplified: the heavy, Italianate dentilled cornice and pedimented window heads were all but erased; the window bays streamlined to suggest the curved elevations of a block with 'streamlined moderne' styling (Figs 42 and 43).⁷⁰ The image, juxtaposing the buildings with a symbol of the age, the motor car, aped a common motif employed in contemporary representations of Modernist architecture; didactic imagery designed to communicate with a more architecturally discerning audience of tenants and investors.⁷¹

By the retirement of Etheldred Browning as manager, in late 1938, riding high on a wave of success, with sixty properties and around 560 flats at near full capacity, and the Stanley Gardens development nearing completion, operations at the society entered the tense pre-Second World War political climate, recalled by Leverkus as a 'time of great national and personal anxiety'. Attention was diverted from the conversion of flats to the architecture of war. In anticipation of bombing campaigns, and in accordance with A.R.P. (air raid precautions), each house was supplied with black-out window screens, 'an electric lamp, two pails of sand and long handled shovels', with supervision organised by the tenants committee in case of air raids.⁷² The basements of four WPH properties would serve as shelters with ceilings altered by Leverkus with a Borough-supplied web of reinforced steel. As war approached, the committee were inundated with communications from fearful tenants requesting monthly tenancies and rent reductions. With numerous WPH flats vacated, the newly opened Stanley Gardens restaurant was deemed untenable and closed until further notice. It would be six challenging and financially debilitating years before the organisation could once again confidently blaze a trail in the sphere of women's housing.

The practice of providing women's accommodation through conversion was also frequently deployed by the UWHA. As discussed in Chapter 3, the UWHA's stated policy at its inception was to erect purpose-built housing, however, twenty-four of their forty-six inter-war developments, including the inaugural scheme at 18 Philbeach Gardens, were actually remodelled properties.⁷³ The strategy of uniting rows of townhouses to create a range of small flats was similarly reproduced, for example as seen at 2 to 7 Westbourne Grove, West London (Figs 44 and 45).

Adapted Villas

Another convenient route to providing women's housing in the inter-war decades involved the adaptation of large, detached Victorian family houses or 'villas' in the London suburbs, which, like

⁷⁰ LMA, LMA/4776/F/02/001 - Promotional illustration of 24-49 Stanley Gardens, unknown artist, c.1938; LMA/4776/F/02/002 - Stanley Gardens postcard n.d.

⁷¹ See for example Francis Yerbury, 'Le Corbusier, Villa Stein-de-Monzie with motor car', 1927 photograph reproduced in Iain Borden, 'Imaging Architecture: The Uses of Photography in the Practice of Architectural History', *Journal of Architecture*, 12 (2007), pp.62-4.

⁷² WL, 7GLE - Gertrude Leverkus, 'Auntie Gertrude's Life'; LMA, LMA/4776/A/01/009 - WPH Committee minutes Jun 1937.

⁷³ Field, 'A Home of One's Own', p.21

the terraced townhouses, had fallen from grace as victims of the 'servant problem' and spiralling costs. Set in substantial garden plots with leaseholds set to expire, many were vacant or ripe for re-development. By the turn of the century, it was commonplace for outlying villas, no longer able to command high rents, to be converted into middle-class flats. Projects like the re-modelling of 'Roseberry', Anerley Road, Camberwell by architect John W. Rhodes, where the now superfluous billiard room, library, butler's pantry and morning room were reconfigured to create an easily-maintained, more marketable five-room family flat on each floor.⁷⁴ The working through of effective spatial layouts assisted developers in shaping future purpose-built flats in such suburbs as Maida Vale and St John's Wood in the Borough of St Marylebone, where hundreds of such villas made way for middle-class mansion blocks before and after the First World War.

However, for those delivering women's housing, it was not always deemed expedient to demolish the pre-existing villas. Applying similar principles to Albany, Piccadilly (1805) the scheme developed for bachelors by Henry Holland (see Chapter 2), the inter-war women's housing providers often opted to reconfigure villas, creating bedroom accommodation on the upper floors and communal club facilities on lower levels, and extending or augmenting the structures with newly-constructed ranges of flats in the former gardens. A number of detached Victorian villas or 'lodges' on large plots were exploited by the UWHA. In 1926 for instance, a large house at 71 Lower Addiscombe Road, Croydon was acquired and converted to provide accommodation for eighteen women tenants. Re-named 'Kendal House', the scheme was subsequently augmented by the construction of 'Kendal Court', an additional two-storey range of flats built in the gardens in 1928. The evident success of the strategy led to the purchase and adaptation of a further detached Victorian villa in the same year at Kings Avenue, Clapham Park. The 'Victoria House' scheme also involved the erection of 'Victoria Court', a two-storey block of twenty-four flats built at the rear of the plot.

Case Study: Lady Workers Homes Ltd – Abbey Road scheme

The LWH inaugural project at 1 Abbey Road, St John's Wood involved the renovation and reconfiguration of the former family home of the Scottish landscape painter and Royal Academician John MacWhirter (1837-1911).⁷⁵ Following their extensive flat-building programme at St Pancras, Abraham Davis and associates turned their attention to a number of freehold sites and building leases acquired from the Eyre estate located in St John's Wood and on the fringes of Maida Vale.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Perks, *Residential Flats*, pp.150-3.

⁷⁵ John McWhirter, MacWhirter [McWhirter], John (1837-1911), landscape painter, *ODNB*, 2004. The zebra crossing outside and neighbouring villa (Abbey Road Studios - converted in 1931 by The Gramophone Recording Company, later EMI), were made famous by The Beatles 1969 album.

⁷⁶ Watson, 'Rebuilding London', p.76.

Like other speculators, Davis was attracted to the potential of such villas on large plots; the house lending itself well to residential club-type rooms and facilities, and the garden being of ample size to accommodate an additional block of flats. Opting to adapt rather than demolish and rebuild may have reflected the condition of the property or Davis' desire to conserve MacWhirter's former home. Given that Davis intended to open the restaurant to the public, a more traditional club format might also have fulfilled a perceived need for a respectable, socially acceptable space for women, which would help overcome St John's Wood's somewhat dubious reputation as a location for so-called 'kept women'.⁷⁷

The villa (demolished in the 1960s) had previously been remodelled by MacWhirter in 1885, the builder Mr E. Cox working to plans by architects Wallace and Flockhart to 'unite and blend into one two separate and already existing houses'.⁷⁸ This included the creation of an elevated artists' studio, *The Builder* reporting that 'the studio window commands one of the finest lights in St John's Wood' (Fig. 46).⁷⁹ Architectural plans relating to the LWH conversion of the house have not survived, but in line with Davis' penchant for placing mansion block restaurants on upper floors rather than in basements, the dining room was placed in the former studio.⁸⁰

Press coverage for the forthcoming scheme in *the Times*, described the private and communal facilities which were to be provided in the converted villa: a number of bedrooms with shared bathrooms on the upper floors, with a dining-room, drawing-room, entertainment hall, reading-room and lounge downstairs. The 'well-wooded grounds covering about an acre' also allowed scope for the construction of bespoke blocks of flats 'on two sides of the ground which will supply approximately 120 additional bedrooms with central heating and bathrooms':

These little flats are the kind of thing the woman worker has dreamed of but never hoped to see at the price. For 10s a week she has her own hall door opening into a little hall; she has a big, pleasant room wonderfully planned...a big, good-looking fixed sideboard to save the tenants buying much furniture...In the little kitchen is a fixed table, a sink, and a cooker, and off it is the greatest boon of all, the bath. There is a little balcony too, overlooking the grounds, and the big house is also at her disposal should she care to take advantage of its many rooms.⁸¹

The virtues of the specially designed, space and cost-conscious built-in furniture were similarly praised in the *Daily Express* Women and Their Work column 'the planning of the little flats is most artistic and cleverly arranged. Hanging cupboards, bookshelves, and inglenooks make it possible to utilise space to the best advantage, without the overcrowding of heavy furniture'.⁸² Condescending

⁷⁷ William Holman Hunt's Pre-Raphaelite painting 'The Awakening Conscience' (1853), a moral commentary on mistresses housed in St John's Wood was famously staged in Woodbine Villa, Alpha Road.

⁷⁸ 'House and Studio for Mr. J MacWhirter A.R.A.', *The Builder*, 49, 10 Oct 1885.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ 'The Lady Workers' Homes Ltd, Restaurant Opened', *Hampstead, St John's Wood and Kilburn Advertiser*, 04 Jan 1917, p.2 and 11 Jan 1917.

⁸¹ 'Flats for Women Workers', *The Times*, 21 Jul 1914, p.5.

⁸² 'Scheme to Solve the Housing Problem: Little Flats', *Daily Express*, 11 Oct 1915.

references to 'tiny' or 'little' spaces were partly justified given their compactness, but incorporating both cooking and sanitary facilities in one-room flats, whilst maintaining affordability was challenging; even more so during wartime. By October 1915 rentals of 12s 6d per week already represented a considerable uplift from the 10s indicated the previous year.

The most interesting part of the scheme as far as *The Times* was concerned, was the inclusion of twenty-six 'higher-rental flats' with 'every modern improvement'.⁸³ Floorplans submitted to the LCC architects' department in July of 1914, illustrate the spatial layout of each of the six storeys: ten one-room flats at the centre of the plan facing inward, and five larger flats with bay windows enjoying a more prominent aspect onto the Abbey or Garden Road (Fig. 48). These more commodious suites 'in which two sisters or friends or a family could live', varied in size between two and five rooms and catered to a range of possible household scenarios.⁸⁴ Bay-fronted dining and drawing rooms, and the inclusion of full-sized kitchens suggested occupation by prosperous middle-class couples or families, though spaces might as easily mutate into bedrooms for women sharers as needs dictated. For Davis and his associates, well-versed in the construction of flats, 'elastic' internal configurations future-proofed the development against changing market conditions thereby safeguarding their investment (Chapter 3).

Architecturally the new flats exhibited the formal and stylistic characteristics of red-brick mansion blocks, a building type which Davis had been perfecting since the late nineteenth century. The evolution in design reflected attempts to overcome the 'barrack-like' monotony of model dwelling company tenements, whilst moving closer to the West-End mansion-block model. The contrast was tangible in Davis Mansions, Whitechapel (1894-5), his first solo attempt to improve upon standard block dwellings, and the more recent Queen Alexandra Mansions (1912), St Pancras, an architecturally ambitious mansion block of eight storeys plus basement, one of the first projects of the newly-incorporated Central London Building Company.⁸⁵ At the Abbey Road flats, building elevations were functional, yet enlivened by arched window heads, gauged brickwork and cornice, whilst projection and recession alleviated the proliferation of multi-paned sash windows. With the block containing the one-room flats well-concealed within the plot, no attempt was made to disguise the small, triple apertures of the shared toilets and bed recesses, fully legible on the exterior (Fig. 49). More architectural refinement was reserved for the more visible Abbey Road façade, a symmetrical, seven-storey block with restrained classical detailing, projecting bays linked by balconies with decorative iron balustrades, and a central entrance framed by a stone arch at first floor level carrying a pair of engaged Doric columns. This newly erected block was rather unsympathetically bolted onto the side of the MacWhirter villa (Fig. 47). The overall composition of buildings, forming a familiar quadrangular arrangement surrounding a 'central lawn and flower garden', was suggestive of the sort of protected, semi-concealed communities realised in the

⁸³ 'Flats for Women Workers', *The Times*, 21 Jul 1914, p.5.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ Watson, *Rebuilding London*, pp.62-84

Edwardian women's schemes in the Garden Cities and Suburbs. One resident complimented the convenience of the scheme's amenities, provided in the converted villa on the more traditional club-basis:

Other flats I have seen seem to be designed by architects who have no idea of the needs of the educated woman of small means, only recognising the artisan's wife...who does all her washing and cooking.⁸⁶

The availability of a moderately priced hot meal had long been seen as a key component for exhausted women commuters working long hours in the city. Although contemporary hostels like Ada Lewis House aimed at a lower class of worker, often provided single women with communal laundry facilities, the cultural norm for middle-class women was to pay for this service.

The development would later be known as Abbey Road Mansions, bringing it in-line with the rest of the Davis portfolio, which, when the war ended, would continue to evolve under the Lady Workers Homes brand.

Conclusion

This chapter set out to explore the adapted women's housing schemes, the reasons for redevelopment rather than new-build, and why particular locations were selected. For WPH and UWHA, the adapted London townhouse offered a pragmatic, cost-effective solution throughout the inter-war decades. Regenerating existing housing stock through flat conversion was also closely aligned with central government policy directives after the War. The flexible, multi-storey townhouse form facilitated conversion into a range of flat types, and planning generally perpetuated traditional spatial hierarchies, with superior flats on the first and ground floors, and caretakers' flats and services in basements. Adaptive practice often became an iterative process when rows of townhouses, formerly converted into residential clubs earlier in the century, were subjected to further spatial and material transformation. With party walls frequently breached, this practice effectively created quasi-blocks of flats.

Adaptive-re-use provided the means to revive and re-configure elements of the built environment with minimal external change; a modest form of development deemed more appropriate for female reformers. Whilst transformative, such buildings also retained their social and cultural meanings as former family homes in middle-class metropolitan boroughs; a strategy which met the social and cultural aspirations of both the providers and occupants. Davis' adaptation of suburban villas carried similar advantages; a means to work through optimal flat formats and arrangements for the new venture, whilst realising the potential of large plots in up-and-coming

⁸⁶ WL, 334.109421 ROB - Special collections pamphlets: Roberts, D. J. for Lady Workers' Homes Limited, 'Real Homes for Women Workers: A Great Housing Scheme'.

suburbs. Thus, much like schemes of a previous generation, adaptive re-use continued to act as an essential ground for experimentation.

Chapter 7

Case Studies: Purpose-Built Schemes

Having examined adaptations of and additions to existing housing, this chapter focuses on newly built schemes. It examines their architectural characteristics in terms of style, form and spatial planning, including arrangements for dining and other communal facilities and external features such as gardens and landscaping. It considers the building types and forms adopted and assesses the continuities and discontinuities with the earlier women's schemes. A series of case studies are analysed, organised by building type, beginning with The Lady Workers Homes' (LWH) developments at St John's Wood and Highgate, before moving on to those of the United Women's Homes Association (UWHA) at Hammersmith, Hampstead Garden Suburb and Westminster.

Mansion Blocks

Case Study: The Lady Workers' Homes Ltd – St John's Wood

The first fully bespoke schemes for single women workers in London after the First World War were supplied by LWH. The mansion block form, deployed to great effect for their St Pancras developments, remained the model of choice for the Davis flat-building enterprises. Although the onset of war derailed progress, plans were afoot ahead of the armistice 'to swiftly take in hand' building plots acquired in the Borough of St Marylebone.¹ Like other speculators, Davis was keen to capitalise on potential opportunities arising in well-connected inner suburbs like St John's Wood or Maida Vale where many blocks of flats had already been approved on sites formerly occupied by large villas (Figs 50 and 51). Land here represented better value, being 'half the cost of land in the slum districts such as Somers Town or Bethnal Green'.²

In September 1918, Davis informed the London County Council (LCC) Architects' Department of their intention to augment their initial experiment at Abbey House with a further scheme for single women:

It is our desire to meet the large demands which we have for Flats for Ladies who follow some business or profession...the scheme has been laid out on the same lines as the very

¹ LMA, GLC/AR/BR/17/044766/02 - Correspondence: CLBC to LCC Architects' Department, 20 Sep 2018.

² TNA, HLG49/664 - Correspondence: PUHS to the Ministry of Health, 31 Jul 1919.

successful undertaking of the Lady Workers Homes built by us on the opposite side of Grove End Road, No.1, Abbey Road.³

The three-quarters of an acre freehold at 22 Grove End Road, with a detached, dilapidated house, stables and outbuildings, had been purchased from Sir James Duke in 1917 for £4300 but had lain dormant for the duration of the war.⁴ Architectural floorplans submitted for consideration proposed a T-shaped arrangement consisting of a block fronting onto the street containing larger flats, and a longer range at the rear for the more numerous smaller flats (Figs 52 and 53).⁵ Spacious three to five-room self-contained suites, many with dining and drawing rooms plus segregated service wings, targeted larger households where single women might share with friends or relatives. Various types of one-room flats were located further along the spinal corridor, ranging from LWH's signature self-contained 'flatlets' (with bed recess, kitchenette, small bathroom, built-in furniture and 'cosy inglenook') to a compact kitchenless version, where bathrooms were shared between four tenants. Regardless of size or status, most flats benefitted from a private balcony, however a spatial hierarchy operated, with better-appointed flats placed near the mosaic-floored entrance hall, and the most basic tucked into the building's inner corners.

There was clearly an intention to offer a broad range of options, with anticipated rentals varying from 5s to 8s per week.⁶ Combining larger flats with small had proved a successful strategy for Lady Feilding. It also allowed Davis to let the flats to general family households as demands changed, a future-proofing mechanism signified by the dedicated storage area for 'bicycles or prams' shown on the plans. In any case, like LWH's Abbey Road precursor, and the early Victorian societies before them (see Chapter 2), there was a desire to integrate single women's dwellings within a wider family environment. This differed from the women-only blocks generally favoured by providers in London thus far. The merits of each approach and its moral implications were deliberated when designing inter-war single women's schemes in Frankfurt.⁷ In a further departure, the restaurant and 'club' facilities of lounge, drawing room and reading room were located on the uppermost floor rather than the more usual ground and basements levels. Folding partitions also opened up the spaces to facilitate larger social functions (Fig. 53). The arrangements also allowed for the installation of Davis' patented 'service-lift system', where a series of service hubs connected to the main kitchen enabled hot meals to be delivered to the seven floors below (directly to the largest suites), much like a 'dumb-waiter'. A small shop 'where the tenants may purchase a loaf of bread, tea, sugar, butter or any other commodity which they may have "run out of" was also incorporated in the inner courtyard since 'the majority of shops are all closed by the time the tired

³ LMA, GLC/AR/BR/17/044766/02 - Correspondence: CLBC to LCC Architects' Department, 20 Sep 2018.

⁴ TNA, HLG49/664 - District Valuers Report, 21 Aug 1919.

⁵ LMA, GLC/AR/BR/17/044766/02, CLBC, 'Flats for Lady Workers', floorplans, Jul 1918.

⁶ TNA, HLG49/664 - Ministry of Health valuation report, n.d.

⁷ See Susan R. Henderson, 'Housing the Single Woman: The Frankfurt Experiment', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 68 (2009), 358-377

worker returns home'.⁸ A considerable portion of the upper floor plan was also set aside for dormitory-style staff accommodation, along with a ground floor self-contained flat for a male caretaker and family. Thus, in common with other women's schemes, whilst catering to middle-class 'lady workers', it simultaneously housed a 'hidden' class of worker.

The seven to eight-storey mansion block with narrow, vertical bays, was to be faced in yellow stock brick with red brick plinths, quoins and window arches. Most of the detailing was concentrated on the two upper storeys with a heavy dentilled cornice, triple 'venetian' style windows, polychrome brick bands and decorative consoles (Fig. 54).⁹ The aesthetics were reminiscent of the more architecturally sophisticated blocks for workers seen at the LCC's Boundary Road Estate (1900) or at the East End Dwellings Company's Tonbridge Houses, St Pancras (1904) adjacent to Davis' own blocks (Fig. 60). However, the proposed flats posed an unwelcome intervention to occupants of neighbouring villas; Mr Hart of 20 Grove End Road wrote to 'strongly object to...the erection of a block of flats of this height' which would 'depreciate the value of the surrounding properties'.¹⁰ Furthermore, although the Ministry thought the plans 'shrewdly done and the result of much experience', St Marylebone's Housing Section raised concerns on multiple counts, not least their dubious suitability for assistance under the National Housing Scheme: 'these flats do not appear to be for the working classes, and, generally speaking, are badly planned and badly lighted'.¹¹

Addison House

By the summer of 1919, Davis applied formally via the Public Utility Housing Society to the Ministry of Health and the scheme was approved in principle by the London Housing Board (LHB) and Public Works Loans Commissioners as a 'working class tenement of 124 flats'.¹² However, to reduce costs per flat and thereby be eligible for subsidy, the LWH's proposed design was substantially altered. The height was reduced to the standard five storeys, the lounge and dining room thus relocated to the ground floor (Fig. 56) and only one of the two passenger lifts retained.¹³ The 'complicated internal courtyards' were simplified in plan and ornamentation pared-back, the façade detailing being confined to gauged brick window arches and keystones (Fig. 55).¹⁴ The terrazzo paving used to differentiate lobbies serving the superior flats was to be replaced by 'red oxide' concrete throughout and such mouldings as pilasters, picture and dado rails dispensed with.¹⁵

⁸ Helen Souter, 'Bachelor Women in London', *Quiver*, Feb 1925, p.386.

⁹ LMA, GLC/AR/BR/17/044766/02, CLBC, 'Flats for Lady Workers', elevations, Jul 1918.

¹⁰ LMA, GLC/AR/BR/17/044766/01 - Correspondence Mr Hart to W.E. Riley (LCC Superintending Architect), 28 Sep 1918.

¹¹ LMA, GLC/AR/BR/17/044766/01 - Correspondence: Borough St Marylebone Housing Section to LCC Architects Department, 10 Oct 1918.

¹² TNA, HLG49/664 - Correspondence: PUHS to Ministry of Health, 07 Jul 1919.

¹³ TNA, HLG49/664 - Correspondence: Housing Commissioner to A. Davis, 13 Mar 1920. Costs were limited to £5200 for the site and £90,000 for the build.

¹⁴ TNA, HLG49/664 - Report: 'Grove End Road Flats', LHB Architect, c. Jul 1919.

¹⁵ TNA, HLG49/664 - Outline Building Specification: 'Block of flats for women workers at 22 Grove End Road', PUHS, Oct 1919; TNA, HLG49/664 - Correspondence: Board Surveyor, Housing Commissioner to PUHS, 04 Nov 1919.

To gain publicity and demonstrate Ministry endorsement of the scheme, Davis enquired whether Christopher Addison, the Minister of Health, might 'turn the first sod'. Since the LWH project was the first to be built under the National Housing Scheme in the Metropolitan area, the response was favourable: 'Mr Davis obviously wants an advertisement but the Minister may be disposed to agree. The scheme is undoubtedly a good one'.¹⁶ The foundation stone of the scheme, henceforth known as 'Addison House', 'as a mark of our esteem and a small recognition of Dr Addison's efforts and labour for the better housing of the people', was laid on the 15th of January 1920.¹⁷ The ceremony also afforded the minister an early opportunity to defend the pace of the Liberal's housing programme, arguing that whilst he 'might be hanged on a lamp-post' because progress had been slower than critics desired, 'when his remains had been taken down and duly dealt with, the nation would be glad that they had supported a housing scheme which required authorities all over the country to take over housing needs'.¹⁸

During construction, further changes were necessitated due to post-War escalating material costs, problems securing bricklayers and a shortage of delivery trucks. Unable to obtain stock bricks of sufficient quality through the Ministry of Supplies, the front elevation was faced in Dorking red pressed bricks and Flettons covered in roughcast used at first floor level to the rear.¹⁹ Cost-cutting did nonetheless seem to spark such innovations as an 'experimental bath constructed in one of the flats of concrete finished in cement and Pudlo', the waterproofing additive.²⁰ Correspondence relating to the build conveys Davis' sense of frustration with a bureaucratic process where minimal changes had to be approved and justified in advance, and where inspections by the District Surveyor were frequent, '...variations which we regard as great improvements...only actuated with the desire to do the very best possible in connexion with this important scheme'.²¹ With both public utility society and building contractor vested in the same hands, LHB officials were alert to the potential misappropriation of Treasury funds, advising that the project be 'carefully watched' and any variations strictly controlled.²² St Marylebone councillors also remained wary of Davis who they felt was 'not a philanthropist, and ...they were not satisfied with the genuineness of his motives'.²³ There were reports of rents being higher than stated and tenants asked to invest substantial qualifying sums.²⁴ As the scheme neared completion at the end of 1920, Davis raised his own criticisms of the Public Works Loans Board's (PWLB) retention of payments until completion which,

¹⁶ TNA, HLG49/664 - Correspondence: PUHS to LHB, 26 Nov 1919; TNA, HLG49/664 - Minutes: LHB and Ministry of Health, Dec 1919.

¹⁷ Addison 'House' as opposed to 'Mansions' also denoted the diminished architectural and social status of the block.

¹⁸ 'Dr. Addison on Himself', *Daily Mail*, 16 Jan 1920.

¹⁹ TNA, HLG49/664 - Correspondence: Hale, Son & Walder (PUHS Surveyors) to Surveyor LHB, 08 Apr 1920.

²⁰ TNA, HLG49/664 - Inspection Report: District Surveyor to LHB, 20 Oct 1920.

²¹ TNA, HLG49/664 - Correspondence: A. Davis (PUHS) to LHB, 15 Jul 1920.

²² TNA, HLG49/664 - Memoranda: LHB, 19-22 Apr 1920.

²³ TNA, HLG49/664 - Conference Minutes: LHB and Borough of St Marylebone, 18 May 1920. Investments of £50, £100 and £150 were required for 'bachelor flats, three and four-room flats respectively': TNA, HLG49/664 - Memoranda: LHB, 26 May - 1 Jun 1920.

²⁴ Watson, 'Rebuilding London', p.77. The LHB explained that public utility societies were entitled to ask tenants to take up loan stock of up to 25% of the capital cost of the flat required.

he claimed, was not the case for cottage schemes, as well as the prospect of his firm absorbing the uplift in labour and material costs.²⁵ Demand for the flats was certainly high, but changes to the building and internal configurations by the various government bodies had resulted in more flats for larger households and less for single women: the LWH original plans envisaged 42 larger flats and 143 small flats for single occupancy; the altered arrangement provided 44 and 80 respectively.²⁶

Circus Road Mansions and Elm Tree Mansions

Whilst Addison House was still under construction, plans were set in motion to extend the LWH development. Adjacent leasehold sites had been acquired from the Eyre Estate with permission to replace the existing villas with blocks of flats. At 43 Circus Road, early thoughts had been 'to convert the Circus Rd house into a club and restaurant for the use of the tenants...' along the lines of MacWhirter House, Abbey Road, but these were subsequently abandoned, and the decision made to utilise the plot to greater effect.²⁷ Funding was even less forthcoming on this occasion; first and foremost due to the flailing National Housing Scheme, but also simply by virtue of the Davis firm already having received funding.²⁸ Agreement was eventually reached and a new separate block for women, later known as 'Circus Road Mansions', was constructed to the north-east of Addison House. Perhaps learning from the strict funding regime for Addison House, the plan and elevation adopted a simpler, rationalised Neo-Georgian form. The design consisted of a central block flanked by pavilions, with a symmetrical red-brick façade, repeating bays of white Georgian-style sashes and Davis's signature keystones, and subtle neo-classical detailing around the entrance, balconies and dormers (Fig. 57). The scheme provided forty additional flats of various types, from one-room flatlets to four-room suites, distributed evenly across five levels.²⁹ As well as its own reading room, lounge and live-in staff accommodation, the dormered mansard level was to contain a top-floor restaurant, with doors opening onto a rooftop garden (Fig. 58). However, for reasons of economy, the restaurant was later substituted with a further accommodation floor.³⁰

A second 'extension' to the Addison House scheme, planned for a neighbouring lease at 24 Grove End Road – with the initial plan to connect the two buildings above a first floor archway – was also mooted for potential Treasury assistance during 1921 (Fig. 52).³¹ However progress was stalled by the protracted negotiations with the Eyre Estate concerning the freehold, and with the LCC

²⁵ TNA, HLG49/664 - Memorandum: LHB, 23 Nov 1920. The application for payment had been lodged in Jan 1920 and a loan of £71,400 plus subsidy of £3014.13 approved by the PWLB in Mar 1920. The building was completed early 1921.

²⁶ TNA, HLG49/664 - Rental schedules, n.d. The 80 smaller flats comprised 29 self-contained flatlets; 33 bed-sitting room flats with kitchenette and 18 without.

²⁷ TNA, HLG 49/664 - Minutes: Inspector to Local Government Board, 16 Jul 1919.

²⁸ LMA, GLC/AR/BR/17/044766/02 - Site plan 'London County Council, Housing of the Working Classes Acts 1890-1921'.

²⁹ The architectural drawings were autographed 'A. Davis': LMA, GLC/AR/BR/17/044766/02 - 'Addison House No.1 Extension, No.43 Circus Road', Drawings Nos. 1-7, floorplans and elevations including 'Plan of Restaurant and Roof Garden', Feb 1921. The block was renamed 'Circus Lodge' in 1962.

³⁰ TNA, HLG49/664 - Correspondence: PUHS to LHB, 16 Sep 1921. An agreement was finalised in November 1921 between the PUHS and the Public Works Loan Commissioners to advance the project the sum of £22,960.

³¹ LMA, GLC/AR/BR/17/044766/01 - LCC Building Acts Committee report, 21st Feb 1921; LMA, GLC/AR/BR/17/044766/02 - PUHS, 'Addison House Proposed Extension No.2', floorplans and elevations, Jul 1921.

architects department over legal covenants to satisfy the Building Acts.³² It was not until 1926 after Davis' death, that the firm eventually erected a block of two to five-room family flats adjoining Addison House.³³ A third LWH women's scheme, 'Elm Tree Road Mansions', was constructed with private finance in 1922-3 on a separate plot directly to the south of Addison House and Circus Road Mansions. Architectural plans and correspondence files related to this project do not appear to have survived, but this further addition for single women of around 100 flats was actively promoted in the press as part of their LWH's expanding 'St John's Wood estate'.³⁴ In July 1924 a landscaping plan connecting the trio of LWH women's schemes was conceived for the inner courtyard with lawns, seating and a network of covered walkways converging on a circular pavilion (Fig. 62).³⁵ Incorporating green areas complied with Building Act regulations concerning open space around buildings, but the concept also encouraged conviviality amongst the emerging community of women tenants. Such landscaping also offered LWH's tenants something of the seclusion and protection of the enclosed lawns and cloistered pathways of earlier suburban quadrangles like Waterlow Court (1909) at Hampstead Garden Suburb. Similar strategies to promote health and well-being had been deployed at the LCC's Boundary Estate (1900) where verdant courtyard gardens were planted between the blocks, and a bandstand pavilion provided the central focus at Arnold Circus; elevated on a platform created from the rubble of the former slums (Figs 59-61).³⁶

Case Study II: The Lady Workers' Homes Ltd – The Holly Lodge Estate, Highgate

A further opportunity for LWH to erect flats for single women workers arose at Highgate, North London, largely as an adjunct to Davis firm's re-development of the Holly Lodge Estate. The large site, located on the southern slopes of Highgate Hill, had formerly surrounded 'Holly Lodge', the summer retreat of the late Baroness Angela Burdett-Coutts (1814-1906), famed philanthropist and heiress to the Coutts banking fortune. Coutts had herself been involved in housing women, co-founding 'Urania Cottage', Shepherd's Bush (1847) with Charles Dickens as a refuge for homeless women, and a hostel for female art students in Brunswick Square, Bloomsbury (1879) with Louisa Twining, the workhouse and Poor Law reformer.³⁷ She also developed 'Holly Village' (1865), a gothic revival housing scheme for her estate workers designed by Henry Darbishire, the Peabody Trust architect.³⁸ They also collaborated on 'Columbia Market', Bethnal Green (1866-9), a failed venture

³² Watson, 'Rebuilding London', p.75

³³ It is unclear whether the original 1921 scheme was for families or single women. LMA, GLC/AR/BR/17/044766/02 - CLBC, 24 Grove End Road site plan, 15 Dec 1926.

³⁴ 'A Safe & Beneficial 6% Investment', *The Times*, 15 Jul 1922; 'Flats to Let: Elm Tree Road', *The Times*, 06 Oct 1922. The flats were let at £90 to £160 per annum: 'Sound and Beneficial Investment', *Daily Telegraph*, 12 Jan 1923.

³⁵ LMA, GLC/AR/BR/17/044766/02 - Landscape plan with detail of covered way, Jul 1924.

³⁶ Named after Sir Arthur Arnold, chairman of London County Council in the mid-1890s: Beattie, *A Revolution in London Housing*.

³⁷ For Coutts see Edna Healey, *Lady Unknown: The Life of Angela Burdett-Coutts*, 2011 edn (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1978); Diana Orton, *Made of Gold: A Biography of Angela Burdett Coutts*, (London: H. Hamilton, 1980).

³⁸ Christopher McIntosh, 'Victorian Fantasy in Highgate', *Country Life*, 05 Dec 1968, pp.1491-4.

with remarkable parallels to Davis' own ill-fated covered market speculation at Fashion Street, Spitalfields (1904-5), which brought him to the brink of financial ruin (see Chapter 3).³⁹

When Coutts died in 1906, the house and sixty-acre estate failed to sell. Following her husband's death in 1921, trustees re-marketed the estate in lots promoting its 'unrivalled position...commanding magnificent views over the Metropolis', however only outlying freeholds secured buyers (Fig. 64).⁴⁰ In his capacity as Alderman, and with a track record in supplying public utility housing, in the summer of 1922 Davis attempted to persuade the St Pancras Borough Housing Section to purchase the land for re-development. Unsuccessful, in 1923 he purchased the remainder of the estate himself for £45,000, resurrecting another of his companies for the purpose, London Garden Suburbs Limited.⁴¹ Around this time Davis and his business associates were beginning to tap into the growing speculative potential of suburban housing estates around London.⁴² In devising the master plan for the estate along garden suburb lines, a less familiar context, Davis had recourse to the spatial principles deployed by Raymond Unwin and Barry Parker at Brentham, Ealing from 1901 and at nearby Hampstead Garden Suburb since 1909. The resultant street layout, linear rather than organic and lacking the favoured closes and culs-de-sac, seemed more closely aligned with a desire to maximise profits. However, the estate plan possessed some more familiar garden suburb characteristics. The low-density (eight per acre) semi-detached housing, bounded by the elliptic sweep of Swains Lane and West Hill, was ranged along Hillway (the north-south spinal roadway) and four wide tree-lined avenues. A small handful of larger detached houses were placed near the ornamental gardens of the demolished mansion house (Fig. 65).⁴³

The formal and stylistic design choice made for the new housing also represented a distinct departure from Davis' earlier developments. The shift towards the popular Neo-Tudor style was partly due to the estate's location at Highgate, which unlike some suburbs peripheral to London had 'remained conservative' with 'old-time country houses' and 'ancient hostelries'.⁴⁴ It also responded more directly to trends in the emerging owner-occupied, middle-class speculative housing sector, where Tudoresque elements were applied liberally across the growing number of family suburban estates and ribbon developments facilitated by London's ever-expanding transport infrastructure.⁴⁵ The aesthetic chimed with imagery promoted by the Metropolitan Railway and much of the housing

³⁹ For Columbia Market see *A History of the County of Middlesex: Volume 11, Stepney, Bethnal Green*, ed. T. F. T. Baker (London, 1998), p.189; Watson, 'Rebuilding London', pp.68-9.

⁴⁰ Joseph Stower sales advertisement for the Holly Lodge Estate, Highgate, *Country Life*, 27 May 1922, p.38.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, p.77. Margaret Downing, *The Story of Holly Lodge*, (unpublished manuscript: Holly Lodge Residents Association, 2009).

⁴² The London Housing Society was involved in developing estates at Pinner Hill and Stanmore amongst other locations: Watson, 'Rebuilding London', p.83. For an account see Jackson, *Semi-Detached London*, pp.99-119.

⁴³ Block Plan: Holly Lodge Estate, Central London Building Company, c. Jul 1923, LMA - GLC/AR/BR/17/051249/01.

⁴⁴ A. E. Richardson, 'Highgate', *Architecture*, Vol 4 (1926).

⁴⁵ For an account see Oliver, Davis, and Bentley, *Dunroamin: The Suburban Semi and its Enemies*; Jackson, *Semi-Detached London*.

erected in London's north-western suburbs like Kenton and Harrow by contemporary firms including Nash and Costin (Fig. 67 and 68).⁴⁶

Its roots lay in the 'Old English' domestic style, inspired by the Arts and Crafts movement and developed by Richard Norman Shaw, William Eden Nesfield and Edwin Lutyens amongst others.⁴⁷ An alternative to the 'Queen Anne' domestic, it drew inspiration from traditional vernacular forms, materials and techniques such as timber-framing and tile-hanging. The 'black and white' aesthetic of half-timbering had been adopted for housing constructed at model garden villages such as Cadbury's Bournville, Birmingham and the Lever Brothers' Port Sunlight, Merseyside since the 1890s.⁴⁸ Though shunned in avant-garde architectural circles and derided as nostalgic pastiche, the so-called 'Tudorbethan' enjoyed considerable public favour between the wars, adapted for numerous building types, from golf clubhouses to seaside pleasure piers. The style was celebrated at successive *Daily Mail* Ideal Home Exhibitions and deployed to spectacular effect by Edwin T. Hall and E. Stanley Hall in the rebuilding of London department store Liberty & Co (1922-4).⁴⁹ For inter-war speculators and aspiring lower-middle class families investing in more autonomous form of tenure, it offered a means to differentiate the new homes from the simplified Neo-Georgian generally adopted for cottages at local authority estates. Recent more nuanced interpretations point to the cultural and psychological meanings behind the style's popularity. Adopting a style with deep-seated national associations allowed the shaping of a distinctive suburban modernity, which fused new with old to imbue a sense of stability and continuity with the past.⁵⁰

With roadways laid by the Autumn of 1923, construction began at the foot of the estate with a parade of shops on Swains Lane designed by 'Abraham Davies, architect'.⁵¹ The Neo-Tudor aesthetic, which would soon unify the estate, was achieved through gables with decorative barge boards and finials, tall brick chimneys, small hipped dormers, herringbone brickwork and 'sham timbers', creosoted and pinned to roughcast elevations.⁵² Houses were individuated through subtle variations in the timber motifs, the position of bays, doors and balconies and repetition alleviated by semis arranged as alternating pairs (Fig. 69). Although instrumental in the design and development during the early stages of the estate, Davis' health, which had been failing for some

⁴⁶ Ibid, pp.99-109; Cyril A. Wilkinson, cover illustration, 'Metro-Land', (Metropolitan Railway, 1921).

⁴⁷ Gavin Stamp, 'Neo-Tudor and Its Enemies', *Architectural History*, 49 (2006), 1-33

⁴⁸ Gillian Darley, *Villages of Vision: A Study of Strange Utopias*, Rev. edn (Nottingham: Five Leaves, 2007). See also Michael Harrison, *Bournville: Model Village to Garden Suburb*, (Chichester: Phillimore, 1999); Amanda Rees, 'Nineteenth-Century Planned Industrial Communities and the Role of Aesthetics in Spatial Practices: The Visual Ideologies of Pullman and Port Sunlight', *Journal of Cultural Geography*, 29 (2012).

⁴⁹ Historic England, 'Premises of Messrs Liberty and Company Limited (Tudor Building)', Listing: 1357064.

⁵⁰ For example Stamp, *Neo-Tudor*; Andrew Ballantyne and Andrew Law, *Tudoresque: In Pursuit of the Ideal Home*, (London: Reaktion Books, 2011). Deborah Sugg Ryan, 'Living in a "Half-Baked Pageant": The Tudorbethan Semi and Suburban Modernity in Britain, 1918-39', *Home Cultures*, 8 (2011), 217-244.

⁵¹ LMA, GLC/AR/BR/17/051249/01 - Swains Lane shops, floorplans and elevations, 1923.

⁵² LMA, GLC/AR/BR/17/051249/01 - CLBC, 'Detail of Sham Half-Timbered Work', Makepeace Mansions Blocks VII-X, Apr 1927.

time, suddenly deteriorated.⁵³ Construction at the estate continued after his death in January 1924, with his son-in-law Frank Myers at the helm, but plans for the Holly Lodge garden suburb to consist solely of family villas were set aside.⁵⁴ Purportedly due to rising infrastructure costs at the site, land to the east of the spine roadway, originally envisioned to accommodate around 100 semis, was designated for blocks of flats (Figs 65 and 66). In light of the success of the LWH enterprise, the majority of these flats would be for single women. The further decision to design these taller, multi-storey buildings in a matching Neo-Tudor aesthetic, resulted in what would become the most visually arresting element of the estate.

For design inspiration the CLBC might have looked to flats in low-rise, two to three storey quadrangular formats, which continued to be favoured for suburban contexts. St George's Court, Bournville (1924), for example, a recent scheme of thirty-two flats for single women erected by Elizabeth Cadbury, or Guessens Court (1925), forty flats designed by H. Clapham Lander at Welwyn Garden City with a separate three-storey restaurant block. They opted instead for a denser more familiar model; four and five-storey mansion blocks. The first flat-building phase commenced with eight blocks erected either side of Langbourne Avenue. As at previous LWH schemes, the broad range of one to four-room flats were aimed at single women and women sharers, with tenants encouraged to bring their 'dependent female relatives'.⁵⁵ By December 1925, 'ideal flats' at 'Langbourne Mansions', with the modern convenience of gas, electric lighting and power, were being advertised at inclusive rentals of £150 per annum.⁵⁶ Thereafter further blocks of flats followed, configured at greater density and aimed more exclusively at women workers living alone: 'Makepeace Mansions', ten blocks at Makepeace Avenue and 'Holly Lodge Mansions', thirteen blocks at Oakeshott Avenue (Fig. 70).⁵⁷ Four to five storeys in height, the steep fall of the land accommodated a lower ground level where a centrally located, three-room caretaker flat was situated. Floors were configured internally into a variety of one-room flat types, from self-contained flatlets (albeit without the characteristic Davis inglenooks) to cheaper kitchenless versions where sanitary amenities were shared between four. The newly created flatted community, 'for business and professional women', was populated with female workers in a wide variety of occupations. Tenants in the smallest flats included such residents as Miss Rammel living at flat 38, Holly Lodge Mansions; a 'university woman' and experienced teacher who specialised in educating children with special needs.⁵⁸

The mansion blocks received a similar Tudoresque treatment as the houses with the addition of slim corner towers, red brick plinths, and prominent blackened timbers in diamond,

⁵³ 'Obituary: Alderman A. Davis, J.P.', *St Pancras Gazette*, 01 Feb 1924, p.5.

⁵⁴ Francis Henry Myers was listed 'Managing Director and Chairman in place of Abraham Davis deceased', 11 Mar 1924: TNA, BT13/21077/125709 - Board of Trade Records, Files of Dissolved Companies: CLBC.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Sunday Times*, 06 Dec 1925, p.31.

⁵⁷ LMA, GLC/AR/BR/17/051249/01 - Holly Lodge Mansions, floorplans, 05 Oct 1927. There were 88 flats at Langbourne Mansions, 269 and 408 flats at Makepeace and Oakeshott respectively: Downing, *The Story of Holly Lodge*, p.9.

⁵⁸ Classified advertisement, *Woman's Leader*, 27 Sep 1929, p.260.

quatrefoil and circle motifs (Figs 71 and 75). As a standard cost-cutting strategy, detailing was concentrated on the street-facing facades, starkly contrasting with the plain, white-rendered side and rear elevations which conveyed a decidedly Modernist aesthetic (Fig. 75). For critics of the Neo-Tudor style, this would no doubt have epitomised the superficiality of the 'false gables' and 'sham half-timbering'.⁵⁹ The concept of fusing the multi-storey mansion block form with Neo-Tudor styling, uniting them aesthetically with the houses, was aligned with the LWH's usual desire to integrate women's flats within wider family estates. However, the verticality of the blocks was accentuated by the elevated location and their juxtaposition against the low-lying villas (Fig. 76). Dominating the north-eastern section as 'the most prominent buildings on the estate', they were later referred to disparagingly as 'weird half-timbered mansion blocks' in the *Buildings of England*.⁶⁰ The idiosyncratic formula was evidently deemed successful, replicated at further CLBC flat developments: Clifton Court, Maida Vale (1925) for Service Flats Ltd, and Vernon Court, Hendon Way, Cricklewood (1930), for the LHS (Fig. 77).⁶¹

As soon as Langbourne Mansions were underway, plans were afoot for a standalone, three-storey 'Restaurant and Club', to be built in a complementary style and situated near the flats on Makepeace Avenue (Figs 72-74). As at St Johns Wood, the provision of such facilities, particularly for those lacking a kitchenette, compensated for the outlying location distant from central London's restaurants and clubs. Serving the entire estate, it also acted as a central community hub, fostering a sense of belonging and encouraging active citizenship. As well as a large ground floor restaurant, the sloping topography facilitated a lower ground level with a reading room and ladies lavatory (indicating its primary designation for the women tenants). Large and small 'club' rooms occupied the upper floor, the former with a raised stage and large balcony overlooking the gardens, and the latter acting as an additional reading space. By 1927, these spaces were referred to as the 'Assembly Rooms', a shift in identity signifying the building's function as a meeting venue for the entire estate community rather than the lady workers alone.⁶² Amenities, serving body as well as mind, extended to the outdoor environment, with hard tennis and badminton courts provided for residents and the former ornamental gardens of Holly Lodge becoming 'a beautiful park...reserved exclusively for the use of residents' offering 'privacy and restful peace'.⁶³ Much like the St John's Wood development, the landscaping scheme aimed to create a secluded, secure haven in the

⁵⁹ Cross sections illustrate the 'false gables' applied to the rectilinear structure: LMA, GLC/AR/BR/17/051249/01 - CLBC, Makepeace Mansions Blocks VII, 04 Mar 1927.

⁶⁰ Bridget Cherry and Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Buildings of England - London 4: North*, (London: Penguin, 1998), pp.415-6.

⁶¹ LMA, GLC/AR/BR/06/055480 - Clifton Court, Aberdeen Place, Maida Vale, 1925; LMA, GLC/AR/BR/17/067518 - Vernon Court Flats, London Housing Society Limited, 4-6 Burgess Hill, Hampstead, 1930. Pioneering aviator and former typist Amy Johnson (1903-1941) moved into newly-built Flat 5 in 1930: English Heritage Blue Plaques: <https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/blue-plaques/amy-johnson/> [accessed 03 Feb 2023].

⁶² LMA, GLC/AR/BR/07/03863 - Holly Lodge Estate Restaurant and Clubs. The building hosted community meetings, events and clubs. For a discussion on community centres in the period see Elizabeth Darling and Alistair Fair, 'The Core': The Centre as a Concept in Twentieth-Century British Planning and Architecture. Part One: The Emergence of the Idea', *Planning Perspectives*, Forthcoming (2022).

⁶³ 'Live on the Holly Lodge Estate Highgate', *Country Life*, 23 Jul 1927, p.34.

communal gardens between the women's flats. The sense of enclosure was enhanced by the inclusion of a single-storey block of garden-facing, mews-style flats which closed off the eastern end of the open space in an unobtrusive and picturesque manner (Fig. 78).

Promotional campaigns revolved around the estate's verdant setting and topography and Highgate's geographical and social relationship to the city. Much as 'Metro-land' developers, advertisements focused on the 'sylvan loveliness of Kenwood and picturesque charm of Hampstead Heath', and extolled the benefits of this 'Country Estate in Town' where one might live in 'the bracing air of healthy Highgate'.⁶⁴ Historically Highgate, around five miles from the centre and main gateway to the North, had long enjoyed a reputation as a lofty, healthy and pleasurable retreat for the middle classes from the metropolis.⁶⁵ Marketing slogans in the national press such as 'The House You Want' – aping the campaign of housing reformer and GCTPA chair Richard Reiss – evoked the 'Homes for Heroes' and garden city spirit.⁶⁶ Advertisements for the flats, boasting 'Bachelor Girl Problem Solved', underlined the middle-class status of the development by quoting monthly rather than weekly rental terms.⁶⁷ Early maps promoted the train, underground and tramway services serving the Estate (Fig. 63), however the hilly aspect presented difficulties for many tenants. In May 1934 the LWH directors arranged the service of a 'company car from the foot of the estate' which ran to a timetable from the garage on Hillway, conveying lady workers to their homes.⁶⁸

Not all welcomed the supplanting of a new suburban community on Highgate's elevated slopes. One local resident complained that the development 'permanently disfigured' the views from Parliament Hill.⁶⁹ A series of locked gates preventing locals from crossing the new estate to reach Waterlow Park to the east or the bathing ponds to the west, drew further criticism.⁷⁰ No formal public right of way existed, but securing public access was felt to partly compensate for the scar inflicted on the landscape.⁷¹ Although the CLBC gladly exploited the marketing potential of a private 'gated community' in their sales literature, the gates were originally proposed by the LCC in response to residents' complaints of damage to property and 'serious nuisances'.⁷²

The efforts of Abraham Davis and the LWH enterprise to provide women's housing at the Holly Lodge Estate and elsewhere, were commemorated by a memorial fountain and four stone plaques installed by the directors in the gardens between Makepeace and Oakeshott Avenues.

⁶⁴ Classified advertisements: *Sunday Times*, 24 Jan 1926, p.24 and *Country Life*, 23 Jul 1927, p.35.

⁶⁵ See Elizabeth McKellar, *Landscapes of London: The City, the Country and the Suburbs, 1660-1840*, (New Haven, CT; London: Yale University Press, 2013).

⁶⁶ *Daily Mail*, 09 May 1928, p.8; Richard Reiss, *The Home I Want*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1918). House prices ranged from £1500 to £3500, rising to £5750 for the larger detached

⁶⁷ 'Bachelor Girl Problem Solved', *Daily Mirror*, 15 Oct 1930, p.10. Adverts in the press in 1929 quoted flat rentals from £3 5s to £6 10s per month.

⁶⁸ 'Ideal Flats for Ladies', *Sunday Times*, 19 May 1935, p.37; Downing, *The Story of Holly Lodge*, p.14.

⁶⁹ LMA, GLC/AR/BR/06/051249 - Correspondence: G.S. Ford to LCC, 01 Jul 1929.

⁷⁰ Waterlow Park was named after Sydney Waterlow, founder of the Improved Industrial Dwellings Company.

⁷¹ LMA, GLC/AR/BR/06/051249 - Correspondence: G.S. Ford to LCC, 01 Jul 1929.

⁷² LMA, GLC/AR/BR/06/051249 - LCC Report, 12 Oct 1925; correspondence: CLBC to LCC, 02 Jul 1927.

Unveiled by his wife Helena on Empire Day 1936, the inscriptions underlined Davis' personal contribution as 'pioneer of flats for ladies and founder of The Lady Workers' Homes Ltd' (Fig. 78). The central sculpture, a seated female figure reading a book, presumably depicted a lady resident benefitting from the club reading rooms, peaceful verdant surroundings and private living spaces.

Cottage Flats

Case Study: The United Women's Homes Association – Hammersmith

In 1926 the UWHA acquired an awkward, wedge-shaped plot of land in Hammersmith, West London. The freehold site – at the junction of Du Cane Road and Wood Lane, abutting the Great Western and Central London Railway line and close to the White City exhibition grounds – would become the location of their first London-based purpose-built development. Build operations began the previous year with blocks of cottage flats for women members at Ladysmith Road, Brighton, with similar flats also constructed at Leigh-on-Sea and Merton Road, Wandsworth. From their inception, the 'homely' cottage flat became an integral part of the association's identity, central to the artwork of the UWHA corporate badge and their promotional literature (Fig. 79). The decision to adopt the cottage flat model for their schemes was partly financial, thought to be the most likely means to qualify for subsidies under the Chamberlain Housing Acts of 1923 and 1924.⁷³ It also responded directly to the wishes of the prospective tenants. As managing director Alban Gordon indicated, 'almost without exception the applicants state that they approve of the principle of flats in small houses' rather than larger blocks.⁷⁴

The first modest scheme of eight flats was approved by the LCC Architects Department in October 1926. Designed by architects Hendry and Schooling to evoke a row of cottages, it consisted of a modest, low-rise building with four two-room flats. The central block was flanked by pavilions, with a hipped roof, large brick chimneys and façade in Fletton brickwork covered in white roughcast, presumably for reasons of economy.⁷⁵ Simplified Neo-Georgian styling was typical of the local authority cottage estates and co-partnership housing erected in the garden cities and suburbs (Fig. 80). Arrangements where each cottage flat had its own front door, with upper flats accessed via two external staircases, also echoed the model artisan flats of the mid-nineteenth century (see Chapter 2) affording the dwellings a greater sense of privacy and individual identity. Each flat contained a kitchenette partitioned from the main living area, a separate bedroom and bathroom, and a range of built-in cupboards and shelving.

A modified block plan of March 1927 duplicated this first scheme, adding two additional smaller blocks: 'Alcott House' and 'Anderson House' were conceived to visually complement the

⁷³ The UWHA obtained subsidies for the cottage flats of £9 a year per flat (£8 for the four-room) for a period of 20 years: LMA, GLC/AR/BR/06/058709 - correspondence UWHA and LCC, Sep 1927.

⁷⁴ 'Report by Mr. Gordon', *Feminine Life*, Jul 1925, p.2.

⁷⁵ LMA, GLC/AR/BR/06/058709 - Hendry and Schooling, UWHA Du Cane Road, elevations and floorplans, 12 Oct 1926.

larger 'Selma House' and 'Garrett House' in a symmetrical composition (Fig. 82).⁷⁶ The intention, as with all cottage flats, was to create the illusion of individual family homes: 'from the outside [the scheme] will have the appearance of a substantial detached double-fronted house, with front door in the centre'.⁷⁷ The deception was enhanced by the canopied porch leading to the hallway and an internal staircase serving the four, three-room self-contained flats. A visual impression of bedrooms on the upper floor rather than flats was also cleverly created by the raised string line of the elevation (Fig. 81).⁷⁸ The layout of the buildings resembling short terraces adopted the sort of optimum groupings of cottage dwellings recommended in publications such as James and Yerbury's book on the design of small 'community' housing.⁷⁹ Once built, the blocks were set back from the road amongst trees and lawned front gardens entered via small picket gates (Figs 83 and 84).⁸⁰

Although the group of twenty-two flats erected by the association was successful in obtaining subsidies and exploiting a tight section of the building plot, development at such a modest scale was an issue given the huge demand from women members. The UWHA experimented with two further iterations of the cottage flat type at the Hammersmith site. The first, 'The Quadrangle' (1927), provided three floors of cottage flats arranged in a fully enclosed quadrangle, a format deployed for women's cooperative housing in the suburbs since the beginning of the century. The scheme may also have drawn inspiration from 'The Quadrangle' at Herne Hill, a development for single women workers over the age of thirty-five, constructed before the War but recently extended with a further range of one-room flatlets (Chapter 2). The formal qualities closely replicated the existing cottage aesthetic at the site, but there was a clear attempt to increase densities without the need for women to share. The scheme provided thirty-six, small self-contained flatlets ranged over two storeys and a dormered attic level, with a two-room caretaker flat on the ground floor. Each flat benefitted from a bath, but as with many working-class flats, this was placed within the kitchenette. Like many older model dwelling schemes, the tall, four-sided arrangement may also have suffered from a lack of light entering the inner courtyard.

The final UWHA cottage scheme at the site was planned and constructed in 1928-9 on the section of the plot facing onto Wood Lane, consisting of a block of two-storey cottage flats over a row of twelve shop units. The strategy of supplementing the income of women's schemes by letting ground-level shops had been previously used by the YWCA and the Ladies' Dwelling Company. The

⁷⁶ Ibid, revised block plan, 16 Mar 1927. The composition was inspired by Hendry and Schooling's sketches: LMA, A/FWA/C/D/294/001 - UWHA First Annual Report and Balance Sheet, 31 Dec 1925, 'Suggestion for a UWHA house', p.7. Commemorating prominent women campaigners/pioneers became a UWHA tradition, for example the Garrett Anderson family; American author Louisa May Alcott (1832-1888); and Selma Lagerlöf (1858-1940), the first woman to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.

⁷⁷ LMA, GLC/AR/BR/06/058709 - Hendry and Schooling, UWHA Du Cane Rd, blueprint for Block B elevations and floorplans, 12 Jan 1927.

⁷⁸ *Feminine Life*, Jul 1925, p.5.

⁷⁹ C. H. James and F. R. Yerbury, *Small Houses for the Community*, (London: C. Lockwood, 1924).

⁸⁰ WL, 363.59209421 HOM - 'A Home of One's Own', prospectus of The Second United Women's Homes Association, (London: United Publishing Society, c.1928), cover illustration. 'Alcott House' and 'Anderson House' were originally to be built for the 'United Citizens' Homes Association', a sister public utility society for families, but the venture abandoned.

accommodation consisted of twenty-four, self-contained one-room flatlets, accessed via three staircases and galleries at the rear of the building (Fig. 85).

Still insufficient to meet the demand for smaller flats, the remainder of the Hammersmith site also accommodated further schemes which adopted a more radical approach to design, inspired by the modern movement and the mass housing schemes recently constructed in continental Europe. These schemes will be explored in greater detail later in the chapter.

Case Study II: The United Women's Homes Association – Hampstead Garden Suburb

In 1927 the UWHA opened a further, long-anticipated development at the Hampstead Garden Suburb. The seeds of opportunity to build in this location were first planted in 1921, when UWHA President Lady Emmott chaired the women's housing sub-committee for the Local Government Board. Working alongside the suburb's founder Henrietta Barnett and Dorothy Peel amongst others, their investigations were originally focused on 'cooperative and communal arrangements' but later shifted onto the more fertile ground of accommodation for single women workers.⁸¹ The explorative exercise, which involved compiling testimonies from a variety of female wage-earners, convinced Barnett of the need to incorporate more such schemes at the Hampstead Garden Suburb 'for working women of every class of society.'⁸²

Though situated beyond the county of London on the outskirts of the metropolis, the suburb had been favoured by the UWHA as a prime location since its inception. Like Women's Pioneer Housing (WPH), the UWHA was affiliated to the GCTPA, connections forged through Lady Emmott's role on the Council and as former chair of the Women's Section. With scope for long leases and extensive experience of co-partnership, the garden cities and suburbs were as practicable as they were desirable. In the 1890s the Ladies Dwelling Company had been keen to extend their developments into leafy Hampstead. By the mid-1920s the expanded transport network had helped the location become even more feasible, 'a little way from Golders Green Tube Station' with 'frequent service of trams and buses...within a hundred yards'.⁸³ The continued demand for the sort of low-rise schemes for single women constructed at the garden cities and suburbs was confirmed by the representatives of the Association of Women Clerks and Secretaries, who highlighted 'the crying need for more places like Waterlow Court in the Hampstead Garden Suburb'.⁸⁴

Queen's Court

The first set of prospective designs were sketched by the firm Thomas Garrett and Sons, architects of the UWHA's first purpose-built flats at Brighton, with Barry Parker, Hampstead Garden Suburb Trust architect and planner, acting as consultant. Illustrations of the three separate and

⁸¹ Pearson, *The Architectural and Social History of Cooperative Living*, pp.153-4.

⁸² Barnett, *The Story of the Growth of the Hampstead Garden Suburb*, p.71.

⁸³ LMA, A/FWA/C/D/294/001 - UWHA First Annual Report and Balance Sheet, 31 Dec 1925, p.9.

⁸⁴ Pearson, *The Architectural and Social History of Cooperative Living*, p.145.

architecturally distinct blocks of flats were featured prominently in the first UWHA prospectus (Fig. 86).⁸⁵ The original plan for half-timbered, gabled three-storey buildings with a wide asymmetrical frontage and styled in a neo-vernacular, arts and crafts aesthetic, was conceived to harmonise with the surroundings, in keeping with 'the charming old-world character of the beautiful garden suburb'.⁸⁶ The design concept took its cues from the first scheme for single women at the suburb, opened in July 1909; the 'quaint and interesting buildings' comprising Baillie Scott's Waterlow Court, designed for the Improved Industrial Dwellings Company (IIDC).⁸⁷ As Barnett later explained, the impetus for incorporating this earlier women's scheme stemmed from the discomforts suffered by her female settlement workers, who were obliged to live 'in drear neighbourhoods lodged in rooms over-filled with furniture' and overseen by 'disagreeable landladies'.⁸⁸ The layout was based upon an 'ideal quadrangle' sketched by Raymond Unwin and worked up by the IIDC's David Waterlow and Arthur Moore, with internal features and amenities closely specified by Barnett.⁸⁹

By the mid-1920s the need to expand and democratise the women's housing offering at the suburb took on renewed significance for Barnett: 'low-rented hostels for young women was, is, and will be one of my cherished schemes'.⁹⁰ The proposed site for the UWHA scheme was located at the rear of two pre-existing blocks of flats and shops, Arcade House and Temple Fortune House which marked this entrance point to the suburb (Fig. 87 and 88). This pentagonal plot, known as 'Temple Fortune Open Space', formed the central focus for a set of radiating roads lined with housing: Asmunds Way, Asmunds Place, Temple Fortune Hill and Hampstead Way. Originally earmarked for buildings in Parker and Unwin's 1907 preliminary plans, before the War it was subsequently designated as a space for a public garden with a circular pond and tennis courts. In the face of considerable opposition, Emmott and Barnett championed the site as the setting for a new scheme for single women workers, overturning the covenants restricting development.⁹¹

Concessions to the Hampstead Garden Suburb Trust at this sensitive site were evident in the formal planning. The adoption of the elongated building layout wrapping around the perimeter of the site, retained much of the open space whilst still allowing private courtyard gardens at the rear (Fig. 88). However, although the architectural drawings were initially approved by the Trust architect John C. S. Soutar, attempts to progress a design which was both 'pleasing and appropriate' like Waterlow Court but also economic to build, proved fruitless. One sticking point concerned the increased height and density of the buildings (Figs 89 and 90); a further issue hinged on the proposed internal plan and its eligibility for Ministry subsidies (Figs 91 and 92). The UWHA's founding objective, to offer accommodation mainly as affordable one-room flatlets, proved problematic. Floorplans configured into small flatlets failed to qualify under the current funding

⁸⁵ LMA, A/FWA/C/D/294/001 - UWHA First Annual Report and Balance Sheet', 31 Dec 1925, pp.10-14.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p.10

⁸⁷ Barnett, *The Story of the Growth of the Hampstead Garden Suburb*, pp.20-21.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.71.

⁹¹ Mervyn Miller and A. Stuart Gray, *Hampstead Garden Suburb*, (Chichester: Phillimore, 1992).

regime calculated on spatial standards for family dwellings.⁹² At this point the UWHA and Thomas Garrett & Sons parted company, the scheme eventually being built in 1927 to the designs of Hendry and Schooling, the London-based partnership who had recently completed a development for the UWHA at Ashted, Surrey.⁹³ Here the architects had found a solution which satisfied the funding stipulations. As *The Times* reported, 'one-room flats have been built that can, if necessary, be converted into three-roomed family flats.'⁹⁴

The characteristics of the successful design echoed the sparer, cottage-inspired designs erected elsewhere by the association. The development now comprised ten contiguous two-storey blocks, almost identical to those prepared for the Ashted scheme (Fig. 94). Close replication of blocks would become a favoured strategy for the UWHA, as a means to cut costs and as an exercise in modularisation. Breaks between the blocks formerly aligned with the radiating roadways, were now linked by two open loggias surmounted by additional flats. The Hendry and Schooling design also achieved greater financial and spatial efficiency internally, dispensing with the costly stairwells, balconies and covered walkways and streamlining superfluous circulation space (Figs 95 to 97). The large inner hallways serving a pair of flats were replaced with narrow passageways leading to four. An overhauled floorplan, with a reduction in the number of flats from around 100 to 80 and now divided equally between one-room and larger two-roomed flats, ensured that at least half of the development would be subsidised.⁹⁵ More flexible than the Garrett scheme, the arrangement could conceivably revert to one-room flatlets, or equally mutate into larger three-roomed flats. Pairs of flats shared sanitary facilities, but every flat had its own private kitchenette with cooker, sink and ventilated larder, though this was significantly reduced in floor area. Cupboards and clustered fireplaces placed in the corners of living rooms also made more efficient use of dead space and chimney outlets.

Though stylistically more pared-back and utilitarian than first envisaged, the neo-vernacular was evident in the treatment of the canopied doorways with depressed arches, decorative herringbone panels and ledged and braced doors, and the chamfered posts and lintels of the loggias leading to the internal courtyard. It was also subtly articulated in the gable-ended facades with arrow slit apertures; hipped attic dormers; multi-tonal Dorking brickwork; and the corbelled, flat tile detailing at the eaves (Figs 98 and 99). Garden city principles were also apparent in the picketed gates and clipped privet hedging demarcating the lawned garden frontage. Blending with neighbouring housing, some of the earliest built at the Hampstead Garden Suburb, it was an ensemble which effortlessly conveyed the illusion of a row of family cottages rather than small cottage flats. Barnett later defended her intervention at the controversial site, noting that the

⁹² Labour's Housing (Financial Provisions) Act 1924 (the 'Wheatley' Housing Act) increased the subsidy terms of the 1923 Chamberlain Act, from £6 to £9 per house, and the timespan from 20 to 40 years.

⁹³ Hendry and Schooling were commissioned by the UWHA early on: LMA, A/FWA/C/D/294/001 - UWHA First Annual Report and Balance Sheet, 31 Dec 1925, p.7.

⁹⁴ 'One-Roomed Flats', *The Times*, 06 Sep 1927, p.5.

⁹⁵ LMA, ACC/3816/P/01/362, Hampstead Garden Suburb, 'Abstract Specification Form', c.1927. The Hendry and Schooling application states '40 subsidy flats' (their scheme comprised 80 flats overall).

scheme was praised by Edwin Lutyens as being ‘the best bit of modern domestic architecture you have got on the estate.’⁹⁶

Emmott Close

As a testament to its success, a second UWHA development for single women, also designed by Henry and Schooling, was constructed at the Hampstead Garden Suburb the following year. ‘Emmott Close’, the second UWHA scheme to be named in honour of its President, was once again designed to merge discreetly with the distinctive spatial layout and character of the garden suburb’s cottage housing. The six variously-sized blocks of flats were spatially separated and ranged symmetrically around the close; a much-favoured residential format at the garden suburb (Fig. 100). The close or ‘cul-de-sac’, a much-repeated suburban planning format, was developed by Parker and Unwin to promote peaceful and congenial living environments. Each group of housing within a cul-de-sac, would, it was hoped, foster a community with its own unique identity. Essentially an expanded variant of the quadrangle, intimate and protective, it was deemed a suitable layout for single women occupants. The flatted accommodation, provided in six ‘houses’: Abingdon, Beaufort, Carpenter, Cosway, Kingsley and Stowe, was similar to the winning formula eventually arrived at for Queen’s Court, with floors configured into one and two-room flats (Figs 101-7). Much of the formal quality of Queen’s Court was repeated in the multi-toned brickwork of the paired gabled frontage, although a heightened roofline allowed accommodation to extend into a partial third floor in the attic space (Fig. 108) A stylistic shift towards the classical was also instigated, the flat-roofed dormers, entrance canopies and door casings being Neo-Georgian rather than Neo-Tudor.

Residential Clubs

Case Study: United Women’s Homes Association – Murray House, Westminster

Confident in the success of the housing schemes to date and the growth of the various corporate ventures under the ‘United’ banner, in 1927 the UWHA set about developing a further freehold building plot at 7-13 Vandon Street, Westminster. The intention, to erect a large new structure, combining bespoke office space for the expanding operation with residential club accommodation for around 120 to 130 single women, answered two imperatives simultaneously: the need to invest in denser built forms to meet the demand for accommodation in the central districts of the metropolis; and, having outgrown their rented offices at Oxford Street, the desire for a purpose-designed London headquarters. The 1927 Annual General Meeting of the United Women’s Insurance Society (UWIS) was aborted and moved to Central Hall, Westminster, the office space being insufficient to accommodate the hundreds of members who attended. Like other expanding corporations, the UWHA were looking to create more spacious, open-plan office space to

⁹⁶ The scheme was listed at grade II: Historic England, ‘Queen’s Court, Hampstead Way’, Listing 1391092, 16 Sep 2004.

accommodate the burgeoning array of technologically advanced equipment, furniture and clerical staff required to carry out administrative tasks with greater efficiency. Such a build project also echoed the activities of a growing number of speculators specialising in urban office blocks in the inter-war period, influenced to a significant degree by American developments.⁹⁷

The UWHA project also followed similar examples set in the field of women's housing provision by the large, Christian women's housing organisations. A prestigious central London headquarters, combining office space with club-style accommodation, had been constructed before the First World War by the Girls' Friendly Society. Their London Diocesan headquarters at 29 Francis Street, Westminster (1912-14), designed by the specialist R. Stephen Ayling, represented the organisation's largest accommodation to date. Occupying a prominent corner block near Westminster Cathedral and Victoria Station, the imposing building – with a dormered French mansard roof and 'Wrennaissance' styled façade featuring alternating red brick and Portland stone quoins, gauged flat brick arches and an ornate door casing carved by H.C. Fehr – provided office space, large communal club rooms plus three wings of accommodation, arranged as small bedrooms and accessed via spine corridors.⁹⁸ Subsidiary entrances allowed public access to the restaurant and waiting room, where female workers arriving on early trains could wait in safety and comfort. The UWHA Westminster building was also erected in parallel with the YWCA's new headquarters building, Queen Mary's Hall and Central Club (1928-32), designed by Edwin Lutyens and erected at Great Russell Street, Bloomsbury.⁹⁹ An impressive Neo-Georgian, brown brick and stone-dressed structure, employing high-quality materials and craftsmanship, the plan combined YWCA offices with residential club rooms, a concert hall and accommodation for 'business and professional women', as well as a double-storey concert hall on the first floor.¹⁰⁰

Besides serving practical functions, such architectural projects raised the profile of the organisations and their distinguished benefactors. The notion of investing in a prestigious headquarters was arguably an extravagant, expensive undertaking for such a recently-formed housing body which necessitated the securing of substantial mortgage sums.¹⁰¹ Much of the impetus for the project stemmed from managing director Alban Gordon's ambitions to expand the

⁹⁷ For the modernisation of office space in the inter-war period see Jonathan Clarke, 'The Development of the Speculative Office in Inter-War England', (University of Cambridge, 2021). TNA, HLG49/1374 - Correspondence Lady Emmott to Neville Chamberlain, Mar 1925; LMA, GLC/AR/BR/17/043172 - Searle and Searle, Murray House, floorplans and elevations

⁹⁸ Historic England, 'Former London Diocesan Girls' Friendly Society Hostel (St Mungos), 29 Francis Street', Listing 392546, 17 Apr 2008; Gee 'Where Shall She Live?; Nikolaus Pevsner and Simon Bradley, *Buildings of England, London: 6 Westminster*, (2003), p.697.

⁹⁹ Historic England, 'Queen Mary Hall and YWCA Central Club and Attached Railings, 16 to 22, Great Russell Street', Listing 1113221, 14 May 1974.

¹⁰⁰ 'Y.W.C.A. Central Club', *Woman's Leader*, 16 Sep 1927, p.254; Margaret Richardson, 'Edwin Lutyens: Wrennaissance to Neo-Georgian', in *Neo-Georgian Architecture 1880-1970: A Reappraisal*, ed. by Julian Holder and Elizabeth McKellar (Swindon: Historic England, 2016), pp. 53-64.

¹⁰¹ The land costs were estimated to be £9,000 and the build cost £50,000: TNA, HLG49/1374 - Correspondence: Lady Emmott to Neville Chamberlain, 17 Feb 1928.

'United' group of companies. Nevertheless, acquiring the freehold of this well-located plot also provided the potential to sell land with building rights at the rear of the site.¹⁰²

It was also a product of Gordon's pragmatism in the face of rejection; the UWHA had initially attempted to develop women's accommodation at the site in conjunction with the Lady's Dwelling Company (LDC), the pioneers of Sloane Garden House, tapping into the LDC's unallocated share capital of £436,000. As discussed in Chapter 4, the LDC's response to such an alliance, perceived as an aggressive take-over bid, was decidedly unfavourable. The affair was reported in *Truth* magazine:

It seems that the Homes Association proposed a "fusion" of interests with the Ladies' Dwelling Co. which apparently meant that the latter should purchase from the former a site near St James's Park Station and erect thereon a building to cost about £77,000 for letting as flats and offices. The directors of the company refused to entertain this scheme.¹⁰³

The architectural design, commissioned from the established London firm, Searle and Searle, took its lead from the brand of neo-classical historicism employed by established women's housing bodies such as the GFS. An illustration of 'Murray House', named in honour of Sir George Murray, former chairman of the Domestic Servants Insurance Society, was featured on the cover of the June 1927 issue of *Feminine Life* to convey the grandeur of the symmetrical façade; a recessed central block, with giant order brick pilasters and large windows set within banded-brick arches, flanked by the projecting east and west entrance blocks, with brick quoins and a pedimented first floor window (Fig. 109).¹⁰⁴ The heavily corniced upper level was surmounted by a dormered mansard roof. The usual architectural fiction deployed for club or hostel accommodation was adopted, whereby each window actually served two separate cubicles within.

Extant architectural drawings, submitted to the LCC Architects Department in April 1927, included a sectional view through the building demonstrating an overall plan which allocated space for offices on both the ground and first floors (Figs 110 and 111).¹⁰⁵ More detail of the layout of the inter-war workspace is indicated in a 1943 inventory and floor plans recorded when Murray House was requisitioned during the Second World War. A large, open-plan 'general office' was located on the ground level lit by two large roof lanterns; smaller cellular offices around the perimeter (presumably the domain of the managing director and other supervisors); and a suite of three larger, partly inter-connected rooms on the first floor, possibly for board and committee

¹⁰² LMA, GLC/AR/BR/17/043172 - Correspondence: Messrs. Sole, Sawbridge & Co. to LCC Superintending Architect, 14 Feb 1929. Obtaining LCC and Westminster City Council permission to divert the public passageway Horseshoe Alley became a protracted process. Land at 63-66 Petty France was eventually sold to the Tilbury Contracting and Dredging Company in 1932, who erected Tilbury House, a similar office building.

¹⁰³ 'Women's Homes and Ladies' Dwellings', *Truth*, 02 Mar 1927.

¹⁰⁴ *Feminine Life*, June 1927, cover.

¹⁰⁵ LMA, GLC/AR/BR/17/043172 - Searle and Searle, Murray House, floorplans and elevations, 1928.

meetings (Fig.115).¹⁰⁶ Murray House was also envisaged to function as a centre for women's interests, not only providing office space for the United Women's Insurance Society, but also the National Council of Women, a body with which Lady Emmott had long been associated.

The women's accommodation on the upper levels comprised '24 one-room flatlets on the second and third floors' let from 15s a week, and '73 cubicles on the fourth and fifth' charged at 3s 6d a night including breakfast and bath.¹⁰⁷ The accommodation benefitted from electric light and power and bespoke furniture including fifty oak bedroom sets specially made by Papworth Industries of Regent Street.¹⁰⁸ This high density of accommodation was achieved through the planting of two additional floors of garret-style rooms within a dormered mansard roof (Figs 112-114). Floor plans illustrate the configuration of the fourth floor with so-called 'cabins', basic cubicle rooms which would likely have contained a single bed and basic furniture. The full extent of sanitary amenities is not shown, but each cabin was provided with a small corner basin, and bathrooms were shared between several tenants. The building was provided with two passenger lifts, including one located near the north-eastern entrance, probably dedicated to the women tenants. The club facilities in the basement level, including a lounge, library and restaurant, could be accessed via the tenants' entrance or directly from Vandon Street. With the ground and first floor offices affording the greatest height and prominence, the spatial planning reproduced traditional hierarchies; a strategy which was indicative of the value placed on women's accommodation vis-à-vis public work areas.

Foundations for the six-storey, steel-framed structure were well underway by November 1927. Keen to secure a prominent figure in central government to promote the new development and endorse the association and its work, in March 1928 the UWHA's president Lady Emmott wrote to ask Neville Chamberlain, Minister of Health, to lay the foundation stone. He politely declined but provided a statement to be read at the ceremony which recognised the 'special difficulties' experienced by single women, and commended the association for 'providing accommodation of a special type, which does not fall within the scope of the normal housing programmes of local authorities.'¹⁰⁹ When Murray House neared completion, Alban Gordon asked the newly-appointed Labour Minister of Health, Arthur Greenwood, to preside over the opening ceremony in October, however he too declined, anticipating a packed Autumn Parliamentary session.¹¹⁰ By the time of the inaugural luncheon of 12th December 1929, held to promote the benefits of the newly-opened club, the membership was reported to have already reached 800.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁶ The building suffered minor blast damage. The offices were requisitioned by the Ministry of Works for the Petroleum Warfare Department in Jun 1943: TNA, WORK 12/517 - Ministry of Works: Murray House requisition lease/correspondence.

¹⁰⁷ 'Murray House Club', *Westminster and Pimlico News*, 20 Dec 1929, p.6.

¹⁰⁸ Classified advertisement, *Saffron Walden Weekly News*, 13 Nov 1928, p.13.

¹⁰⁹ TNA, HLG49/1374 - Correspondence Lady Emmott and Neville Chamberlain, Feb-Mar 1928. The ceremony was conducted on 24th March 1928 by the Councillor Jacques Abady, Mayor of Westminster and UWHA director Lady Hall.

¹¹⁰ TNA, HLG49/1374 - Correspondence Alban Gordon and Arthur Greenwood, Jul 1928.

¹¹¹ 'Murray House Club', *Westminster and Pimlico News*, 20 Dec 1929, p.6

The venture was marketed as the ‘new idea in Women’s Clubs’, with electric lifts serving all floors as well as ‘cosy lounges, guest rooms, reading and games rooms for dancing and recreation, and a well-staffed restaurant...open all day to serve meals and light refreshments to resident members and their guests’.¹¹² Countywide advertising campaigns promoted low subscriptions of 12s 6d per annum for residents and 17s 6d for out-of-town members, with the UWHA shareholding requirement being only £1. Non-resident members had ‘the use of all the public rooms, and may obtain bedrooms for short periods not exceeding a fortnight...a very popular feature...for country members who are visiting on business or holiday’.¹¹³ However, the model was broadly the same as earlier residential clubs, hotel-style rooms with longer-term accommodation. Murray House was purportedly the largest club for women workers in London. Stanley Lawrence, UWHA chairman was reported as saying that the new club was ‘in no sense a hostel’ but rather ‘a real club where friends of both sexes may meet, and where prohibition does not reign.’¹¹⁴ Such liberal attitudes, sensationalised by the *Daily Mirror*, linked Murray House with the large American club residences and marked a tentative transition towards the acceptance of unisex blocks for single people.

Tenement Blocks

Case Study: The United Women’s Homes Association – Hammersmith

The cottage-flat developments at the UWHA’s Du Cane Road site, Hammersmith were a modest, step towards improving housing options for London’s self-supporting women, however Alban Gordon recognised that bolder architectural solutions were necessary if the UWHA were to make serious inroads into the women’s housing shortage. As discussed in Chapter 5, in June 1927 Gordon embarked on a European tour to draw inspiration from the high-profile social housing schemes of Germany, Austria and the Netherlands. This course of action, it was hoped, would augment the UWHA’s portfolio with a more innovative type of flat development.

Gordon was impressed by ‘the advantages of large buildings’ and convinced enough by the potential economies of scale to willingly forego Treasury assistance: ‘although this building will not qualify for subsidy it offers such overwhelming advantages in economy of building and economy of land...’.¹¹⁵ Like many of his British contemporaries Gordon found the Frankfurt kitchen – the scientifically devised, space-conscious fitted kitchens, designed in 1926 by Viennese architect Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky – particularly inspiring, but most other aspects of Ernst May’s *Neue Frankfurt* housing stark and alienating. The *Gemeindebauten* (municipal tenement blocks) of ‘Red Vienna’ left the most lasting impression.¹¹⁶ The Viennese apartment schemes seemed most closely aligned with the UWHA imperatives, the women tenants’ housing needs and his own staunch

¹¹² Ibid

¹¹³ Alban Gordon, ‘Clubs for Women’, *Runcorn Weekly News*, 25 May 1928, p.8.

¹¹⁴ ‘New Girls’ Club: London Institution Where Prohibition “Does Not Reign” – Men Guests’, *Daily Mirror*, 13 Dec 1929.

¹¹⁵ Ibid

¹¹⁶ For an account of Viennese inter-war social housing schemes see Blau, *The Architecture of Red Vienna, 1919-1934*.

socialist principles. Gordon was struck by the potential of such substantial courtyard models to foster healthy communities for women. Photographs and detailed descriptions demonstrating ‘the use of flat roofs’ and ‘the value of balconies’ were featured in the pages of *Feminine Life*.¹¹⁷

On his return to Britain, Gordon initiated proposals to the board for a new scheme to be constructed on the remaining, vacant section of their Du Cane Road site: ‘a large four-storey building of reinforced concrete with a flat roof containing 188 one room flats...in which I have incorporated ideas that I gathered in Vienna and Frankfort [sic].’¹¹⁸ The location in Hammersmith – on the western fringes of the County of London and in close proximity to the bold, modern American factory buildings which had sprung up along the Great West Road and the Westway – was perceived by Gordon as affording the association ‘a freehand’ in design terms and appropriate for the sort of radical experimentation less permissible in the central districts or more ‘leafy’ suburbs.¹¹⁹ As discussed in Chapter 5, Gordon assumed considerable personal responsibility for the project’s design concept and delivery. Frequently referred to as the ‘Vienna block’ in the association magazine, the principal source of its design inspiration was clear.

However, initial intentions to engage fully with the latest build technologies experienced in Germany and elsewhere had to be abandoned. The frame was steel with reinforced concrete floor slabs but owing to the cost of an entire reinforced concrete shell, the wall make-up comprised of 13½” solid brickwork, thereby restricting the height to four storeys as per building regulations. In any case, build techniques involving monolithic concrete were yet to enter mainstream construction, and the use of brickwork faced with white-painted render was comparable with contemporary experiments elsewhere, such as the development of modern movement houses at ‘Silver End’, near Braintree, Essex (1926-32) built by the Crittall family. Although compromises were made, historic aerial photography capturing the UWHA’s Hammersmith site, emphasises the boldness of the architectural statement being attempted; the white, rectilinear multi-storey blocks being a stark visual contrast against the traditional rooflines of the cottage-style flats (Fig. 140).

Though distinctly modern in inspiration, the formal planning of the new scheme retained many aspects of the Western classical tradition. Extant architectural drawings illustrate the exacting symmetry adopted for the floor plan, not unlike the neo-classical formality of a Baroque country house; the central block, flanked by projecting wings encircling the ‘cour d’honneur’, with a ‘carriageway’ opening leading to an inner courtyard (Figs 116 and 124). The buildings ranged around the courtyards offered spaces of communality, privacy and enclosure. The arrangement of the outer court also attempted to adopt the socially inclusive aspects of the Viennese housing developments; the open arms of the front elevation created a semi-public space and a visible link with the street. This symbolic connection between the community of women housed within and London society at large, marked a notable departure from the sense of concealment discernible in

¹¹⁷ Both Gordon’s 1924 publications called for better housing in every municipality to promote healthier societies: Gordon, *Social Insurance*, pp.71-5; Gordon, *The Common Sense of Socialism*, pp.111-7.

¹¹⁸ *Feminine Life*, Aug 1927, p.5; ‘Report by Mr Gordon’, 14 Jul 1927, Appendix No.2, p.2.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

many earlier women's developments. Though less apparent now with most of the original features removed, the landscaping design for the entrance court closely replicated the elements of the larger Reumannhof development (Figs 117 to 122). It was conceived as a place for leisure and quiet contemplation, with a curved ornamental pergola and planting scheme, bench seating and a central fountain.¹²⁰ The aspiration to elevate the architectural status of the multi-storey tenement, reflected Alban Gordon's personal egalitarian principles, to bring the best architecture possible to the lower strata of society. As demonstrated in the development of Queen's Court and Emmott Close, this was a philosophy which he shared with Lady Emmott and Henrietta Barnett.

The formal planning also illustrates the regularity and modularity of the composition, corner entrances giving corridor access to five, near-identical repeating modules, each containing eight one-room flatlets (Figs 123 and 124). Two additional east and west entrances with arched open porches served an extensive area set aside for coal bunkers and ash bins, but it also offered the tenants an independent access point for the flats. Though the block of flats exhibited a more rational, modern design approach, there were also subtle Art Deco embellishments. The central archway was emphasised through abstracted classical mouldings and fluted columns with angular bases and curved plinths. (Figs 125 and 126). This was characteristic of the 'moderne' styling which became a hallmark of many well-appointed 1930s London flat complexes.¹²¹ The zig-zag motif was expressed through the angular window bay projections, which replicated the Viennese elevations, and through the volumes at the building's corners (Fig. 127). Further angled vertical projections containing the shared balconies concealed toilets within. Here, arrow-slit apertures were functional as well as decorative, providing the sanitary spaces with ventilation (Fig. 128). A similar geometric motif was repeated in blind apertures (Fig. 129) adding restrained detailing to the otherwise plain rendered walls. In most other respects however, the building's appearance was undoubtedly modernistic if not Modernist.¹²²

The foundation stone for the new scheme, named 'Gordon Court' in honour of its principal protagonist, was laid by Lilian Gordon on the 14th of June 1928. The following year plans were underway to augment the scheme with two similar, yet more modestly proportioned blocks of flats on the remaining portion of the Hammersmith site. Nightingale House (1929) and Browning House (1930) were both modular offshoots based on the constituent blocks of the Gordon Court plan. Modularisation had previously been employed by Hendry and Schooling with success in the UWHA's cottage-flat developments. Internal arrangements diverged slightly from their parent blocks at Gordon Court; although at Nightingale House each flat retained a combined kitchenette with bath and the shared balcony with toilet, space set aside for the stairwell and a recessed entrance resulted in two fewer flats per floor; a total of twenty-four rather than thirty-two flats (Fig.

¹²⁰ Isometric sketch of Reumannhof Courtyard, Vienna c.1927 in Field, 'A Home of One's Own', p.65.

¹²¹ For example, a similar entrance with fluted columns was seen at Lichfield Court, Richmond-upon-Thames (1936): Harwood, *Art Deco Britain*, pp.34-5.

¹²² The Crittall metal casements were entirely replaced in the refurbishment of the building in 2001.

131).¹²³ The loss of floorspace and density was resolved at Browning House a year later, but the spatial restrictions necessitated less privacy, with four flats sharing a sanitary amenities located at either end of the access corridor (Fig. 132).

The overall aesthetic, cubic volumes and modern balconies remained, however, at Nightingale House concessions were made to the external design, diluting some of the more radical aspects of Gordon Court. The arched entrance porch and fenestration in a darker painted timber introduced elements more akin to the suburban-semi (Figs 138 and 139).¹²⁴ The severity of the flat roofline was also tempered by the addition of 'old rustic brown pantiles' on the roof of the stair tower, and the rendered façade softened with a plinth of 'multi-coloured red-brown bricks'.¹²⁵

In 1929 Bruno Taut, the German architect and city planner, featured Gordon Court in his showcase of modern architecture for *The Studio*.¹²⁶ Commissioned by the architectural publication to elucidate the principles behind the new aesthetic for an English audience, Gordon Court was highlighted by Taut as an exemplar amongst the small handful of British buildings exhibiting the modern style; the only other domestic dwellings being Peter Behrens' 'New Ways', Northampton (1925-6) and houses designed by Thomas Tait (1926) at Silver End, Essex.¹²⁷ In the final chapter, photographs of the UWHA flats were juxtaposed against the cottage homes of Hammersmith to emphasise the contrast between the existing and new suburban style (Fig. 130). The following year, the three blocks of flats were covered by *Architecture Illustrated* and *The Architect and Building News* (Figs 133-137) who approved of the overall character 'with a strong flavour of Central Europe' but criticised features such as the courtyard pergolas as 'conventional architectural remembrances'.¹²⁸ Gordon Court was nevertheless selected as one of the British exhibits by the RIBA to be included at an international exhibition of modern architecture at Budapest in 1930.¹²⁹

Despite the rarity of modern movement architecture in Britain at the point of its construction (1928) and the favourable coverage by Bruno Taut, Gordon Court has remained absent from published narratives of inter-war British domestic modernism. Gordon Court fell short of the Modernist canon due to its abandonment of monolithic concrete walls, its symmetrical plan,

¹²³ LMA, GLC/AR/BR/06/058709 - Hendry and Schooling, UWHA Nightingale House, elevations and floorplans, Oct 1929. Plans illustrate 22 one-room flats and 2 slightly larger two-room flats on the ground floor.

¹²⁴ Ibid; LMA, LMA/4776/F/02/003 - Nightingale House, black and white photograph c.1979. Decorative brickwork has since been rendered over.

¹²⁵ *Architecture Illustrated*, Jul 1931, pp.5-8.

¹²⁶ Bruno Taut, *Modern Architecture*, (London: The Studio, 1929), p.109 and p.207.

¹²⁷ Ibid, p.156 and p.162. Taut's survey excluded houses co-designed by Charles Quennell and Walter Crittall for the family firm at Clockhouse Way Estate, Braintree (1918-20) which have been acknowledged as 'the first modern houses' in Britain: Jeremy Gould, *Modern Houses in Britain, 1919-1939*, (London: Society of Architectural Historians of Great Britain, 1977), pp.8-10 see Elizabeth McKellar, 'C. H. B. Quennell (1872-1935): Architecture, History and the Quest for the Modern', *Architectural History*, 50 (2007), 211-246.

¹²⁸ 'UWHA Gordon Court and Nightingale House', *The Architect and Building News*, 124, 17 Oct 1930, 529-532; 'Gordon Court, UWHA', *Architecture Illustrated*, Jun 1930, 31-3; 'Nightingale House and Browning House, UWHA', *Architecture Illustrated*, Jul 1931, 5-8.

¹²⁹ Field, 'A Home of One's Own', p.33; *Feminine Life*, Sep and Oct 1930.

angular projections and decorative detailing.¹³⁰ Unlike 'Wolverton' or 'New Ways', transitional house designs which incorporated classical dentilated porches and triangular façade projections (Figs 141 and 142), the scheme has not been afforded a place amongst early modern movement housing.¹³¹ As a product of the voluntary housing sector and designed by lower profile architects, it has tended to be disregarded.¹³² In contrast, the Isokon Lawn Road flats, Hampstead (1933-4) designed by Wells Coates in collaboration with Jack and Molly Pritchard, are now widely acclaimed as a 'radical modern icon'.¹³³ Coates' well-choreographed media promotion of the scheme as an exemplar of 'modern tenement building' has overshadowed the earlier experimentation in 'minimum flats' seen in developments such as Gordon Court, marginalising their contribution to the evolution of the modern British flat.

Conclusion

The analysis of the purpose-built women's schemes in this chapter demonstrated continuity with the basic multi-occupancy building types developed in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The protective qualities of the quadrangular spatial tradition also continued to be expressed, sometimes overtly but also more loosely in new courtyard arrangements. By 1918 no consensus had been reached as regards the optimal form and arrangement for women's flats thus there was also significant architectural experimentation.

Mansion blocks, a familiar format for Davis, continued to serve as the basis for LWH schemes, even in the lofty heights of the Holly Lodge Estate. However, the basic form was cloaked in a variety of styles including the Tudoresque aesthetic. Davis also experimented with a wide variety of flat types to suit different budgets and female household scenarios, including a range of one-room variants designed for single occupancy. Internal planning also demonstrated in-built flexibility with larger flats for women sharers adaptable as family homes. Nevertheless, such configurations were also dictated by funding stipulations in the Housing Acts, with providers obliged to specify floorplans based on family standards to qualify for subsidy. Further innovation was also apparent in Davis' service flats concept and patented 'service lift' system, his roll out of passenger lifts and experiments with concrete baths. Although, as was seen at LWH's Addison House, approval

¹³⁰ Modernist architecture was defined in 1932 as '...an emphasis on volume, space enclosed by thin planes or surfaces as opposed to the suggestion of mass and solidity; regularity as opposed to symmetry or other kinds of obvious balance; and lastly, dependence upon the intrinsic elegance of materials, technical perfection, and fine proportions, as opposed to applied ornament.': H-R. Hitchcock and P. Johnson, *The International Style*, (New York ; London: Norton, 1932, 1995 edition).

¹³¹ For a discussion of the blurred lines between Modernist and 'Art Deco' canons see Harwood, *Art Deco Britain*, Introduction, pp.8-9. On 'New Ways' see Darling, *Re-Forming Britain*, note 34, pp.213-4. A similar fate befell C.H.B Quennell's housing: McKellar, 'C. H. B. Quennell (1872-1935): Architecture, History and the Quest for the Modern'.

¹³² Voluntary sector blocks such as R.E. Sassoon House have been recognised in recent decades: Darling, *Re-Forming Britain*, pp.103-5.

¹³³ The Isokon flats were one of the earliest twentieth-century buildings to be recommended for heritage-listing (listed Grade II in 1974, raised to Grade I in 1999): Cherry, 'The "Pevsner 50": Nikolaus Pevsner and the Listing of Modern Buildings"', p.100; Historic England, 'Numbers 1, 1a, 1b, 1c and 1d and 2-32 Isokon Flats', Listing 1379280.

for public funding also necessitated significant cost-cutting and abandonment of new and tried-and-tested design principles.

The UWHA's small, seemingly inconsequential development at Hammersmith, West London, represented in microcosm much of the formal and spatial evolution taking place in the design of women's flats in this period. The site acted as a laboratory to test various iterations of the cottage flat form as well as Gordon's new ideas based upon the modern blocks of continental Europe. Techniques of rationalism and modularisation were not only pioneered in such avant-garde designs as Gordon Court, but also deployed to effect in the schemes at Hampstead Garden Suburb and elsewhere. Although women's housing provision was generally moving towards floorplans of one and two-room flats offering enhanced self-containment, the period also witnessed the re-emergence of the large residential club with small, cheaper rooms and communal club facilities. Newly fused with office space on two floors, the design was in tune with both the expansion of London hotels and the rise of the large-scale, central office headquarters.

Though largely overshadowed by later schemes of the 1930s designed by Wells Coates and Frederick Gibberd amongst others, the women's housing providers thus played a significant role in the evolution of the small British 'minimum flat'. Although women's housing organisations lacked the financial resources to match the leisure facilities increasingly offered in speculative middle-class flat complexes, they nonetheless prioritised access to community clubhouses, landscaped gardens and tennis courts as a means to promote social interaction, healthy lifestyles and active citizenship. The lived experience of these flats, an aspect often disregarded in architectural historical accounts, will be the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter 8

Living in the Schemes: Values, Meanings, Experience

The preceding case studies in Chapters 6 and 7 focused on the women's schemes in terms of the architectural characteristics of the buildings and their associated landscaping. The current chapter moves on to explore the interior qualities of the new living spaces in greater detail, including the more liminal spaces of corridors, stairs and landings. What were the flats like in terms of internal layout and material conditions? In what ways did the interiors engage with contemporary design discourses and how did this relate to gender and class? It begins by examining the general spatial and material conditions of the flats, and the significance of such aspects as small, private kitchens and space-efficient fitted furniture. It then investigates the lived experience of these multi-occupancy dwelling spaces, drawing upon a range of primary material: architectural floorplans and building specifications; illustrative artwork and photographs; oral testimonies and written commentaries. It also provides a visual mapping of the flats to their tenant occupiers within WPH's Harrington Gardens scheme, when newly converted in 1931. Lastly, it explores the less immediately tangible values and meanings embodied within the flat interiors and their representations, including notions of home, permanence, privacy and the opportunity for self-actualisation.

The Spatial and Material Conditions of the Flats

As demonstrated in the preceding case studies, considerable experimentation with the flatted dwelling type continued during the inter-war period. Despite significant variation, there were identifiable, general trends in the spatial and material qualities of the newly created women's flats. The two decades after the First World War witnessed marked technological advances which impacted upon the nature of housing provision for single women, including the wider uptake of electric lighting and power, and the replacement of coal-fired space heating with gas then electric fires. Shared bathrooms with geysers operated on the 'penny-in-the-slot' principle were once lauded in nineteenth-century developments like Sloane Gardens House; now the United Women's Homes Association (UWHA) was able to boast of shilling slot meters controlling new gas fires in their living spaces, and by 1930, The Lady Workers' Homes (LWH) of their 'all-electric' flats. The internal planning of schemes sometimes made allowance for larger three or four room flats with shared occupancy in mind, however, the vast majority settled upon the denser, more affordable

layout of predominantly one-room flats with some two-room. Attempts to offer women greater self-containment prompted the growth of 'flatlets' or 'bed-sitting room flats', diminutive variants of the standard bachelor type, deemed particularly suited to their lower-incomed female counterparts. These all-encompassing, single-occupancy dwelling spaces – a less-acknowledged forerunner of the 1930s 'minimum flats' – incorporated a single bed and compact private kitchen, either partitioned or screened from the main living room within alcoves.

With limited build budgets and affordability paramount, efficient use of space was a key consideration. The inclusion of multi-purpose, space-saving fitted furniture was, and continued to be, an important aspect of the new flats. Unlike rooms in boarding houses, flats were generally offered on an unfurnished basis giving women the freedom to tailor their own living environments. Furniture was, however, often expensive and ill-suited to purpose, thus fitted items were increasingly provided. The LWH flatlets were praised in the press for their innovative standardised, built-in storage including wardrobes and sideboards. Although most scholarly emphasis concerning the introduction of space-efficient, standardised furniture in inter-war British flats has been placed in the mid-1930s, focusing on the influence of the German concept of 'Existenzminimum' and the work of designers such as Jack Pritchard and Wells Coates, such ideas had long been designed into the single women's schemes. As mentioned in Chapter 2, LRC director Agnes Garrett, the architecturally-trained interior designer, had supplied fitted furniture at the York Street Chambers. Likewise, the innovative nature of multi-purpose folding beds and bookcases was noted in the press when demonstrated in the show flats at LDC's Sloane Gardens House. Attempts by women architects and designers to incorporate fitted storage, including understairs cupboards or linen closets, all perceived as standard today, were often perceived as being a superfluous, distinctly feminine response to a design brief. *Country Life's* showcase of economically-built '£1000 houses', including those designed by Gertrude Leverkus and fellow UCL-trained builder/designer Faith Brooke, observed the gender distinction: 'As we should expect from a woman architect, the house is well supplied with cupboards'.¹

Although women occupants in these and other flats occasionally enjoyed the luxury of a private bath (often integral to the kitchen area), sanitary amenities were almost invariably shared between two or more tenants. Private kitchen space, albeit compact, was however prioritised in the inter-war women's schemes, becoming a foremost spatial and material consideration, even within the tightest of floorplans. Most flats, converted or purpose-built, were configured with space to house the newly inseparable trio of a freestanding cooker (often purchased or hired by the tenant), a sink with accompanying draining board, and a 'ventilated larder', a precursor of the refrigerator. The inclusion of basic kitchen facilities was not without precedent; the larger, well-appointed flats of the Ladies Residential Chambers Company's (LRC) Chenies Street development (1889) had a pantry and 'cooking stove...set in each suite', and their subsequent York Street scheme

¹ Phillips, *The £1000 House*, p.96.

experimented with more cost-effective joint pantries shared between a cluster of flats.² The flats at suburban development Waterlow Court contained a small scullery with 'gas stove and food cupboard'.³ However, the provision of better-equipped, small private kitchens without the usual recourse to a communal dining room, heralded a departure from the collectively-organised philosophy of the women's residential clubs, cooperative quadrangles and hostels (see Chapter 2).

Private Kitchens

The imperative for a zoned kitchen space, variously known as a 'kitchenette', 'pantry kitchen', 'scullerette' or 'workroom', can be understood as a product of both pragmatic and ideological forces at play: on the one hand, the advent of more effective kitchen furniture and appliances, and on the other, shifts away from the cooperative and communal towards a set of ideals based upon individual homes, household efficiency and women's traditional domestic role.

The concept of 'cooperative living' with its pooled cooking and dining arrangements, hailed before and during the First World War as the solution to the servant problem for the middle classes, and deployed in many of the women's schemes as an aid to the busy worker, was rapidly losing favour. Cooperative housekeeping of any sort became closely associated with the forced communality of the 'National Kitchens' for war workers, installed across English cities to cope with the exigencies of the conflict, and the unpopular central kitchens and laundries provided for many working-class families.⁴ Furthermore, in government circles cooperative facilities were largely dismissed as costly and superfluous. As a close-reading of Women's Pioneer Housing's (WPH) public utility society funding applications revealed, communal arrangements were also actively discouraged by Housing Board officials, wary of approving dwelling formats which deviated from the newly codified family normative (see Chapter 6).⁵ As previously demonstrated, Women's Pioneer Housing (WPH) had initially proposed communal dining arrangements in some townhouses but abandoned this on the London Housing Board's recommendation.

The necessity for women's housing providers to meet the raised expectations of investors and tenants also played a part. In WPH's case, pivotal investor Mary Cunliffe steered floorplans through her insistence on the inclusion of small kitchens in every flat. Though her precise motivations are undocumented, Cunliffe was responding to the desires of her nominated tenants, and indeed of self-supporting women more generally. Access to private kitchen space constituted a significant improvement on the rudimentary gas rings at boarding houses, or the meagre meals provided at hostels. Struggling to get by on low, erratic incomes, many women yearned for the means to cater to their own nutritional needs with greater freedom and economy. The sort of issues continually faced are underlined in Virginia Nicholson's compelling exploration of the

² 'The Ladies' Residential Chambers', *Women's Penny Paper*, 25 May 1889, p.6.

³ Ibid; T. Alwyn Lloyd, 'The Associated Homes at Hampstead Garden Suburb', *Garden Cities and Town Planning*, 4, Nov 1909, p.246.

⁴ See Pearson, *The Architectural and Social History of Cooperative Living*, pp.154-6.

⁵ TNA, HLG49/695: Records of public utility societies, Women's Pioneer Housing Limited.

everyday lives of self-supporting single women between the wars, told through multiple individual testimonies.⁶ Although the range of restaurants accessible to women workers was expanding, and the social stigma of unchaperoned dining fading, complaints of bland, prohibitively expensive food abounded. The perpetual strain of affording enough to eat was constantly voiced, even by those in skilled business occupations: women such as journalist Mary Margaret Grieve who expressed being 'slightly hungry all the time' in the workplace; typists and sisters Beatrice and Enid Brown, who, in their vain search for cheaper, better lunches 'grew to know every nasty tea-shop in the Strand'; or Ethel Mannin, later a successful novelist, who was 'always ravenous, always watchful of her purse, making up for inadequate cheap lunches with sweets and chocolate at her desk.'⁷

In her article on the new WPH and UWHA women's housing schemes, journalist Florence Low reported the popularity of the new kitchenettes:

the majority of women who are working delight in the possession of a kitchen and prefer meals at home (often involving a considerable amount of time and labour) to meals in a restaurant. Perhaps this little bit of domesticity satisfies something in a woman that is not appealed to in the daily round of her profession?⁸

The small kitchens clearly offered practical advantages; an opportunity to save money on the sort of simple fare (bread and butter, jam, soup and cake) regularly purchased in restaurants or cafés. The need had been anticipated at LWH's St John's Wood development, where an on-site convenience shop served the suburban women's flats with provisions. Kitchen sinks were also no doubt a boon for washing small items, particularly at a time when wash basins were a luxurious addition to most bathrooms. Moreover, WPH founder Etheldred Browning's initial vision of providing small rooms with laundry appliances in the converted townhouses seems never to have been implemented, and illustrative budgets in advice manuals for single working women demonstrate that paying to send out laundry was still generally practised.⁹

Florence Low's further proposition, that kitchens spoke to an innate need in the feminine psyche which might be negated during working life, was an enduring and pervasive notion in housing discourse. The premise of incorporating facilities for preparing meals in single-occupancy flats had long been a gendered practice. From their inception, residential chambers for women professionals were consciously 'planned on a different principle' to those for bachelors.¹⁰ Gender assumptions, grounded in the doctrine of separate spheres, perceived single male professionals' lives (and appetites) being catered to beyond their flats in the 'public realm' and women's largely within. This influenced the internal spaces, with private bathrooms traditionally being prioritised

⁶ Nicholson, *Singled Out*.

⁷ *Ibid*, pp.143-6.

⁸ Florence B. Low, 'The Professional Woman: New Housing Schemes', *The Manchester Guardian*, 09 Jun 1927, p.6.

⁹ 'Self-Contained Flats for Professional Women', *The Vote*, 15 Oct 1920, p.230. See a range of budget examples in Miall, *The Bachelor Girl's Guide*.

¹⁰ Perks, *Residential Flats*, p.158.

over private kitchens in most bachelor flats. The rolling out of small kitchens across the new schemes also responded to a reassertion of women's 'place in the home' after the First World War. The dire health of recruits during the conflict had prompted reassessment of the working populations' health and living conditions.¹¹ Women's 'natural' nurturing role in the domestic environment was seen as the corrective, cemented by calls for women to step aside during demobilisation. Intense debates concerning the emerging standards for the new 'homes for heroes' heightened the profile of kitchen space in design discourses significantly. With the majority of family homes needing to function without domestic staff, discrete kitchen provision for the middling classes became a prominent topic of discussion across the media.¹² The inter-war decades saw the reconsideration of the kitchen and its designation as a small, specialised room uniting the formerly spatially separated functions of food preparation (usually carried out in a combined living/dining room with cooking range), with the scullery-based tasks of washing and cleaning. Traditional configurations gradually made way for better-equipped kitchens, facilitated by advances in fuel and technology, such as cleaner, compact gas-fired or electric cookers, and the wider accessibility of purpose-designed kitchen furniture.¹³

With more servant-less homes, the desire to improve household efficiency and reduce drudgery, particularly in the kitchen, also intensified. The concept of 'scientific management' in the domestic environment – the rationalisation of household processes through time-and-motion studies and optimal kitchen layouts – was informed by a range of North American publications, notably by Christine Frederick, which had in turn been inspired by the industrial efficiency doctrine of 'Taylorism'.¹⁴ As discussed in previous chapters, many protagonists of single women's housing were intimately involved in scientific, investigative studies of domestic planning, 'labour-saving' and efficiency for the Ministry of Reconstruction, the GCTPA and other bodies. Dorothy Peel for instance, acted as advisor during the conversion of Stowe House, Buckinghamshire into a public school, producing a series of motion plans to track the movements of domestic staff.¹⁵ Promotional literature for the new women's flats often highlighted simple easy to clean features such as tiled window ledges, linoleum and 'dustless skirting'.¹⁶ Advice surrounding the 'ideal home' was disseminated through the editorials and advertisements of newspapers and women's magazines, and the exposition of room sets and consumables, most notably at the *Daily Mail's* yearly Ideal Home Exhibition. Women's housing campaigners also made use of a further mass medium of communication – the BBC radio broadcast. Early WPH founding member Sydney Bushell for

¹¹ Swenarton, *Homes Fit for Heroes*.

¹² Phil Lyon, 'Uncertain Progress: British Kitchens in the 1920s', *Home Cultures*, 17 (2021), 205-226.

¹³ Sugg Ryan, *Ideal Homes*.

¹⁴ For example Christine Frederick, *The New Housekeeping: Efficiency Studies in Home Management*, (Garden City, N. Y: Doubleday, Page & company, 1913). For an account of Christine Frederick's work and foundation in Frederick Taylor's 'scientific management' theories see Janice Williams Rutherford, *Selling Mrs. Consumer: Christine Frederick and the Rise of Household Efficiency*, (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2003).

¹⁵ Peel, *Life's Enchanted Cup*, pp.247-8.

¹⁶ LMA, A/FWA/C/D/294/001 - UWHA First Annual Report & Balance Sheet, 31 Dec 1925; '5s. A Week Flats: New Housing Scheme for Women', *Westminster Gazette*, 09 Apr 1925, p.1..

example, disseminated her expertise in 'Common Sense in Household Work: How I Planned My Kitchen'.¹⁷

New thinking in design discourses concerning the kitchen also gained currency across Europe during post-1918 reconstruction. In Germany, the primacy of the scientifically-devised, space-conscious kitchen resulted in the influential 'Frankfurt kitchen', designed in 1925-6 by Viennese architect Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky (1897-2000) for Ernst May's mass municipal housing estates in Frankfurt-am-Main (Fig. 147).¹⁸ Aimed at families, it nonetheless made a lasting impression on UWHA's Alban Gordon, who praised its virtues after experiencing it first-hand during his 1927 European tour.¹⁹ Moreover, Lihotzky was herself in the process of designing housing solutions for single women to integrate within the Frankfurt schemes, tapping into her considerable expertise in developing space-conscious built-in furniture.²⁰ In the event, restrictive build budgets ensured that the new kitchen spaces, even at progressive 1930s developments like the UWHA's Gordon Court, remained unfitted and relatively basic. Due to the spatial constraints, optimal layouts were difficult to implement in the remodelled townhouses. Devising layouts which ensured adequate cross-ventilation and outlets for the new larders was already challenging enough. In any case, fitted kitchens – which began to appear in Britain in the early 1930s, designed by Wells Coates amongst others – were generally adopted much later than in America and the rest of Europe, not taking off until the 1960s (Fig. 148).²¹ With floorspace increasingly cramped in the new family homes, versions of the freestanding kitchen cabinet, with its roots in the American 'Hoosier cabinet', were more popular. Although many integral cabinet features aimed at family catering (open shelves for flour hoppers and labelled storage jars; tin or lead-lined meat safes; pull-out enamel worksurfaces) were less relevant for those living alone, the underlying, space-efficient design philosophy was pertinent for kitchenettes in the women's schemes (Fig. 144). Adapted versions were supplied by Coates for the Isokon flats, which in essence tapped into the long-standing, space-conscious kitchenette layouts worked through by the women's housing providers (Figs 145 and 146). The rational 'workstation' template was manifest in architect Gertrude Leverkus' standardised 'kitchen cupboard' design for WPH. Surviving drawings illustrate how all elements of a functioning kitchen were skilfully incorporated within a pre-determined recess: a bespoke system of open shelving and eye-level cupboards mounted to the doors with carefully-conceived details including a hinged preparation table; fitments for towel rolls; an integral electric light; and the rounding of potentially hazardous cabinet edges (Fig. 143).²² Leverkus' specification offered WPH a cheaper, builder-supplied alternative to the popular family-orientated cabinets imported since 1919 and subsequently manufactured by companies such as Easiwork and Hygena

¹⁷ BBC Broadcast: 30 Sep 1929 advertised in *The Woman's Leader*, 27 Sep 1929, p.260.

¹⁸ Bullock, 'First the Kitchen - Then the Façade'; Henderson, 'A Revolution in the Woman's Sphere'.

¹⁹ *Feminine Life*, Feb 1928, pp.1-5.

²⁰ Lihotzky's schemes were largely unrealised: Henderson, 'Housing the Single Woman'.

²¹ Ryan, *Ideal Homes*, pp.124-7. See also Ryan in Lucy Dearlove, 'Trophy Cabinets', *Kitchens*, Lecker podcast series, <<https://www.leckerpodcast.com/episodes/2021/6/22/trophycabinets>>, [accessed 20 Jul 2022].

²² LMA, LMA/4776/D/05/040: Gertrude Leverkus, standard WPH kitchen cupboard design, n.d.

(Fig. 144).²³ The kitchenettes at the various developments thus also afforded single women, many who might never marry, a stake in the emerging 'ideal home' phenomenon generally targeted towards housewives.

In spite of the vocal determination of women's housing activists to free busy women workers from domestic worries, for many single women private kitchen space of their own became highly desirable. The change, stemming from social and cultural as well as more pragmatic motivations, may also be interpreted from a feminist perspective. In recent decades, academics from multiple disciplines have theorised the gendering of space in domestic and other architectural contexts. Architectural and design historians, cultural geographers and anthropologists amongst others have examined the ways in which gender is materialised in domestic spaces such as the kitchen according to dominant cultural norms, and how gender roles are reinforced through everyday activities.²⁴ There has been considerable focus on 'gendered spaces' and 'performative' aspects of gender within the context of family homes, but single-person households remain under-explored. In the light of feminist spatial theory, the inclusion of small private kitchens conformed to women's perceived domestic role after the War. Enabling single women to perform housekeeping duties in the flats also reinforced gender assumptions through everyday practice. With such households being a head-on challenge to patriarchal norms, kitchens arguably smoothed negotiations for the social acceptability of the women's schemes.

The Lived Experience of Multi-Occupancy

The 'luxury of a flat' for women of modest incomes was felt to represent a marked improvement on the 'uncomfortable and toilsome' arrangements at many women's accommodations.²⁵ Enhanced self-containment negated the obligation to frequent communal facilities, yet the relatively intimate shared blocks and townhouses still allowed opportunities for interaction amongst like-minded fellow tenants. As one WPH tenant stated, 'she need not see anyone unless she wanted to do so...But I like to feel there is someone here in the house of my own sort'.²⁶ However, the drawbacks of multi-occupancy living were ever-present, particularly in adapted townhouses where re-configuration into small flats necessitated erecting multiple partitions. Noise transference within multi-occupancy blocks had long been a thorny issue, and the build-up of wall partitions, floors and ceilings, was always of special concern. The design specification for LRC's Chenies Street scheme took advantage of innovative patented construction systems, *The Builder* noting how 'for sound-deadening and fireproofing purposes the whole of the ceilings and many of the walls are lined with

²³ Ryan, 'Trophy Cabinets', 2021.

²⁴ For example Daphne Spain, *Gendered Spaces*, (Chapel Hill ; London: University of North Carolina Press, 1992).; Heynen and Baydar (eds.), *Negotiating Domesticity : Spatial Productions of Gender in Modern Architecture*.; Irene Cieraad (ed.), *At Home: An Anthropology of Domestic Space*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999).; Llewellyn, 'Designed by Women and Designing Women'.

²⁵ Helen Souter, 'Bachelor Women in London', *Quiver*, Feb 1925, p.385.

²⁶ Ibid

silicate cotton and plaster slabs on Mr. R. W. Hitchin's system'.²⁷ Sydney Perks' survey of *Residential Flats*, stressed hollow voids and carpeted floors to avoid sound penetration and 'the horror of going to bed and hearing a cornet overhead and a clarionet below...'.²⁸

Despite flat conversions in older townhouses being promoted for their 'thicker walls and larger rooms', inter-war sound-proofing technology was still in its infancy, and disputes concerning noise nuisance and other unneighbourly disturbances were commonplace. In WPH's case they litter the pages of management committee minutes.²⁹ At Holland Park Avenue, Isabel King's request to rent the first floor flat and hold 'Higher Thought' meetings was initially refused, and a ground-floor tenure only permitted on condition that singing hymns be restricted.³⁰ Following Mrs Petty's complaints of piano playing at 21 Stanley Crescent, Etheldred Browning was instructed 'to take steps to thicken a partition she regarded as very slight.'³¹ With musical instruments not prohibited in tenancy agreements, and the committee reluctant to interfere further, it is perhaps unsurprising that the same issue still raged thirteen years later, Miss Darnell for example, bemoaning Miss Jones' piano at 12 Collinette Road.³²

By the mid-1930s, the rising popularity of gramophone and wireless prompted the imposition of more stringent restrictions on tenants:

It is, of course, an age of noise, but even so:- gramophones and wireless loudspeakers can be turned down and only played with closed doors. Doors of flats can be kept closed. Talking from one flat to another can always be avoided...These are a few of the troubles that in Miss Browning's experience over many years are always cropping up. Wireless is one of the blessings of this century, how easily it can be made a curse!³³

Everyday lives often leave scant traces through which to recover the nature of lived experience of these built spaces. However, whilst rare, the oral testimonies of tenants illustrate that lived reality – at some schemes at least – played out somewhat differently. At Brook House in Gunnersbury Lane, Acton, one of the three UWHA purpose-built blocks taken over by WPH, Gwen Winterson (1904-2001) (Figs 149 and 150), a waitress for companies including Osram, Hoover and Mecca, and resident there for more than sixty years, recalled typical weekends at the development:

Ours was the best landing. My neighbour Joyce had a wind-up record player and every Sunday morning she'd play 'Harlem'. The minute we heard it we'd rush out and dance around the landing.³⁴

²⁷ 'Chenies Street Chambers', *The Builder*, 09 Nov 1889, pp.332-3.

²⁸ Perks, *Residential Flats*, p.43 and pp.162-4.

²⁹ Etheldred Browning, 'Women and Housing', *The Vote*, 17 June 1921.

³⁰ LMA, LMA/4776/A/01/001 - WPH Minutes, 30 Nov 1921 and 19 Dec 1921.

³¹ LMA, LMA/4776/A/01/001 - WPH Minutes, 08 May 1923.

³² LMA, LMA/4776/A/01/009 - WPH Minutes, 01 Dec 1936.

³³ LMA, LMA/4776/D/03/001 - 'Nightingale, Browning and Brook Houses', Introductory Letter: WPH to tenants, Dec 1935.

³⁴ LMA, LMA/4776/E/02/057 - Interview with (Annie) Gwendolen Winterson (1904-2001), *Women's Pioneer Housing Annual Review 1999-2000*, pp.2-3.

Though formally designated communal spaces had been dispensed with in many plans, the liminal spaces of landings, staircases and corridors were nevertheless being appropriated as sites for social cohesion, and the formation of social group identities.

Synthesising research material from a range of sources (architectural drawings; correspondence and memoirs; census, shipping and electoral records) also enabled reconstruction of a snapshot of the private and semi-private spatial conditions, social admixture and inter-personal relations of shared life within the women's schemes. For instance, at WPH's newly converted Harrington Gardens scheme, Chelsea, in 1932, where eleven households, including that of the caretaker, resided simultaneously. Purchased in 1929 for £4200, this four-storey, brick-built late-Victorian property, designed by Walter Graves (c.1880) with Queen-Anne style ornamental terracotta and open gables, was an expensive acquisition for the society (Figs 154 and 155). Its architecturally complex formal qualities were valued highly amongst the portfolio as 'a very fine freehold...converted into some of the best of the Society's flats'.³⁵ Nevertheless, despite WPH's decade-long experience in reconfiguring townhouses into flats, creating workable layouts with multiple mezzanine levels was challenging. As illustrated in a mapping of tenants to flats, the group of women tenants co-habited a complicated internal spatial arrangement, where private kitchens and sanitary amenities were often separated from flats on different floors (Fig. 159).³⁶

WPH architect Gertrude Leverkus, who drew up the floorplans, made one of the flats her home from 1930 to 1960. Whilst renting the third floor bed-sitting room flat, she developed a long-term friendship with Mary Emily Tregarthen (1871-1956), who had been 'one of the first women factory inspectors' and later, a senior civil servant for the Board of Education.³⁷ After her departure in 1954, Leverkus relocated to Tregarthen's more spacious two-room flat, split across the ground and first floor mezzanines, where she recalled its 'outdoor sitting area...on the roof of the entrance porch' where she would sit 'reading or writing...illuminated by my portable standard lamp'.³⁸ Leverkus also spoke with fondness of her relationship with caretaker Mrs Elizabeth Buck (1882-c.1957), resident in the basement flat with her husband Charles Henry, who, throughout her thirty-year tenure 'was a good friend and looked after my interests.'³⁹

As the women activists had envisaged, the dwelling arrangements clearly offered single women camaraderie and mutual support. However, living at close quarters could also arouse considerable tension; Vera Larminie (1882-1964), a secretary from Sheffield, complained to the WPH committee of the 'unneighbourly conduct' of fellow top-floor occupant Laura Gargett (1883-1936), a militant suffragette, imprisoned at Holloway during the window-smashing campaigns of

³⁵ LMA, LMA/4776/A/03/002 - WPH Annual Report 1929. A further £2029 would be outlaid for the adaptation. WPH Property Ledger, c.1965.

³⁶ Mapping created by the author, based on Gertrude Leverkus plans c.1931 and research data on WPH tenancies compiled by Ann Sainsbury and Anne Sharpley.

³⁷ WL, 7GLE: 'Auntie Gertrude's Life', c.1976, p.54.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

1912.⁴⁰ Awkward access arrangements to their shared bathroom and private pantry kitchens on the mezzanine below may well have fuelled the antagonism. WPH solicitors Torr & Co. were instructed, and despite the conciliatory efforts of ex-suffragette Geraldine Lennox, the executive and tenants' committee agreed Gargett's eviction 'as, owing to its close proximity to her neighbours' it seems difficult for her to live in neighbourly fashion as laid down in her agreement...'⁴¹ Remaining flats were occupied by Sarah Dixon Houlton (1867-1956), a midwife and health visitor; flat-sharing sisters Dorothy Lissie Mary Louise Inness (1867-1936) and Maude Margaret Inness (1869-1954), both registered nurses from Hampshire; Helen Margaret Masson (1859-1934), a former governess who had relocated from WPH's 29 Gledhow Gardens; Isabel Fuller Acland-Hood (1862-1933) a baronet's daughter and former nun; and civil servant Anne Josephine Peers MacEwan (1874-1957).⁴²

The visual mapping of occupancy, of space with its users, makes manifest the wide variety of flat types consciously modelled around a mixed tenant demographic, here ranging in age from thirty-two to seventy-one, with occupations cutting across the professions, nursing, education and the civil service. It also illuminates the day-to-day lived experience of the flats functioning as permanent homes alongside other private and semi-private spaces (several of the tenancies lasting over twenty-five years). Pre-existing spatial hierarchies were retained, with lower status flats in the basement and attic level, but being targeted towards a more established group, the layout was atypical with at least three flats enjoying a private bathroom. The cultural import of private kitchen space is also evident given that alternative spatial strategies could have been deployed, such as additional rooms in the mezzanines or communal and potentially less costly dining space in the basement. The prolific, yet invisible practice of flat-sharing in the inter-war women's schemes is apparent, often siblings but also mothers and daughters, friends or same-sex couples. Indeed, in the following years, two further pairs of women would share flats at the property. Spatial impracticality, potentially increasing (sometimes less desirable) encounters in the liminal spaces, was also clearly overridden by a building's status or location.

Tensions could ensue both outside as well as within the women's schemes; with neighbours rather than between WPH tenants. Correspondence concerning 34 Kensington Park Gardens, a WPH scheme adapted in 1933 for eleven residents, revealed ongoing disputes with the occupants of neighbouring properties and the guardians of the adjoining gardens. WPH became embroiled with Mr and Mrs Rekstin, occupants of number 33, who, after refusing to attend to an overgrown tree, complained vehemently to the society about the newly reconfigured bathroom and toilet on the first-floor, where they had '... at all times of the day and night to be subject to a full view of the

⁴⁰ LMA, LMA/4776/A/01/006 - WPH Minutes, Apr-July 1932.

⁴¹ LMA, LMA/4776/A/01/006 - WPH Minutes 12 Jul 1932.

⁴² The basement one-room flat was either unoccupied until 1936, or the tenant may have been ineligible to vote: Electoral Rolls, 1931-1936. The tenant may have been Emma de Paiva Rapozo (1874-1943), a Portuguese national, who listed her address as 65 Harrington Gardens on shipping records (information from Ann Sainsbury).

users... performing their necessary duties in every stage of undress and nudity...'⁴³ A protracted five-year-long quarrel over communal garden rates also took place between WPH and the officious local residents who ran the Stanley Gardens South committee, who remained unsympathetic to the new form of tenure created within the converted house. A 'most unpleasant incident' saw a watering hose deliberately turned onto two WPH tenants who were told that, since they had not paid standard fees, they 'had no right to be in the gardens'. The disputes not only highlight the difficulties faced by the provider organisations, but also the daily strains and discomforts which might be experienced by single women tenants living amongst less accepting middle-class communities.

Small Dignified Homes

The creation of 'homes' rather than mere dwellings was perceived as one of the most fundamental tenets underpinning the work of the women's housing activists. The desire of self-supporting women for a small, secure home of their own was a constant refrain across the inter-war media. Living long-term in the transient, cramped environments of boarding houses, residential clubs or hostels was recognised as a poor, undignified substitute, especially for older women.⁴⁴ WPH sought to assure women that it was 'the constant aim of the Society to provide in as far as moderate expenditure would permit, really comfortable and attractive small homes'.⁴⁵ The concept of 'home' was a powerful social construct which operated at both a physical and psychological level. The 'Small Dignified Homes' being offered constituted more conducive environments for long-term dwelling, however seemingly innocuous aspects of the flats' materiality were also intimately entangled with meanings of home.⁴⁶

The inter-war drive for efficiency, and in part concerns over urban air pollution, prompted a more determined drive to abolish coal as a household fuel. The replacement of coal grates and chimneys with cleaner, more spatially efficient gas fires and flues, also freed floorplans from the burden of accommodating coal storage cupboards, ash bins and shutles. Aside from their practical application, fireplaces were also infused with deep-seated cultural, spiritual and psychological meaning, the 'hearth and home' idiom evoking a place of comfort, warmth and security. Housing reformer Gilbert Parker's plan, 'to abolish that Englishwoman's palladium, the individual hearth', in favour of central heating at his (never realised) Edwardian women's hostel, aroused considerable resistance:

As Mr. Parker is a Canadian, he probably does not realize the full bearing of this proposal.

Can a room without a fire be regarded as a home? Abolish the fireplace and the room is no

⁴³ LMA/4776/D/03/010 - Correspondence: Mrs Rekstin to WPH, 25 Jun 1938.

⁴⁴ LMA, LMA/4776/F/01/001 WPH Prospectus, c.1936.

⁴⁵ LMA, LMA/4776/A/03/002 - WPH Annual Report 1928.

⁴⁶ LMA, LMA/4776/F/01/001 WPH Prospectus, c.1936.

longer a sanctum. The shrine has disappeared from it, and in its place we are to have hot water pipes and a spirit stove.⁴⁷

Though such technologies were increasingly available, providers were reluctant to enact such a transformation within the inter-war women's schemes. Despite obvious spatial limitations, the LWH's first scheme of flatlets at Abbey Road featured prominent inglenooks, seemingly replicating the Arts and Crafts-inspired fireplaces incorporated at Waterlow Court. Although from their inception in the mid-1920s the UWHA installed gas connections and strongly advocated their use, the hearths supplied were still capable of burning coal. Moreover, even in the 1930s, large areas of Gordon Court's floorplan were given over to coal cupboards and ash bins.⁴⁸ Likewise, in 1933 Etheldred Browning was still opting to preserve traditional fireplaces during townhouse conversions to satisfy WPH tenants' requirements 'as my experience is that coal fires are much preferred to gas fires'.⁴⁹ The cultural connotations of the hearths as an emblem of home were harnessed in WPH's promotional literature. The 1936 prospectus cover featured an aperture revealing an illustration depicting a 'cosy "pioneer" flatlet' interior, the curtained kitchenette just seen in the background and the soft glow of the fire illuminating a typical club armchair of the period (Fig. 157). Accompanied by the tag line, 'Evening Brings All Home', the image was conceived to echo the sentiments of the well-known old Scotch proverb.⁵⁰ The visual representation of warmth and comfort also had a dual sub-text, both feminist and gender-conformist. It assured tenants, investors and the public at large of the homely, domesticity of the flats, whilst also associating the women tenants with a virtuous, Christian working lifestyle. In doing so, it also appropriated a role generally only afforded to men, where work beyond the domestic environs was rewarded at the close of the day by the comforts of home or their members' club. However, by 1930 the 'all electric' provision at the LWH's flats at the Holly Lodge Estate was being promoted in advertisements. The benefits for women living alone were emphasised in an article by Dorothy Edgecombe in the October 1930 issue of *The Electrical Age*, the journal of the Electrical Association for Women (EAW).⁵¹ Electric power as well as lighting allowed women occupants like her friend Mary, tenant at LWH Makepeace Mansions, to incorporate such space-saving innovations at the Baby Belling cooker into their compact flats (Fig. 158). LWH flats were already at the forefront of wider design trends, as seen in the 'Bachelor Girl's All-Electric Flat', designed by architect and RIBA Associate Edna Mosely and developed in conjunction with the EAW. A full-scale demonstration flat was exhibited at The Bachelor Girl's Exhibition staged in the New Horticultural Halls, Westminster in 1930, and promoted

⁴⁷ Zimmern, 'Ladies' Dwellings', p.101.

⁴⁸ LMA, A/FWA/C/D/294/001 - UWHA First Prospectus, Dec 1925, p.7; LMA, GLC/AR/BR/06/058709 - Hendry and Schooling, Gordon Court, ground floorplans.

⁴⁹ LMA, LMA/4776/D/03/012 - Correspondence: Etheldred Browning to Messrs Marsh & Parsons, 16 Nov 1933.

⁵⁰ The Scotch proverb 'The e'en brings a' hame' was often printed in Christian publications. One re-working by Calcutta missionary Ellen S. Craik framed the proverb within the context of modern workers returning to 'home-fires burning' for 'longed-for rest, and warmth, and welcome': 'Miss Ellen Craik's poems', *The Literary World*, vol 17, 1878, p.409.

⁵¹ Dorothy E Edgecombe, 'Bachelor girls' electric flats at Highgate', *The Electrical Age*, Oct 1930. The EAW was founded in 1924 and taken forward by Caroline Haslett amongst others.

as 'the first public expression of a woman's idea of how the bachelor woman could live electrically'.⁵² Many of its design principles would be seen in later 1930s minimum flats.

Many of the discourses surrounding the home were intensely gendered. Prevailing cultural norms deemed single men across the class spectrum to be largely unaffected by a lack of homeliness and separation from personal possessions, whereas for women 'homes' and 'home-making' constituted their very *raison d'être*. Strictly controlled access to private sleeping quarters at men's hostels, where they were 'not allowed to keep even the smallest piece of property' were not deemed appropriate for their female counterparts. Strongly opposing women's lodging houses, Christabel Osborn stressed that 'man wants a lodging, but woman wants a home'.⁵³ Unlike women, such material deprivations for men were accepted and justified, since:

'The man who lives in a Rowton House does not expect a home; very likely he looks forward to a day when some dear little woman will make one for him; meantime he is content with his caravanserai.'⁵⁴

With the heightened gender imbalance, the prospect of a marital family home was not an option for thousands of women of the post-First World War 'surplus' generation, nor was it universally desirable. For activists like Etheldred Browning, providing homes for unmarried women was part of the equalitarian feminist agenda:

The word "home" generally conveys the idea of a husband as being attached, but because a woman supports herself and stands more or less alone, is this any reason that she must spend her days in a hostel, or a bed-sitting room, and never arrive at the dignity of a home?⁵⁵

UWHA's President Lady Emmott expressed similar sentiments: 'the old idea...was that women could not have a home unless they were married...it was not everyone who wanted to be married. But everyone wanted a home of her own'.⁵⁶ Such contentious ideas of home challenged the patriarchal norms by promoting households without a male head, but were vitally important to self-supporting women. One tenant interviewee, who had been living for five years in a flat at one of WPH's Kensington houses: 'it is simply perfect here; so convenient, so easy to run, and so quiet – a real home.'⁵⁷

The need for 'homes' was, however, also based upon more traditional perceptions of women's innate home-making instinct. Women's role as homemaker went hand-in-hand with the concept of the efficiently run family dwelling. The art of homemaking was shaped by a growing

⁵² See IET (Institution of Engineering and Technology) blog: <https://ietarchivesblog.org/2017/08/01/the-bachelor-girls-exhibition-london-1930/>. <[accessed Mar 2021]>.

⁵³ Christabel Osborn, 'Rowton House for Women', *The Contemporary Review*, 01 Jan 1911, Vol 99, pp.707-8.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Etheldred Browning, 'Women and Homes', *The Vote*, 11 Mar 1921, p.395.

⁵⁶ 'Flats for Single Women', *West Sussex Gazette*, 28 Jan 1926.

⁵⁷ Florence B. Low, 'The Professional Woman: New Housing Schemes', *The Manchester Guardian*, 09 Jun 1927, p.6.

range of inter-war domestic media.⁵⁸ Though scholarly attention to date has focused on the housewife, the pressure to perform such duties was applied and equally felt by single women. Accordingly, flats became domestic venues where women occupiers might satisfy their 'natural' predilections. When debating the emerging women's housing schemes earlier in the century, Alice Zimmern warned against the suppression of this instinct occasioned by unsuitable housing:

We must not try to check that overmastering tendency which leads a woman to make a home out of the smallest and meanest attic lodging; In that lodging she will stay rather than move into your most expensive barrack "with steam heat up to the top" and all the latest modern improvements, if you deny her that little spot which she can call her own, where she can keep her treasures, arranged according to her own taste, and now and then offer a chair and a cup of tea to a congenial friend.⁵⁹

Worse still, for other commentators, the denial of women's home-making impulses also caused detrimental effects to both women's physical and mental well-being. Sydney March, journalist and long-term tenant at the Brabazon House residential club, contended that 'women, unlike men are intensely domesticated beings', and whilst the average man was able to overlook homely deficiencies in accommodation, for women this would 'vex her mind and play havoc with her nerves'.⁶⁰ The same concerns remained current after the First World War. On her return to London in 1924, Jane Mander, who had emigrated to New York ten years previously, was struck by the advances made in single women's housing provision across the Atlantic compared with the stagnant situation at home. The continued prevalence of the small women's residential club, and especially the boarding house with their 'benumbing and corroding influence', was, she claimed, the cause of women's depressed spirits and premature ageing; 'a kind of lack-lustre inside and out'.⁶¹ The inter-war women's housing protagonists were alive to the issue. As Etheldred Browning acknowledged, 'The home-making instinct in woman dies hard', thus the perceived needs continued to be accommodated in the spatial and material fabric of the new flats.⁶²

Creating homes with home-making potentialities also meant providing dwelling spaces imbued with a sense of permanence rather than transience. The desire for stability and thereby respectability, also reflected wider socio-economic shifts in housing tenure. Until the First World War, it was the societal norm for families to move to various rental properties during their lifetime. The notion of the permanent, static family residence developed with the rise of home ownership and a consumer economy in the inter-war decades.⁶³ As outlined previously, champions of

⁵⁸ Ellie Reed, *Making Homemakers: How Woman's Weekly Shaped Lower-Middle-Class Culture in Britain, 1918-1958*, (Liverpool University Press, forthcoming).

⁵⁹ Zimmern, 'Ladies' Dwellings', p.97.

⁶⁰ March, 'Women's Residential Clubs', p.333.

⁶¹ Jane Mander, 'Flats for Single Women', *Time and Tide*, 25 Apr 1924, pp.403-4.

⁶² Etheldred Browning, 'Women and Homes', *The Vote*, 11 Mar 1921, p.395.

⁶³ See Mark Swenarton and Sandra Taylor, 'The Scale and Nature of the Growth of Owner-Occupation in Britain between the Wars', *The Economic History Review*, 38 (1985).; Peter Scott, 'Marketing Mass Home Ownership and the Creation of the Modern Working-Class Consumer in Inter-War Britain', *Business History*, 50 (2008).

women's housing tied the schemes to national efficiency, arguing that working women needed greater security and longevity of tenure if they were to ably contribute to the economy. The need for permanent homes is borne out in the documentary record. Analysis of census and electoral registers evidences the large proportion of tenants living on a long-term basis across the women's schemes, frequently for twenty-five years and sometimes much longer. At LWH's St John's Wood development for instance, Victoria Eileen Brander (1899 -), an Edinburgh-trained ophthalmic surgeon, rented flat 11 at Addison House from 1924 to 1949; Elizabeth Feilde Bosanquet (1868-1948), a retired secretary emanating from an affluent family seat at Rock Hall, Alnwick Northumberland, lived on the second floor from 1924 until her death in 1948.⁶⁴ By the 1960s when the Holly Lodge Estate blocks were taken over by Camden Council, many LWH residents had since retired, having lived in their small flats for nearly forty years.⁶⁵ Investigating WPH's new schemes, Florence Low noted, 'tenants (who take the flats on a year's tenancy) seldom leave except to get married', and when flats were vacated, it was often to relocate to other houses within the portfolio.⁶⁶ Even at flats let on weekly rather than annual rental terms, such as at the UWHA's Hammersmith and Acton developments aimed at workers of lower social economic status, where a more transient occupancy profile might be expected, 20% of the inter-war tenancies lasted beyond twenty years and 30% more than ten.⁶⁷

Self-Actualisation and Identity

Significant value was also placed on securing more privacy for women in the new flats as a means to attain self-actualisation. The curbing of privacy and freedom in the typical boarding house was renowned and became a familiar trope for numerous women novelists between the wars.⁶⁸ The need for privacy was also perceived as a fundamentally English trait.⁶⁹ As Louisa Twining, a correspondent on women's housing noted, whilst the concept of sharing facilities in 'associated dwellings' had been successfully established in Germany and elsewhere, one of the principal barriers to its replication at home was 'the independence and "insularity" of English women'.⁷⁰ Likewise, Zimmern later contended: 'In dwellings for women the centre of gravity shifts itself naturally from the dining and other public rooms to the private rooms'.⁷¹

⁶⁴ Author's analysis based on England and Wales Census 1921; Electoral Registers England and Wales 1932-39; 1939 War Register; UK & Ireland Medical Directories, 1845-1942; UK Medical and Dental Students Registers, 1882-1937. Brander shared her flat with Alice Seddon Bayley from 1929 - 1937 and with new husband John H. Gurley after 1942. Bosanquet shared with Frances Bosanquet from 1929-1939. Her uncle was Bernard Bosanquet (1848-1923), political theorist and his wife, Helen Bosanquet (née Dendy; 1860-1925), was leader of the Charity Organisation Society; brother Robert was first chair of Classical Archaeology at Liverpool University.

⁶⁵ Downing, *The Story of Holly Lodge*, p.19.

⁶⁶ Florence B. Low, 'The Professional Woman: New Housing Schemes', *The Manchester Guardian*, 09 Jun 1927, p.6.

⁶⁷ Author's analysis based on data for 1167 tenancies identified by Ann Sainsbury and Anne Sharpley.

⁶⁸ In more recent decades it has become a recognised motif within literary modernism. See for example Mullholland, *British Boarding Houses in Interwar Women's Literature: Alternative Domestic Spaces*.

⁶⁹ 'A Club for Ladies', *Daily News*, 20 May 1890.

⁷⁰ Correspondence: Louisa Twining, 'A Castle in the Air', *Work and Leisure*, 12(10),1887, pp.283-4.

⁷¹ Zimmern, 'Ladies' Dwellings', p.97.

The flats were also considered as places of retreat and solace for their single women occupiers, where self-fulfilling intellectual and leisurely pursuits might flourish; a privilege, which with the exception of wealthy women, was historically reserved for men. The fruits of WPH chair Ray Strachey's house-building venture 'Mud House', though not commercially viable, became her constant refuge from hectic working life, where she would 'wear corduroy breeches' to defy feminine convention as 'a standing protest against constraints on women's freedom'.⁷² For the average working woman, unable to access such resources, small flats functioned as locations for supporting a range of career-focused activities. Indeed, as one nineteenth-century periodical commented, 'Some of the most important novels and biographies of recent years have been written in the "Ladies Residential Chambers"...Many of Miss Adeline Sergeant's books are written in her flat at Chenies Street...'.⁷³ Facilitating more conducive environments for creative and literary production offered greater numbers of women the sort of private spaces famously advocated by Virginia Woolf in her feminist essay *A Room of One's Own*, and manifested in her own, pseudo 'bed-sitting room' writing space at Monks House, East Sussex.⁷⁴ Beneficiaries included women like Ivy Davison, tenant for almost thirty years at WPH's 28 Barkston Gardens development, who edited *The Saturday Review* (later *The New Statesman*) and *The Geographical Magazine*, and moved in the circle of leading writers including Woolf, Vera Brittain and Rose Macaulay (Fig. 152).⁷⁵ Likewise, pioneering Natural History Museum scientists, Dorothea Bate, paleontologist (1879-1951), twenty years a resident at 65 West Cromwell Road, and her colleagues Helen Muir-Wood, geologist (1895-1968) and Isabella Gordon (1901-1988), marine biologist, who both lived at WPH's 15 Bramham Gardens for fourteen and seven years respectively (Figs 151 and 153).⁷⁶ With journalists, scientists and architects amongst a host of other professional residents, it is easy to envisage papers being written, editorials annotated and architectural plans sketched within the small flats. Women's need for private space for spiritual or leisurely pursuits was another strand of the new emphasis on women's self-actualization.⁷⁷ Several women living in the new women's schemes, as well as WPH founder Etheldred Browning, identified as Christian Science practitioners, meetings being

⁷² Brian Harrison, *Prudent Revolutionaries: Portraits of British Feminists between the Wars*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), p.169.

⁷³ 'Miss Adeline Sergeant', *The Woman at Home*, n.d., p.210, Nineteenth Century UK Periodicals. Emily Frances Adeline Sergeant (1851-), teacher, settlement worker and novelist.

⁷⁴ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, (London: Hogarth Press, 1929). For a discussion of Woolf's spatial practices see Rosner, 'The House That Virginia Woolf Built (and Rebuilt)'.
⁷⁵ See Felix Driver, 'Davison, Ivy Lilian Margaret (1892-1977), journalist and editor', *ODNB*, 2015. I am grateful to Ann Sainsbury for this information.

⁷⁶ Zoë Hughes, 'Helen Marguerite Muir-Wood: My Museum Hero', n.d. <<https://www.nhm.ac.uk/discover/helen-marguerite-muir-wood-my-museum-hero.html>>, [accessed 20 Feb 2023]; Karolyn Shindler, 'Bate, Dorothea Minola Alice (1878-1951), palaeontologist', *ODNB*, 2004.

⁷⁷ Colpus, 'Women, Service and Self-Actualization in Inter-War Britain'.

conducted within the confines of the flats themselves.⁷⁸ Browning stressed the benefits of the new flats in enabling women to foster interests beyond work:

The working hours of the day are not the whole of the day, nor always the most important part of the day. Women need to treasure as very precious and as very far-reaching in their power for good those hours that are spent privately according to individual aims and ambitions.⁷⁹

The contents of the WPH archive evidence how Browning's eighteen-year career managing the society's flat portfolio became all-consuming, yet her own interests extended to metaphysics, travel and music.⁸⁰

Individual self-expression was also manifested in the interior furnishing, decoration and styling of the flats, and in the curation of personal possessions. The unfurnished approach adopted for women's flats between the wars enabled these small dwelling spaces to function as blank canvasses which women might personalise. The domestic creative practices of the middling classes influenced and were influenced by domestic advice books and interior magazines which rose to prominence in the nineteenth century and proliferated in the twentieth.⁸¹ The rising popularity of minimal flats, standardised space-efficient furniture and equipment in avant-garde architectural circles also prompted a new focus on the dwelling type in the latter part of the 1930s, epitomised by books such as Martin and Speight's *The Flat Book*.⁸² Their impact on self-supporting, single women workers rather than housewives in this period is generally overlooked. However, such outlets for creative self-expression were as desirable for women living alone, particularly the much-derided spinster, often invisible to society, who frequently resided in pre-furnished, notoriously dowdy boarding house rooms for several decades. For Jane Mander, 'Years of living with other people's furniture, with other people's wallpapers...other people's pictures, and with other people's food', had further harmful psychological consequences for these women, who were 'suffering unconsciously from being unable to express themselves in their immediate environment', amounting to what she described as 'psychic starvation'.⁸³ The personalisation of flat spaces also served as a marker of social status and cultural refinement. Anne Beale, a commentator on the early women's schemes noted how: 'The artistic arrangement of these homes, their ornaments and pretty furniture, betoken the lady...'⁸⁴ The WPH prospectus likewise boasted that their flats were

⁷⁸ For example, tenant Isabel King LMA, LMA/4776/A/01/001 - WPH Minutes, 30 Nov 1921 and 19 Dec 1921. Sarah Evans (1890-1975) and Winifred Jacobs (1882-1973) were amongst several tenants identifying as a 'Christian Faith Healer'.

⁷⁹ Etheldred Browning, 'Women and Homes', *The Vote*, 11 Mar 1921, p.395.

⁸⁰ Etheldred Browning biographical entry in *Women's Provisional Club Bulletin*, Dec 1938, No.7.

⁸¹ See Jeremy Aynsley and Francesca Berry, 'Publishing the Modern Home: Magazines and the Domestic Interior 1870-1965', *Journal of Design History*, 18 (2005), 1-5, Introduction to special edition; Jane Hamlett, 'Managing and Making the Home: Domestic Advice Books', in *Imagined Interiors: Representing the Domestic interior since the Renaissance*, ed. by Jeremy Aynsley and Charlotte Grant (London: New York: V&A Publishing, 2006), pp. 184-92.

⁸² Leslie Martin and Sadie Speight, *The Flat Book*, (London: Heinemann : Shenvall Press, 1939).

⁸³ Jane Mander, 'Flats for Single Women', *Time and Tide*, 25 Apr 1924, pp.403-4.

⁸⁴ Anne Beale, 'Sloane Gardens House', *The Girl's Own Paper*, 16 May 1891, p.526.

for 'women of exacting taste' where they might indulge their interior styling impulses: 'It is not only a roof over her head which a woman seeks, but a place where she can express her individuality, for the completeness of a woman's life depends on the comfort and beauty of her home.'⁸⁵

There are relatively few photographic images of the interior of the women's flats. They appeared occasionally in corporate literature, magazine articles or newspaper advertisements of the period (Fig. 158 and 159). Nonetheless, they do provide a visual glimpse of the spatial layouts and materiality of these compact living spaces (furniture, textiles, ornaments etc.) and allow a reading of the interiors. Whilst WPH favoured idealistic illustrative artwork to represent their schemes, the UWHA experimented with internal photography. Initially spartan, somewhat amateur images of vacant flatlets did little to convey their 'charming interiors'; as the prospectus conceded, 'the photograph reproduced on page 9 was taken on one of the dark snowy days of January 1926, and therefore fails to do justice to the subject.'⁸⁶ By the early 1930s, image reproduction had advanced, and a later prospectus featured a one-room flat in the 1926 Leigh-on-Sea development, Essex.⁸⁷ The pendant light shade, patterned rugs, fireplace and over-mantel were typical of a traditional, middle-class family parlour (Fig. 161). The spatial and material illusion of a normative arrangement – with a pseudo-family living area as the central focus, and the single bed recess obscured from view by 'feminine' tailored pleated pelmets and with matching curtains) – had long been advocated in women's accommodation. Promotional editorials boasted of the advantages of Sloane Gardens House bed-sitting rooms where 'the bed, and all toilette apparatus could be curtained out of sight...'⁸⁸ The artistically arranged oval mirror, picture frames, carriage clock, paired candlesticks and flower arrangement enriched the visual representation of the flatlets, but also operated as signifiers of how life might be conducted and objects curated within the dwelling space, thereby producing and reproducing gender and class identities.

A further interior photograph at an unidentified 1930s development, conveyed a more 'modern' minimal approach, with pared-back, pale-stained furniture and striped print fabrics, the focus on this occasion, perhaps tellingly, angled towards the kitchenette rather than the fireplace (Fig. 162). Being part of promotional campaigns, it is difficult to ascertain how far the flat interiors were either real or staged; the images provide an indication rather than proof of lived experience. The same may be said of Wells Coates' more polished presentation of the Isokon, Lawn Road 'minimum flats' in the architectural press and the full-sized show flat exhibited at Dorland Hall. Lauded as 'the last word in modern flats' with Japanese-inspired 'doors which slide into the walls', photographic evidence suggests that curtains were also used by tenants to screen areas (Fig. 163).⁸⁹

⁸⁵ LMA, LMA/4776/F/01/001 - WPH Prospectus, c.1936.

⁸⁶ LMA, A/FWA/C/D/294/001 - UWHA First Annual Report and Balance Sheet, 31 Dec 1925.

⁸⁷ The Leigh-on-Sea scheme comprised one-room flats in five blocks: 'Ayrton', 'Cavell', 'Edgeworth', 'Fawcett' and 'Terry' Houses: LMA, A/FWA/C/D/294/001 - Correspondence: UWHA to Family Welfare Association, 13 Apr 1961.

⁸⁸ 'Sloane Gardens House', *Work and Leisure*, 14(03), 1889, p.87.

⁸⁹ 'A Woman's Point: Old or New?', *Daily Mirror*, 30 Oct 1934, p.24.

Calls for the spatial and material means to entertain guests within the flats, even on a modest scale, was perceived as a further marker of tenants' gender and middle-class status. Women's traditional role as hostess in the Victorian middle-class family home was replicated at the LRC's Chenies Street Chambers' annual 'At Home' event where tenants' guests were 'kindly received by each hostess'.⁹⁰ When touring bed-sitting rooms at the LDC's Sloane Gardens House, Anne Beale highlighted 'the time-honoured kettle on the hearth', an amenity which enabled the women occupiers to entertain guests for 'afternoon tea'.⁹¹ Despite busy working lives, the cultural value placed on such social activities had not abated in the inter-war years. As Etheldred Browning recognised,

...a place of her own, furnished to her taste, lived in with absolute freedom, fit for the simple entertaining of guests, and for the dispensing of friendliness, is the goal of most self-supporting women.⁹²

Gertrude Leverkus recalled her fondest memory of life at WPH's 65 Harrington Gardens being 'the visit of my dear mother in 1930, when she and [sister] Elsie had tea with me...'⁹³ The continued performance of these gendered, middle-class hosting rituals was viewed as a means for single women to rehearse domestic skills in preparation for marriage in a potentially servant-less house.⁹⁴ As discussed in Chapter 1, even when women opted to preserve their single status, they continued to be universally viewed by society as 'potentially married'.⁹⁵ Jane Mander considered that, 'Every woman should have a place where she can give a man a meal in privacy and peace, with no rules and regulations...This is one of the chief of feminine rights in this modern world.'⁹⁶

In terms of feminist critique these behaviours represented a further instance of the performative quality of 'gendered space'; designed spaces being moulded by prevailing class and gender conventions, which were then reinforced through everyday practice. These apparent needs and desires can also be analysed with reference to Pierre Bourdieu's concept of Habitus; the conscious or unconscious adoption of a set of norms, values and behaviours of particular social groups as a means to affirm one's class, gender and other social identities.⁹⁷ The women tenant occupiers constituted a diverse group, with a broad span of ages, occupations and backgrounds. Yet even those emanating from relatively lowly origins, shared an aspiration to middle-class values and

⁹⁰ Helen C. Black, *Notable Women Authors of the Day*, (Glasgow: David Bryce and Son, 1893), p.170.

⁹¹ Anne Beale, 'Sloane Gardens House', *The Girl's Own Paper*, 16 May 1891, p.526. For tea's cultural significance see Erika Rappaport, *A Thirst for Empire: How Tea Shaped the Modern World*, (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2017).

⁹² Etheldred Browning, 'Women and Homes', *The Vote*, 11 Mar 1921, p.395.

⁹³ WL, 7GLE - Gertrude Leverkus, 'Auntie Gertrude's Life', 1976, p.54.

⁹⁴ See Grace Lees-Maffei, 'Accommodating "Mrs. Three-in-One": Homemaking, Home Entertaining and Domestic Advice Literature in Post-War Britain', *Women's History Review*, 16(5), 723-754.

⁹⁵ Holden, 'Imaginary Widows'.

⁹⁶ Jane Mander, 'Flats for Single Women', *Time and Tide*, 25 Apr 1924, pp.403-4.

⁹⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, translated by Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977). Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, translated by Richard Nice, (London: Routledge & Paul, 1984).

behaviours. Thus, providing the kind of dwelling spaces where women might exhibit appropriate 'taste' in furnishings, décor, curate treasured objects, or perform the role of hostess, created conditions where tenants' social identities were formed and reformed.

The spatial and material characteristics of the flats, their values and meanings, and the many, often contradictory, facets of women's individual and social identity were encapsulated in the artwork of WPH's inter-war logo, designed for the society by Nina Balfour, a practicing artist and first cousin of Etheldred Browning (Fig. 164).⁹⁸ Ideas, at once progressive and traditional, were embodied in the sophisticated monochrome image of a reclining female tenant, nonchalantly reading a book near a window and vase of flowers.⁹⁹ The visual representation portrayed the flat interiors as pleasant, contemplative spaces where women occupants might freely and privately indulge in leisurely, intellectually stimulating pursuits. At the same time, it signified that the flats were reassuringly domesticated environments where women, despite their single status, might arrange furnishings and display objects, thereby performing gender and class expectations. Likewise, whilst the less-structured clothing identified the figure as a progressive 'New Woman' worker, the somewhat outmoded Edwardian 'low-coiffure' hairstyle, ankle-length skirt, and elegant repose, struck a more conservative tone which spoke to a mature demographic of tenant, but also a potentially more conventional public investor. Distancing tenants from the controversial, androgynous attire of the rational dress movement, and the shorter hair and hemlines of the fashionable 'flapper' style, affirmed the tenants' propriety and respectability. The statue of the lady tenant erected at the memorial fountain in the gardens of the LWH's Holly Lodge Estate flats more than a decade later (Fig. 78), conveyed much the same set of subliminal messages. As this and previous chapters have made evident, there was little evidence of homogeneity or conformity; tenants were a diverse body with a myriad of individual identities. The inter-war women's schemes, in all their shapes and forms, were the 'bricks and mortar' manifestation of genuine, heartfelt hopes to secure for women freer and more fulfilling lives.

Conclusion

The exploration of the interiors of the women's flats highlighted the significance of design aspects such as multi-purpose, space-saving furniture and the introduction of compact, private kitchen space. Kitchenettes with cookers, sinks and ventilated larders were incorporated in the majority of the women's flats, however small, and in both converted and newly built schemes. The new specifications engaged with inter-war design discourses surrounding spatial efficiency, labour-saving and domesticity, usually centred on the housewife and family homes but made relevant for the single woman in the alternative domestic environment of the small flat.

⁹⁸ WPH Logo was designed and executed by Nina Mary Balfour [née Joachim] (1876-1928). Two of Nina's sisters, Gertrude Russell (Hon. Mrs Rollo Russell) and Maud Joachim, the well-known militant suffragette, were early WPH investors. I am grateful to Jennifer Taylor, Anne Sharpley and Sue Kirby for this information.

⁹⁹ LMA, LMA/4776/F/01/005 - WPH Supplementary Prospectus, 1924 and 1935; LMA/4776/F/02/003 - Nina Balfour, WPH logo artwork, c.1924. Balfour's logo has been revived by WPH in recent years and is known as 'Matilda'.

Investigating lived experience through a mapping of tenants and occupiers was fruitful in visualising living patterns, as well as demonstrating the difficulty of configuring rational layouts in townhouse conversions. Linking to census data also revealed the support networks and camaraderie fostered amongst tenants who interacted in the semi-private space of stairs, landings and corridors. At the same time, it exposed the tensions which could arise within those shared spaces. A range of interlinked values and meanings were also found to be embodied within the flats and their various representations. Considerable psychological value was attached to the flats and external surroundings as private, peaceful places which facilitated self-actualisation; self-expression through interior design and self-fulfilment through study, leisure and spiritual pursuits. The flats thus appropriated the qualities of a retreat in the historically male contemplative tradition. The ideology of 'home' was also central, expressed through the new kitchens, hearths and mantels, furnishings and ornaments, imbuing the living spaces with a sense of permanence, independence and dignity often absent from other forms of women's accommodation. Such environments offered practical benefits related to comfort, cost and convenience, but also enabled the performance of rituals associated with middle-class female behaviours, such as the curating of treasured objects and the hosting of afternoon tea. Interpreted as rehearsing domestic skills for the marital home, this reproduced and reinforced class and gender norms as a means to render spinster lifestyles more socially acceptable.

Thesis Conclusion

The principal contribution of this thesis has been to offer a more comprehensive account of housing provision for single working women in the inter-war period. The social aspects of the housing issue for so-called 'surplus women' had been explored from a range of disciplinary perspectives but the architectural historical dimensions had not been adequately examined. The study is the first to conduct detailed comparative analysis across the provider organisations and their various schemes, whilst assessing the continuity with earlier Victorian and Edwardian women's developments. Furthermore, in a departure from the existing historiography of the inter-war family home, it considers relationships between gender and architectural design in the alternative context of domestic space conceived for single women. The investigation also engages with feminist thought then and now, both as a driver of improved women's housing, but also as a tool for critical analysis.

Research Findings

The thesis is organised into three parts. This research topic unites architectural history and women's history, thus Part I provided an overview of the social and historical context of inter-war women's housing from both perspectives. The exploration of Victorian and Edwardian women's history in Chapter 1 highlighted two major issues pertinent to inter-war women's housing: firstly, the precarious and marginal position of self-supporting working women in society, which would lead to their invisibility and exclusion from national housing programmes; and secondly how legal, political and social gains achieved for women in this period provided the framework for the efforts of inter-war housing reformers, affording them both the impetus to advance women's status as equal citizens, and the confidence and skillset and to achieve it. Chapter 2's exploration of housing history over the same timeframe demonstrated the diversity of housing schemes pioneered for single working women, whilst emphasising the distinct moral and spatial challenges involved in housing female occupants with low incomes in a manner which befitted their class and gender.

Part II turned attention to the central thesis topic, inter-war women's housing, focusing on three provider organisations, The Lady Workers Homes (LWH), Women's Pioneer Housing (WPH) and the United Women's Homes Association (UWHA). The method employed in the three chapters – tracing the institutional histories with particular attention paid to key individuals and motivations, and closely examining the themes which cross-cut their business and design practices – has facilitated an account of women's housing in this period with greater depth, which revealed the

connections, allegiances and contrasts between the organisations that less nuanced approaches often fail to bring to light.

The analysis in Chapters 3 and 4 highlighted changes in the profile of the women's housing providers and the nature of the roles performed by men and women within them. Unlike earlier initiatives, ventures operating after the First World War were now instigated and driven by men as well as women. Their backgrounds were also more diverse; not only rooted in philanthropy and the women's movement, but also from the sphere of property speculation and social insurance. With the lifting of legal barriers in most professions by the 1919 Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act, women, long instrumental as housing pioneers, were increasingly able to assume all executive roles within the organisations. Many of the female protagonists were working women themselves whose skillset had been honed through women's rights campaigning and by undertaking roles supporting the War economy. Much of the impetus behind the new initiatives came through post-1918 housing reform, specifically the more favourable terms offered to public utility societies in the 1919 Housing and Town Planning Act. However, there were also strong links in terms of both personnel and philosophy with the garden cities and town planning movement. Offering single women workers affordable, suitable housing was seen as a crucial vehicle of social change; one of the key components of reconstruction and a means to promote women's status as working citizens.

Although all the housing organisations ostensibly adopted the cooperative public utility society model – operating at the margins between philanthropy and profit – they assumed starkly contrasting approaches to their corporate identities, business and design practices, many of which perpetuated gender conventions rooted in the notion of 'separate spheres'. The differing approaches of women vis-a-vis men to the delivery and management of women's housing may be partly explained by personal qualities and experience. Nevertheless, there was a tangible contrast between male protagonists' distinctly corporate interpretation of executive roles and forceful approach to expansion, and women's rigorous adherence to mutual, friendly society principles and measured, incremental growth. All of the organisations under scrutiny faced challenges in advancing capital or proving eligibility for funding. However, women's access to building loans and credit was more restrictive and they additionally contended with the prejudice of government officials based upon their links with the women's movement and suffrage militancy.

The examination of the design approaches adopted by the organisations provided further evidence of women's more assertive agency. Findings in Chapter 5 revealed the connections between women's housing and the professionalisation of architectural practice, notably women's position within the profession. WPH was instrumental in offering support to the first generation of professionally certified RIBA women architects including Gertrude Leverkus and Eleanor Hughes. This thesis has been the first to recover and examine Leverkus' architectural portfolio as WPH's dedicated architect. The close consideration of the nature of agency and authorship in the design process in this chapter also produced findings which challenge the perception of the professional architect as sole author. Recognition of the contribution of non-professionals – self-trained

builder/designers and architecturally-informed clients – as well as collaborative, user-focused design methods have been shown to be crucial to understanding the production of housing.

Research in Part II built upon the ongoing efforts of scholars to bring underacknowledged protagonists shaping the built environment, particularly women, to the fore. The organisational focus uncovered the leading roles played by relatively unknown housing reformers such as Etheldred Browning and Alban Gordon, as well as many other individuals whose contribution in related fields was recognised but not their involvement in women's housing (Ray Strachey, Richard Reiss or Dorothy Peel for instance). The neglected careers of women such as the accountant Miriam Homersham and architect Annie Hall, both pioneers in their respective fields, have also been highlighted. Their invisibility was partly attributable to them 'falling through the net' when their professional bodies ceased to exist; The Society of Incorporated Accountants merger with the Institute of Chartered Accounts in Homersham's case, and the Society of Architects amalgamation with the RIBA for Hall.¹

Part III of the thesis sought to investigate the architectural design, planning and construction of the women's schemes in detail. A notable point of departure in this study in terms of approach has been its scrutiny of flat conversions on the same terms as the purpose-built projects. Analysis in Chapter 6 underlined the continued significance of adaptive re-use in housing; a medium usually neglected in architectural historical accounts. Adaptive re-use, the cornerstone of the WPH model, was a pragmatic solution for organisations lacking the financial means to build afresh. However, seen from a feminist perspective, the re-modelling of townhouses – a traditional setting for women's social projects – also constituted a more modest, socially acceptable intervention into the built landscape when authored by women. In this interpretation women's housing was shaped by gender expectations prescribing men and women's conduct in this 'public' realm. There was seemingly less desire on WPH's part for a bold architectural statement of the type attempted by LWH and the UWHA, although the WPH's healthier financial position in the mid-1930s made new-build a conceivable option. As was discussed, their 'flagship' development became the large-scale conversion project at Stanley Gardens (1937-8). Contrasting perceptions of value were also manifested in publicity campaigns. Although almost half of UWHA projects were conversions, only newly built schemes took centre stage. WPH, on the other hand, actively promoted their rejuvenation of London's redundant housing.

Examination of the purpose-built schemes has helped to dispel misconceptions of stagnancy in inter-war architectural design. The case studies in Chapter 7 demonstrated that the field of women's housing was rich in experimentation between the wars. Although designs were based upon established building types and spatial traditions such as the quadrangular enclave, there was also considerable innovation in spatial economy, standardisation, modularisation and engagement with new build technologies. This was most evident in Davis' schemes and in the strikingly modern

¹ In Homersham's case, The Society of Incorporated Accountants merger with the Institute of Chartered Accounts, and for Hall, the Society of Architects amalgamation with the RIBA.

design of the UWHA's Gordon Court (1928). Such findings contribute to the current reconceptualisation of the British inter-war era as a period of dynamism in architectural terms, rather than a moribund interlude before post-1945 developments.

The analysis also illuminated nuances of flat typology including such variants as 'flatlets', 'open flats' or 'service flats'. This has helped bridge the historiographical gap, not only in terms of our understanding of women's housing but also inter-war flats more generally. The attention paid to tailoring one-room, single occupancy formats also highlights the underacknowledged contribution made by women's housing providers to the design of 1930s 'minimum flats'. With space perpetually at a premium in women's schemes since the 1880s, their designers had long innovated spatially and materially to overcome such issues. These silences in the historiography of inter-war modernism owe much to the self-positioning of Modernist designers and the limited value generally ascribed to speculative and voluntary sector architecture.

The method of studying architectural floorplans in conjunction with census data has revealed many invisible patterns and modes of living which tend to be opaque in other accounts. Much like the earlier women's developments, designated flats or rooms housed unseen women and men of lower socio-economic status, performing roles essential to the functioning of schemes: caretakers (female in WPH's case) and their families; superintendents and restaurant managers; and porters and domestic staff. It also brought to light the hidden practice of sharing whereby women tenants frequently co-habited flats with dependent female relatives, friends or same-sex partners. Analysing plans in isolation has been shown to lead to misinterpretation. Flats with separate bedroom and living spaces, which were assumed to accommodate one tenant, were often shared and larger flats also occupied by three (or more) women. Lengths of tenure were also much longer than might be expected, frequently lasting several decades. Such findings overturn assumptions then and now of transient dwelling spaces and lend weight to the inter-war providers' frequent assertion of the need for 'real homes'.

The analysis further evidenced a broader occupational and demographic profile than might be supposed, even within the same schemes. Slippage at the socio-economic boundary between the lower-middle and upper-working class in wider society was reflected in the broad tenant base of the women's schemes. The stated objective of most providers was to cater to 'business and professional women' in low-income middle-class occupations but they also shared a goal to reach a broad cross section of workers. Moreover, when considered in conjunction with census data any assumed class distinctions between the different providers or their various schemes were difficult to detect. Nevertheless, subtle signifiers of a working-class slant were apparent in the design specification for some UWHA's schemes with baths under flap tables in kitchen areas, and 'scullerettes' or 'workrooms' rather than 'pantry kitchens'.

Until now, the body of scholarship exploring inter-war design discourses of home efficiency, labour-saving and domesticity has focused on the impact on new family homes. Connections drawn between gender and design have also revolved around the role of the housewife. A particular

concern of this thesis was to investigate how such ideas played out in the alternative domestic context of flats designed for single women. The exploration of the material and spatial qualities in Chapter 8 demonstrated an identifiable shift away from communal arrangements towards the provision of compact, private kitchen space, even in the smallest flats, with a standard trio of cooker, sink and ventilated larder. This offered women tenants enhanced independence whilst engaging with wider technological advances and discourses of efficiency. Viewed through a feminist lens, however, this also allowed single women to perform domestic duties appropriate to their gender and class. Conforming to prevailing norms was a means to assert the value of the women's flats and gain social acceptance from an inter-war society which prioritised the nuclear family above all other household formations and viewed spinsterhood as a temporary or undesirable anomaly.

Unlike most studies of this topic, this chapter also focused attention on the lived experience of the schemes. Though developments increasingly lacked communal facilities, the environments of the women's schemes continued to foster strong female support networks and bonds of friendship through the informal, semi-public spaces of corridors, stairs and landings (although close proximity amongst tenants could prove more inflammatory than harmonious for some). Restaurants and club buildings, increasingly fused with community meeting space, encouraged new forms of sociality which encouraged women tenants' participation as active citizens. The new living spaces were also shown to have embodied a range of other less immediately tangible values and meanings. There were clear intentions to harness qualities historically reserved for men, with flats conceived as private, peaceful retreats and sites of self-actualisation, where women might work or pursue self-fulfilling activities more freely. Ideologies of 'hearth and home', firmly rooted in middle-class family values, were also widely expressed in the flats and their various representations. Such conditions enabled the performance of a range of gender and class-based behaviours including curating and hosting. These and other findings reveal the masking of singlehood with normative, cultural and social values. Just as the cottage flat schemes imitated family houses, the screening from view of single beds and kitchen alcoves maintained the illusion of a normative, family environment internally.

The approach adopted in this thesis, focusing attention on organisations, individuals and the experience of lived space as much as questions of architectural design, has facilitated a more holistic view of women's housing provision in inter-war London.

Future Research Directions

The findings of this thesis have highlighted the potential of new research strands and avenues. For instance, the approaches and methods employed could be applied to a comparative study of the accommodation types provided for male bachelors in London and elsewhere across a similar timeframe. There also remains considerable scope for more scholarly research into spaces designed for single-occupancy in domestic design more generally.

Due to the time and space limitations, the thesis coverage has necessarily been confined to three inter-war women's housing organisations. However, a number of other comparable initiatives emerged during the course of research, notably the Over Thirty Housing Association, founded in 1937 as an offshoot of the charitable body, the Over Thirty Association (discussed briefly in the Epilogue). The housing branch would later become known as Housing for Women, operating in London alongside Women's Pioneer Housing (WPH).

The current research centred on the London area; however the geographical scope could be extended both nationally and internationally. Various types of women's housing schemes, both municipal and privately built, were provided in other English urban centres before and after the First World War. Manchester for example, where Ashton House (1909-10) became the first purpose-built municipal scheme for women; or Birmingham, the location of the Mayfield public utility society who actively sought a merger with WPH. As previously discussed, the UWHA established suburban women's schemes up and down the country from Brighton to Liverpool. There is also significant scope to explore housing in the rest of the British Isles. In Scotland, Glasgow's municipal provision for female workers emerged in 1897; in Wales, Cardiff's rapid industrial and commercial expansion led to such provision in 1911. A range of comparable schemes for single women workers were pioneered across Continental Europe, in Germany, Austria, the Netherlands and elsewhere, as well as in North America.

Broadening scholarly research into women's housing provision will allow comparative analysis to extend across borders and oceans, revealing more about this neglected field of architectural history and enhancing our understanding of the interconnectedness of women's experience. This amplifies the significance of this thesis and the value of its multi-disciplinary approach, bringing fresh clarity to the typology of flats and recovering the hidden histories of individual women.

Women's Housing Schemes post-1939

In the inter-war decades, the concerted efforts of the organisations explored in this study never came close to meeting the demand for affordable women's housing. Much like their predecessors, progress was perpetually beset with difficulties concerning the gender pay gap and the economic viability of schemes. Throughout the period housing reformers continued to lobby central and local government to address the unresolved issue for self-supporting women. The matter was brought to a head when, in December 1936, the housing committee of the Over Thirty Association (OTA) organised a joint deputation to Downing Street calling for an enquiry into the state provision of one-room flatlets for single women workers. The charitable body had been founded in 1934 to assist the growing number of 'older' self-supporting women over the age of thirty who were suddenly confronted with unemployment and homelessness in the aftermath of the Depression.²

² The initiative later become known as Housing For Women, the current London-based women's housing specialist: Daniels and Richardson, *A Place of Her Own*.

Yet, despite being led by prominent female MPs including Eleanor Rathbone, and supported by many women's organisations including Women's Pioneer Housing (WPH), their mission was ultimately unsuccessful and the women's housing issue remained 'invisible' in housing plans thereafter.³

The outbreak of war in 1939 brought significant additional challenges for the organisations, not least coping with air raid precautions and an exodus of tenants during evacuation. Nevertheless, the range of flats they created continued to serve as homes for self-supporting women well beyond the Second World War. Although some developments began to accommodate couples, a large proportion of the developments continued to be dedicated to single women until well into the 1980s.⁴ The long-term success of their schemes – although a relatively minor contribution to overall national housing delivery – was significant given that most public utility societies failed to survive in the years following the First World War, swiftly disposing of all their houses.⁵

The Lady Workers' Homes (LWH) continued to manage and let their women's schemes until 1959, trading briefly as Grovewood Securities Limited, after which time LWH was wound up and its assets sold to the Studleygrange Property Company.⁶ In 1964, the Holly Lodge flats, being in a poor state of repair and segregated from the rest of the Highgate estate, were taken over by St Pancras Borough Council.⁷ Over the course of the next three decades, the blocks underwent a programme of refurbishment and external restoration, with smaller flats adapted to modern spatial standards and tenancies no longer restricted to single women. However, despite a hard-fought campaign to conserve the building, the Holly Lodge Estate clubhouse with its restaurant, theatre and assembly rooms was demolished in 1966 and eventually replaced with a block of twenty-five sheltered flats for elderly residents in 1978. MacWhirter House, the restaurant and club building for Abbey Road Mansions, faced a similar fate, demolished and replaced with a new block of flats, Albany Court, in the 1970s. As with most private mansion blocks, the tenure at the former LWH St John's Wood schemes was transformed by so-called flat 'break-up', whereby blocks were no longer managed as a whole but leaseholds of individual flats gradually sold to owner occupiers.⁸ As an exception, the freehold and management of Addison House has been assumed by the Addison House Residents' Management Company Ltd, administered by a voluntary Board of Directors with most leaseholders

³ TNA, HLG 52/846 - Papers of the Over Thirty Association Deputation to the Ministry of Health, 1936. The OTA committee opted to adapt townhouses themselves as emergency women's accommodation before forming the Over Thirty Housing Association in 1937 which erected a purpose-built scheme of 18 self-contained flatlets at Clapham (1939-44).

⁴ Buccleuch House, Clapham Common, a model block of 96 one-room flats for single women built by Hackney Council in 1951, was one of the few municipal options to emerge in London.

⁵ Malpass, 'Public Utility Societies'.

⁶ A parent company, Peachey Property Corporation Limited, managed the flats: Downing, *The Story of Holly Lodge*, pp.17-19.

⁷ Ibid. Subsumed under Camden Borough Council in 1965.

⁸ For flat 'break-up' see Hamnett and Randolph, 'The Rise and Fall of London's Purpose-Built Blocks'.

as shareholders.⁹ The communal gardens with pavilion and walkways, shared amongst the former LWH mansions blocks (now Circus Lodge and Elm Tree Court), have also been retained.

WPH properties all suffered damage during Second World War bombing, some significantly so, but by 1948 they had been re-instated and were fully-occupied.¹⁰ The organisation continues to operate in London today alongside Housing For Women, as the two surviving housing providers specialising in affordable rental flats for single women.¹¹ Some of their inter-war schemes have been sold, including the Brighton house, and several purpose-built schemes have been erected since the 1960s. The WPH portfolio has roughly doubled in size since 1939, with around 100 properties and just over 1000 flats (many smaller flats having been combined to provide self-contained amenities). An ambitious expansion project was announced in 2018 to re-develop the buildings at their Wood Lane site (delayed due to the Covid pandemic). More recent plans include the replacement of the inter-war block Brook House, Acton (formerly belonging to the United Women's Homes Association (UWHA)) with a fifteen-storey block of 102 affordable flats.¹²

Following the UWHA's financial debacle of the early 1930s, some properties were sold but most of their blocks of flats and converted houses continued to be let to women occupants for the remainder of the century. In July 2000, the UWHA came under the umbrella of the Circle 33 Housing Trust, part of the Circle Anglia Group.¹³ By that time the condition of much of the housing stock had declined, the primary purpose of the change being to facilitate works to bring the flats up to current standards. During the next decade, this included a major refurbishment of Gordon Court (renamed Pankhurst House); the replacement of the cottage flat schemes at the Hammersmith site with larger blocks; and a mixed re-development of Murray House, Westminster providing affordable low-rental and shared ownership flats, and commercial units.

The affordability of housing for older single women remains a major issue in the twenty-first century. The cooperative and collaborative ethos of the inter-war schemes has been embodied in such recent developments as the 'OWCH' initiative (Older Women's Co-Housing), a community-led group in Hampstead, North London.¹⁴ In a remarkably similar mode to WPH, the first meeting of six founding members was convened by Madeleine Levius (d.2005) and Shirley Meredeen and held at Meredeen's home in August 1998. The efforts of the group – which included forming a collaborative relationship with housing association Housing for Women, a study trip to the Netherlands for architectural inspiration, and overcoming 'many obstacles which society puts in

⁹ <https://www.addisonhouseonline.com/ownership-and-management/> <[accessed 17 Apr 2023]>

¹⁰ LMA, LMA/4776/F/01/003 - WPH prospectus insert, 1948.

¹¹ WPH recently celebrated their centenary in October 2020.

¹² https://www.bdonline.co.uk/news/grid-gets-go-ahead-for-art-deco-inspired-acton-scheme/5122728.article?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Daily%20Building%20Design%20%20Daily%20news&utm_content=Daily%20Building%20Design%20%20Daily%20news+CID_5b079f98f3cc611af7a9c45d8a716605&utm_source=Campaign%20Monitor%20email&utm_term=GRID%20gets%20go-ahead%20for%20Art%20Deco-inspired%20Acton%20scheme, <[accessed 17 Apr 2023]>.

¹³ The Circle Anglia Group has since merged with the Clarion Housing Group.

¹⁴ The scheme received extensive media coverage and several awards: see New Ground Cohousing: <https://newgroundcohousing.uk/> <[accessed 17 Apr 2023]>.

[the] way' – eventually resulted in a 'pioneering community for women'; the UK's first senior cohousing development of twenty-six purpose-built, self-contained flats with communal facilities, co-designed with architectural firm Pollard Thomas Edwards in 2010.¹⁵ Such schemes evidence that innovative, tenant driven housing models for women living alone, conceived, planned and constructed through participative methods, still have architectural and social relevance today.

¹⁵ New Ground Cohousing: <https://newgroundcohousing.uk/> <[accessed 17 Apr 2023]>.

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Appendix: Summary Tables

Table 1: The Lady Workers' Homes Limited Schemes

Scheme			Date of Construction	No. of flats
St John's Wood	Abbey Road	MacWhirter House	1915-16	single rooms in clubhouse
	Abbey Road	Abbey Road Mansions	1915-17	120
	Grove End Road	Addison House	1919	124
	Circus Road	Circus Road Mansions	1921	40
	Elm Tree Road	Elm Tree Road Mansions	1921	100
Highgate	The Holly Lodge Estate	Langbourne Mansions	1924	88
		Makepeace Mansions	1927	269
		Holly Lodge Mansions	1928	408

Table 2: Women's Pioneer Housing Limited Schemes

Adapted Schemes	Date Acquired	Freehold/ Leasehold	No. of flats
67 Holland Park Avenue, W11	1921	F	6
28 Philbeach Gardens, SW5	1922	L	6
29 & 30 Gledhow Gardens	1922	L	6
21 Stanley Crescent	1922	L	6
134 Holland Road, W14	1922	F	5
62 Ladbroke Grove, W11	1923	F	8
65 West Cromwell Road, SW5	1924	L	8
14 Ladbroke Gardens, W11	1924	F	5
28 Barkston Gardens, SW5	1924	L	6/7
22 Stanley Crescent, W11	1924	L	16
31 Gledhow Gardens, SW5	1924	L	7
12 West Eaton Place, SW1	1924	L	9
151 Cromwell Road, SW5	1925	L	8
1 Nevern Road, SW5	1925	L	5
13 Ladbroke Gardens, W11	1925	F	-
2 Porchester Square, W2	1924	L	-
2 Horbury Crescent, W11	1926	L	7
11 Ladbroke Gardens, W11	1926	F	-
24 Gledhow Gardens, SW5	1926	L	15
25 Gledhow Gardens, SW5	1926	L	15
14 Collingham Road, SW5	1926	L	8

15 Ladbroke Gardens, W11	1927	F	-
34 Ladbroke Gardens, W11	1927	-	-
16 Ladbroke Square, W11	1927	L	-
99 Oakley Street, SW3	1927	L	5
10 West Eaton Place	1927	L	7
10 Abbey Road, NW6	1928	-	-
17 Elsham Road, W14	1928	F	8
62 Redcliffe Gardens, SW10	1928	F	10
63 Redcliffe Gardens, SW10	1928	L	-
1 St Stephens Crescent, W2	1928	-	7 (+2)
8 Stanley Gardens, W11	1928	F	-
128 Abbey Road, NW6	1929	L	12
5 Clanricarde Gardens, W2	1929	L	8
65 Harrington Gardens, SW7	1929	F	9
14 Oakhill Road, Putney SW15	1929	F	7
126 Abbey Road	1930	L	6
67 Ladbroke Grove, W11	1930	F	11
19 Ladbroke Square, W11	1930	-	-
14 St George's Road, NW6	1930	-	-
15/26 Bramham Gardens, SW5	1930	F	16
3 & 4 Gliddon Road, W14	1931	L	20
34 Kensington Park Gardens, W11	1933	F	11
79 Ladbroke Road, W11	1933	F	9
25 Nevern Place, SW5	1934	L	9
16 Stanley Crescent, W11	1934	F	-
12 Colinette Road, Putney SW15	1934	L	6
45 Sussex Square, Brighton	1934	F	-
Brook House, Gunnersbury Lane, Acton, W3	1935	L	-
Browning House, Wood Lane W12	1935	L	32
Nightingale House, Du Cane Road W12	1935	L	24
24-29 Stanley Gardens, W11	1937	F	-

Table 3: The United Women’s Homes Association Schemes

Development			Date of Construction	No. of Flats
Purpose-Built Schemes				
Hammersmith	Du Cane Road	Selma/Garrett House	1926-7	16
	Du Cane Road	Alcott/Anderson House	1926-7	8
	Du Cane Road	The Quadrangle	1927	36
	Du Cane Road	Gordon Court	1928	176
	Wood Lane	Wood Lane Flats	1928	24
	Du Cane Road	Nightingale House	1929	24
	Wood Lane	Browning House	1930	32
Hampstead Garden Suburb	Hampstead Way	Queen’s Court	1927	80
	Emmott Close	Emmott Close	1928	120
Westminster	7-13 Vandon Street	Murray House	1927-8	97
Adapted Schemes				
Earl’s Court	18 Philbeach Gardens	Melba House	1925	12
Bayswater	2-7 Westbourne Grove Terrace	-	1927	46