THE HOUSING MARKET IN ISLINGTON BETWEEN THE WARS

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Abstract

The means for the provision of houses in an area and the manner of the subsequent ownership and occupation of the houses evolve through local conditions, so that every area has what can be called its own housing culture. When local authorities were required by legislation in 1919 to make provision for housing need within the area of their jurisdiction, the Metropolitan Borough Councils of the inner boroughs of London found that not only were they constrained by the paucity of available sites, they were also expected to intervene in an already mature housing culture. By following the housing activities of the Metropolitan Borough of Islington, my thesis illustrates the difficulties and constraints encountered when a local authority did intervene in a local housing culture and the eventual adjustments and compromises necessary in both the public and the private provision of houses. The first chapter explains the nature of the housing culture in the Borough and chapter two applies the concept to post-World War I Islington. Chapters three and four outline the housing activities of Islington Borough Council under the 1919 and 1924 Housing Acts. Chapter five compares the housing culture in Islington during the 1930s with the earlier immediate post-War period and chapter six deals with Islington Council's housing contributions under the 1930 and 1935 legislation. Chapter seven examines the rents charged by Islington Council in relation to the rents of accommodation already available in the locality and this chapter also considers the measures the Council took to manage its properties. Chapter eight is concerned with the amenities provided by the Council in its dwellings and it identifies the emergence of a housing culture within the public sector which by the end of the inter-war period had assumed an autonomy of its own within the general
housing culture of Islington.
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Introduction

The actuality of things forgotten (especially, perhaps, things despised) in the recent past, the truth under the surface of late assumptions, the seeing for the first time as historic what has only lately been forgotten as contemporary, lies very near the roots of creative thought and the formation of new attitudes. John Summerson in the introduction to H.J. Dyos, Victorian Suburb, page 10.

What could be more normal than the way we house ourselves? Most people can expect to buy their dwellings with a building society mortgage, while those unable to manage that will live in rented accommodation, usually with the help of housing benefit. What could be more obvious and in the 1990s, what could be better? But as M.J. Dauntion has pointed out in A Property-Owning Democracy? the complacence or resignation with which we view our housing situation today, is based on a false belief in the inevitability of our housing history.¹

The history of housing tenure, as opposed to the history of houses, has only recently become of interest, and like so much history it has been used to justify the contemporary situation. Marian Bowley's early account of the origins of Government intervention in housing production accepted the premise that private enterprise could not or would not provide enough houses for a substantial section of the population and that council housing was inevitable.² This argument was important for the post-Second World War housing policies of both the Labour and Conservative Governments. Later historians of 19th-century housing conditions such as Tarn and Wohl helped to reinforce Government's role by showing how the effects of legislation had improved the lot of the poor in large cities.³ Even while faith in public provision of houses continued, a critical literature
concerning who had access to the different types of housing tenure arose. John Rex and Robert Moore in their work on Birmingham found that the type of tenure was an important variable in the access different groups had to the available housing. Under this scrutiny the various kinds of housing tenure assumed more importance.

At the same time there was a growing interest in the housing of the past, especially that built around the towns during the great housing booms of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Sir John Summerson's *Georgian London* was a pioneer study which was followed by Donald Olsen's *Town Planning in London*. The work of these historians appeared at a time when the Georgian townscape was enjoying a period of renewed approval. What distinguished this work was that the authors were not interested simply in the physical appearance of Georgian houses, but they were also curious about the financial arrangements and organisational processes which produced them.

The 1960s saw a burgeoning of suburban studies after H.J. Dyos' investigation into the development of Camberwell. The care that Summerson and then Olsen had taken to chronicle the great landed estates, was applied to the activities of speculating builders of the suburbs around London. C.W. Chalklin provided valuable studies of building in provincial towns, as did David Cannadine. This approach became so widely accepted that it was incorporated into the method adopted by *The Survey of London* from 1973 and the publication of the volume on North Kensington.

Academic interest in the process of development coincided with an interest on the part of the general public who were adopting a pattern of owner-occupation in areas of the large cities which had been
hitherto left to a decaying private rented sector. Various events had caused this: the Rent Act of 1965 which reduced the value of rented property; the Leasehold Reform Act of 1967 which gave leaseholders the right to buy their freeholds; and changes in the regulations of the building societies which allowed mortgages on older houses. Those people who bought nineteenth-century terraced houses of even modest dimensions formed a ready audience for a study like Stefan Muthesius' *The English Terraced House.*

In the meantime as public finances for the public sector became scarce, doubts were being expressed about council house provision. On the left the role of the state in providing housing was questioned by among others J. Melling and his colleagues in *Housing, Social Policy and the State.* Melling in his introduction pointed out how by politicising the provision of housing, Governments whether Labour or Conservative, became committed to continuing intervention. Although Melling seemed to agree with David Englander that the agitation from the working classes initiated Government involvement in housing, he and his colleagues questioned the motivation and intentions of both central and local government in the implementation of the various Housing Acts after World War I. Further studies argued that the state was at best mistaken and at worst manipulative. Patrick Dunleavy's *The Politics of Mass Housing in Britain* related a comedy of errors in the production especially of high blocks of flats, while Mark Swenarton's *Homes Fit for Heroes* developed a critique of the Government's production of the early suburban cottage estates and the intentions lying behind their design. It seemed that the earlier historical justification for public housing provision was no longer
sufficient when the public sector was under attack both from the proponents of owner-occupation and the critics of accessibility and quality.

Along with a re-interpretation of the accepted history of council housing went a re-evaluation of the history of working-class housing of the nineteenth century. For example M. J. Daunton in *House and Home in the Victorian City* linked the financial arrangements surrounding housing production with the forms of what was built, and dispelled the impression that working class housing was in all places uniform and was uniformly awful. 12 In his study, *Slums and Slum Clearance*, J. A. Yelling attempted to give a more realistic picture of those grappling with the slums in the latter years of the 19th century and to present the intractable problems such as the dispersal of the poor which plagued clearance schemes. 13 The history of the building industry provided interesting suggestions about the property cycle and the shortage and glut of houses before the First World War, 14 and then Avner Offer in *Property and Politics* opened up so many avenues of investigation by examining the structure of the property market and the effects of the pre-1914 decline in prices and sales volume. 15 Offer's book appeared at a time when the contemporary housing market was heading for an unprecedented boom, which threw up more questions for the historians.

First of all the encouragement for council tenants to buy their dwellings caused questions to be asked about the categories of public and private which had not arisen up to that time. Previously a policy of 'municipalisation' whereby local authorities bought houses from the private sector had resulted in small pockets of public sector housing
appearing in the midst of private housing. Now anomalies arose when what had been homogeneous public estates were broken up into public and private ownership. If after the mid-1970s it seemed that the public housing stock would not grow very much, it had occurred to very few that it would shrink as public stock was transferred to the private sector. What had seemed immutable was found to be vulnerable to change, and this raised the question about the inevitability of the current situation and how it had come about.

During the 1970s housing researchers and urban sociologists had been exploring a structural approach to housing which would integrate the various forms of tenure and their financial systems. Rex and Moore have been mentioned, and other examples are Harloe, Issacharoff, and Minns, The Organisation of Housing, and Murie, Niner and Watson, Housing Policy and the Housing System. The first study acknowledged the different sectors in the housing market, but viewed them as static and therefore manageable. The model of the housing market taken by the second study was more dynamic and yet still tied to the inevitable importance of the local authorities. However, without an historical dimension, these studies seemed irrelevant when the public sector shrank and owner-occupation achieved dominance. Somehow the students of the contemporary housing system had been wrong footed by events.

How could history throw light on what had happened? M.J. Daunton in his introduction to Councillors and Tenants went back not to the early provision of dwellings by the Government, but to their intervention in the housing market in the form of the Rent Restriction Acts, which began in 1915. Whereas the private rented sector before the War was the dominant form of tenure, after the War it began to
shrink under the adverse effects of the Rent Restriction Acts, high rates and repair costs, better returns from other forms of investment, and later punitive conditions of compulsory purchase. The implications of this shrinkage Daunton brings out in *A Property-Owning Democracy?*. Because of their marginal political position, he argues, the interests of private landlords were pushed aside in favour of the owner-occupier and the council tenants. What seems to characterize the British situation, and particularly that of England, was the lack of any alternative structure which could continue private renting when the landlords slipped out of the market.

The approach Daunton has adopted of looking across tenures and of including an economic as well as a social analysis is one I have attempted in my study of the Metropolitan Borough of Islington and its private and public housing provision. I have also drawn on the work of the historians such as Sir John Summerson and Dyos to establish the pre-existing development which determined so much about the public provision.

It might be argued that as a Metropolitan Borough, Islington could not be considered representative, but its position vis a vis the centre of London led to its being extraordinarily balanced in its composition. It was mixed between working class and middle class; it was neither exclusively residential, nor was it predominantly industrial or commercial; it was close to the centre and at the same time bordered upon the edge of the outer suburbs. Most of the house property was held on leasehold and the majority of houses were rented. The earliest speculative developments in the Borough dated from the early nineteenth century, but most of the houses were built after mid-
century. By 1900 Islington was physically complete and the only 

further building to take place before 1914 was private flats and some 

small industrial property. In 1919 Islington was not only complete, 
it also had the population of a large industrial town. In order to 
deal with a complex and sophisticated housing market, it seemed to me 
that the concept of a housing culture was useful. Anomalies which 
were difficult to explain by the workings of the market alone became 
more understandable when viewed from the point of view of accepted 
practice and expectations embodied in a culture. Most of these were 
connected with class distinctions, but accepting them as given was 
particularly helpful in understanding the actions of Islington Council 
under the various housing acts.

The housing culture also helped explain the persistence of the 
rented sector in Islington. Far from being hounded out of private 
renting, the local landlords seemed to have become entrenched in the 
area. At least in Barnsbury, owner-occupation decreased from 11.5% to 
9% of owners over the twenty years from 1923 to 1944, while 40% of 
properties in the ward remained in the same hands. It would seem that 
a turnover of 60% in ownership was rather low for a period of twenty 
years, and suggests a slow if not static market. One explanation for 
this was that the low wages of the working class had kept new 
investment out of the private rented sector but old money in, because 
landlords were not able to get their equity out of their property 
while prices remained depressed.

When Islington Council like other local authorities were 
requested to draw up plans for new housing in 1919, they were 
confronted with the prospect of entering the already existing housing
culture in the Borough. Although the Treasury and the Ministry of
Health saw the provision of housing by local authorities in general
terms, it transpired that each locality had its own peculiar
circumstances. My study of Islington Council's housing provision
continues the investigations made by the authors in Councillors and
Tenants into the experience of various local authorities. But I
insist on the inter-action between the public and private, and for
this reason I begin in the nineteenth century before there was any
thought of public intervention in Islington's housing market.

My thesis thus has two main objectives. One is to add to our
knowledge of housing production by local authorities, especially in
the twenty years after the 1919 Housing Act, and the other is to
contribute to our understanding of how the public and private sectors
evolved. The origins of mass public provision of housing were not
simple nor were those characteristics for which council housing is now
criticized necessarily inherent in its beginnings. The private rented
sector despite competition from owner-occupation continued in the
inner suburbs and not only provided an important form of tenure, but
defined the function of a Borough like Islington in terms of the rest
of the Metropolis. By making the 'contemporary' into the 'historic'
we can perhaps discover the origins of our own contemporary
circumstances and begin to think more clearly about them.
Footnotes - Introduction


Chapter One - The Origins of the Housing Culture in Islington

Each of the Metropolitan boroughs has its own history in relation to the centre of London, and the manner in which the parishes surrounding the city developed during the 19th century was not irrelevant to the housing culture as it evolved in the boroughs prior to 1914. Before considering Islington's experience of public intervention in the local production of housing after 1919, it would be useful to explore the origins of the Borough's housing culture. This chapter will deal with the pattern of land ownership in Islington, the beginnings and pace of development, the physical housing stock produced, and the ownership and occupation of the houses. Then will be considered those changes which took place before 1914 and which formed the context for Islington's housing situation immediately after World War I.

Sir John Summerson has admirably traced the history of residential building that went on in the immediate vicinity of the City of London from the seventeenth century. C.W. Chalklin has done the same for building around provincial towns at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries, and both of them have identified the rational method evolved for dividing the landowners' property into equal lots which facilitated the building of the terraced houses found around so many town centres. In London, ground landlords such as Lord Southampton experimented with this novel form of development as he did in Bloomsbury Square, and modest imitations of these terraces appeared throughout the eighteenth century in most of the suburban villages surrounding London. One of the more famous of these was Church Row, built in Hampstead about
1720, but as F. M. L. Thompson has said, the residential suburb as we
know it is really a phenomenon dating from after the Napoleonic Wars.⁴

Prior to the building booms of the 19th century, the parishes in
proximity to London were more or less important depending on their
usefulness to the centre. Before 1800, although it was well within an
easy walk of St Paul's, Islington was a 'working suburb'. As in other
districts around the capital, market gardens occupied land behind the
main roads and provided produce for the centre.⁴ Islington was a
place where roads from the counties just to the north of London
converged, and its pastures became a stopping place for drovers
bringing their sheep and cattle into the live meat market at
Smithfield. The pasture land also served local dairymen and the
parish became known for its milk production. Another important
function of Islington was as a provider of water. The New River
Company, established early in the 17th century, brought water from
Ware in Hertfordshire to its reservoirs in the north of the parish
before piping it down into the City. Brickmaking can be added to the
list of services the parish provided for the centre and surrounding
areas, but perhaps for most Londoners in the 18th century, Islington
was best known as their recreation ground where they could enjoy sport
or the delights of the various pleasure gardens located there.

Islington was also a favourite retreat for wealthy city families,
long before it became common practice to live in the suburbs, well
away from the counting house. As Samuel Lewis remarked in his
chronicle of the parish published in 1842:

From its proximity to London and the purity of its air,
Islington, at a very early period, became the residence of the
more opulent citizens, and was inhabited by many illustrious and
distinguished families; but at the present time, it is chiefly
composed of dwellings of persons connected with the capital, and retired citizens."

One of the wealthy proprietors was John Dawes, a stockbroker, who took a 61 years lease on land in Canonbury in 1770 and built there three houses and a villa for himself. Later in 1781 he rebuilt Highbury House at a cost of £10,000, and leased in 1774 his freehold property in Highbury for 60 years to the architect, James Spiller, for house building purposes. Spiller's was a speculative venture, and Lewis tells us that at first it was not the success that had been hoped:

The houses were at first let at very low rents, and many of them remained for a considerable time unoccupied; the first tenants of Nos 2 to 8 inclusive, obtained leases at from 34£ to 36£ per annum; but such is the increased value of the property, that many of the houses are now let at thrice the rent paid by the original inhabitants.

Despite the ribbon development that took place along the main roads of Islington, at least since the early years of the 18th century, the time was not ripe for a full development of the parish as a residential suburb.

Islington was a large parish, including 3,032 acres within its boundaries in 1806. No landowners predominated among the local proprietors, and the 21 owners who held more than 25 acres each accounted for the ownership of 64.6% of the tithable land. (See Table 1.1) This compared with the 10 owners in Hampstead who owned more than 25 acres each and who held 81.5% of the tithable land, and the 20 similar owners in Camberwell who held 84.4% of the tithable land. Some of the Islington owners were private families such as the Thornhills, the Tufnells, and the Milner-Gibsons. Others were corporate owners such as the Drapers' and the Clothworkers' Companies, or trustees such as those who administered the Stonefield estates.
Francis Sheppard has pointed out that these corporate owners, whose purpose was often to raise funds for various charitable purposes ranging from education to the relief of the poor, were prevalent throughout the environs of London, and in the case of Islington they were quick to exploit their properties by building houses. For example the Stonefield estates in the south of the parish comprised about 16 acres which were let on building leases for 81 years from March 1824. Rents from the property in 1808, before any building had taken place, amounted to £84 per annum, but in 1840 after the estate's houses had been completed the revenue from rent was £925, or 11 times what it had been 32 years before. Such a steep rise in revenue would have been most attractive to corporate charities which depended on their endowment to fund their activities, and they were among the first owners to develop their land in Islington, along with the Marquess of Northampton, a landed proprietor who would have been used to regarding land as an exploitable asset.

Table 1.1
Structure of Landownership in Islington, 1848

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size of Tithable Estates</th>
<th>Landowners</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Landholdings</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 1 acre</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>34.5</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 to 4 acres</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>33.0</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 to 9 acres</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 to 24 acres</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>333</td>
<td>18.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 to 99 acres</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>738</td>
<td>39.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100 and over</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>459</td>
<td>24.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Tithe Apportionment, St Mary's, Islington, 1848

From the list of those liable for the payment of tithes in 1848, it is obvious that no landowner dominated in Islington, and development took place through the activity of many small proprietors. Holdings of any substantial size, such as the 121 acres of Robert
Fellowes and the 117 acres of the Tufnell family were in the north of the Borough where at mid-century much of the land remained unbuilt upon. By this time, however, the streets and squares in the south were filled with terraces of nearly uniform appearance. Although the land was owned in relatively small parcels, the majority of houses were still built under the leasehold system. The landowner let his land on building leases for a peppercorn rent in the first instance, and the builder sold the lease of the house to the buyer who then owned the house for the duration of the lease on payment of a modest ground rent to the landowner. When the lease reached full term after usually 99 years in London, the landowner took possession, not only of the land, but of the house as well. The reward for letting the land at a low rent was the opportunity for the ground landlord to redevelop his property according to circumstances obtaining a century after the houses were built. As will be shown, the element of redevelopment in the leasehold system became increasingly significant as time went on.

The point when land became more valuable as building land than it was for the other functions found in the 'working suburb' is difficult to determine. The moment often depended on circumstances occurring outside the locality. By 1800 Islington was losing its functions as a 'working suburb' but had not yet assumed its position as a residential suburb for the City. At the time of the 1801 Census out of a population of 10,212 there were 112 engaged in agriculture while 892 were recorded employed in trade, manufacture or handicrafts."

Expressed as a percentage of the sum of these two figures, Islington's agricultural workers were 11.15%. As might be expected the number of agricultural workers within the City of London was very small and
formed only 0.04% of the two groups.

It seems however that the relative decline in the agricultural value of land had to coincide with other developments before building could be conceived of as a viable alternative. Transport perhaps contributed most to the increased likelihood that an area would assume the status of potential building land. Although Islington was so close to the City and within a twenty minute walk of St Paul's, during the 18th century the journey was fraught with danger, and the fear of being set upon was enough to prevent the ordinary middle classes without benefit of horse or carriage from moving the short distance to the parish. In 1761 the new City Road from the Angel to Finsbury Square cut a direct link to the financial heart of the City, and at least by 1768 there was an hourly coach service along this route. 12 Around 1773 Henry Penton developed the streets on the north side of the new road west of the Angel in what became known as Pentonville. 13 His houses were modest terraces suitable for a very middling class of City clerk and they set the tone for further development in, for example, nearby Liverpool Road.

The coach was relatively expensive, but in 1829 the horsedrawn omnibus arrived in London, and reduced the cost of commuter travel further. One of the first routes was along City Road, but this was soon followed by others which carried passengers as far as Highbury and Holloway. 14 While the neighbouring parishes were reaching their optimum population and, in the case of the City, beginning to decline, Islington was growing at first steadily and then at an ever increasing rate. In 1801 there were 1,665 inhabited houses in the parish, and by 1851 these had increased to 13,528. St Pancras immediately to the
west of Islington started off in 1801 with 4,173 inhabited houses, and by 1851 had increased to 18,584. After this Islington began to overtake its neighbour and by 1881 it had increased its net housing stock two and a half times, to 34,046. (See Table 1.2) In many ways Islington and St Pancras were similar in their geography and their population, but the similarity was upset when the north London railway termini came to be located in St Pancras and the borough lost houses not just to the stations but also to the rail yards and sheds.

Table 1.2
Decennial Increase or Decrease in Net Number of Inhabited Houses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Islington</th>
<th>St Pancras</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1811</td>
<td>734</td>
<td>1,653</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1821</td>
<td>1,096</td>
<td>2,998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1831</td>
<td>2,302</td>
<td>3,545</td>
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<tr>
<td>1841</td>
<td>2,714</td>
<td>2,381</td>
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<tr>
<td>1851</td>
<td>5,017</td>
<td>3,834</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1861</td>
<td>7,176</td>
<td>3,268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1871</td>
<td>6,375</td>
<td>2,278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>6,967</td>
<td>598</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>3,829</td>
<td>-258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>770</td>
<td>-728</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census 1801 - 1901

In his classic study of the development of Camberwell, H. J. Dyos has described the interests which were involved in building the 19th century suburb. It was not enough that the landowner was willing to let his land at a low rent and that the builder was prepared to build the houses. The builder had to have capital to build and the buyers had to have the capital to buy. These needs brought into being a network of agencies and individuals who acted as channels of capital from often very small investors to the builders and buyers of houses such as those built in Islington. The very act of building a suburb could generate the wealth of the locality by drawing into it the money for investment, the craftsmen for construction, and the population to
fill the houses.

During the forty years from 1841 to 1881, 25,535 houses were added to Islington's net housing stock, while in the following forty years from 1881 to 1921 only 8,044 dwellings were added. Building slowed somewhat during the depressed years of the 1880s, but by the time the general surge in building during the second half of the 1890s most of the Borough was built up. That Islington was built mostly in the middle years of the 19th century and that it was built on land relatively close to the centre of London, determined the type of houses found there. Sir John Summerson has pointed out that the physical form of the London house was conditioned by the economic need to get as many houses as possible into one street. Since the choice had been made to give every dwelling its own front door at street level, this led logically to the terraced house.

As for the plan of the house itself, nothing could be simpler. There is one room at the back and one at the front on each floor, with a passage and staircase at one side. On a site as narrow as twenty-four feet hardly any other arrangement is possible; in broader sites it is still a perfectly satisfactory and economical arrangement. There is no escape from it. Mariners' humble cottages in the East End have this plan; and so have the great houses in Carlton House Terrace. Indeed while new working-class housing was being built in long terraces, the middle-class preference was shifting to the detached and semi-detached villa, but this was made possible by their access to cheaper land further from the centre which did not require such high
densities to ensure a profit.

Thus most of Islington's housing stock consisted of terraces of different sizes, but basically of similar form. The older houses, especially in the south of the Borough, had basements, which when first built, were intended to serve as domestic offices and to be inhabited by servants. Later, the houses erected in the north on the border with Hornsey and around Finsbury Park were of the non-basement type which were better suited to middle-class families unable to afford live-in help. During the first half of the nineteenth century there was very little housing which was built specifically for the working classes. About 1800 George Pocock acquired forty acres of freehold land from the Marquess of Northampton and built some working-class dwellings in Lower Holloway around Georges Road. On the west side of the Borough a small industrial area grew up in a district called Belle Isle, and since this area came to stand close to the railway when Kings Cross was built, it attracted a working-class population and eventually streets of small houses arose for their occupation. Otherwise the working classes tended to live in cottages in courts and back gardens behind the more substantial houses along the main roads. One of these areas which later became cause for concern was centred around Elder-walk on the east side of Essex Road. Up to mid-century the area was occupied by those engaged in 'watchmaking and other mechanical trades', but subsequently it became inhabited by a mobile population of casual workers.

By 1853 the southern third of the borough, south of the North London Railway line, was largely built up with streets and squares of terraces. North of the railway line building had proceeded along
A Plan of the Parish of
ST. MARY ISLINGTON
with the Boundaries of the
Several Ecclesiastical Districts
AND
PAROCHIAL WARDS.

ENGRAVED & PUBLISHED BY
JOHN DOWER.
Cuming Place, Pentonville Hill.

ECCLESIASTICAL DISTRICTS.
1. St. John's
2. St. Andrew's
3. St. Mark's
4. St. Mary's
5. St. John's
6. St. Stephen's
7. St. Peter's
8. St. Judas'
9. St. Paul's
10. St. Jude's
11. St. Andrew's
12. St. Matthew's
13. All Saints'
14. St. Peter's

WARD
1. Upper Hollow
2. Lower Hollow
3. Highbury
4. Islington
5. Barnsbury
6. St. Mary's
7. Canonbury
8. St. Peter's

Boundary, thus
Map 1 - Parish of St Mary, Islington, 1853.
Holloway and Hornsey Roads as well as in the district lying between Holloway Road and the new Metropolitan Cattle Market. However, a fair amount of building land was still available, especially on the larger estates owned by the Tufnell, Morrice, and Fellowes families. The latter two families owned land in Highbury, which they decided almost simultaneously to develop in two estates of suburban villas. One reason that it seemed auspicious around 1850 to build substantial middle-class villas in this area was that the North London railway line opened in that year a service from Highbury to Fenchurch Street in the City, thus bringing what had been pasture land within a fifteen minute ride of the centre of business. Another reason, other than transport, was that both these estates came into the hands of the younger generation at this time. R.J. Morris has shown how the suburban house played its part in the life cycle of the middle-class families of 19th-century Birmingham and Leeds, and there may have been a similar, more long-term process going on here. Neither family lived in Islington, although an elderly uncle of the Morrice family resided at the Grange on their Highbury property. While the older generation remained alive, nothing was done about development, but as soon as the land came into the hands of the heirs, they set about developing new style suburban estates with substantial detached and semi-detached houses on generous plots. Morrice, a country vicar, developed his estate, Aberdeen Park, himself, and although it remained incomplete until the 1930s, it still retained its middle class status. The Fellowes family soon capitalised their property by selling the estate to the developer Henry Rydon who took great care by his control of building and the enforcing of covenants to maintain the character
of Highbury New Park. Much of the building that went on in the north of the Borough tended to undermine the status of existing development by increasing density and reducing the amount of garden space and greenery. These two estates, however, enhanced what development had already taken place in Highbury and connected this area to the new detached villas that had recently been built immediately to the south on the Marquess of Northampton's Canonbury estate.

A substantial amount of building land in Upper Holloway was owned at mid-century by three freehold land societies, the National, the Birkbeck, and the St Pancras Freehold Land Societies. Far from furthering building in this area, the societies delayed development by selling off their plots individually so that building was piecemeal and slow. In the case of Campbell Road this led to a protracted building history and its subsequent reputation as 'the worst street in North London' could partly be attributed to this cause. At first this street experienced mixed fortunes as Jerry White has noted. Of the 63 occupied houses in Campbell Road in 1871, 37 were inhabited by more than one household, but nonetheless at this time 20 households could keep a servant. Although the multiple occupation of houses came to be regarded as the cause of decline in a locality, the flexible form of the London house meant that it was only too easy for multiple occupancy to occur even among the middle classes.

It has been assumed that the attractions of the single household dwelling must have been great at a time when the opportunity for a family to live in a house of its own was becoming available to a greater number. However the contemporary commentators often had an interest in building houses, and the possibility that some people
might prefer to share their house could not be countenanced. This went for those who advocated flats as well, because their point was that families were living promiscuously in houses never intended for that purpose. The multiple occupancy of middle-class houses became an issue at the time of shortages brought about by building slumps as happened for example during the 1840s. One correspondent to The Builder in 1847 pointed out that it was very difficult for a middle-class family to find a residence in a decent neighbourhood for £40 a year and that many were forced to accept 'unfurnished lodgings in houses not built for the purpose of accommodating separate families, and where the intermixing of the landlord and his lodgers is most unpleasant.' In 1849 The Builder referred to a paper read by F. Chambers at the Architectural Association:

The paper in question contains the surprising statement, that "only one-fourth of the dwelling houses in the metropolis are occupied by one family each" the remainder, though constructed to be similarly tenanted, are ("common" or uncommon, as the case may be) mere lodging-houses - sham private dwellings, which they are not, - ill-arranged, uncomfortable lodgings, which they were never built to be. Such arrangements may have been a sign of an immature market with limited channels of investment available for building in the more distant suburbs where space was plentiful and land was cheap. A borough such as Islington, so close to the centre, was vulnerable to the rapid rise in land values as commercial development increased, so that multiple occupancy of dwellings would not have been confined to the working classes.

How the houses of Islington were occupied is of continuing interest since the occupiers formed an important section of the housing culture. In the large villas along the main thoroughfare of
Highbury New Park, even at the time of the 1881 Census, there were hardly any lodgers let alone multiple occupancy of houses. However, just a few streets over to the east on the same estate, 10.5% of the population in 1871, the first census year after the houses were built, were classified as lodgers. From the first it seems that lodgers were acceptable in these houses without a loss of status. The history of the occupation of Gibson Square, built on the Milner-Gibson estate during the 1830s, illustrates how the pattern of occupation need not be fixed once an area was covered with houses, nor how change must always be in the direction of higher density. The houses were of the basement type with an additional three or four storeys and lay within a half hours walk of St Paul's and within easy reach of various omnibus routes. If we look at the Census Enumerators' Returns for Gibson Square from 1841 to 1881 the most striking variable is the number of households sharing. In 1841 35.7% of the 70 households resident in the 57 houses were sharing. The proportion drops significantly in 1851, and continues low until it rises sharply in 1881. (See Table 1.3) The number of lodgers and boarders increased markedly from 1851 to 1861 and continued at an average of 13.5% of the population. There was at this time apparently a market in lodgings, particularly for single men engaged in white collar work. The reduction in population and in the amount of sharing on the part of households recorded in 1871, may have been the result of a building boom, but in Islington at least there was no building slump between 1871 and 1881. It is more likely that external pressure from overcrowding in neighbouring boroughs was beginning to have an effect on the older streets in the south of Islington. Certainly no
labourers had come to live in Gibson Square by 1881, but there were more tradesmen among the inhabitants and perhaps also fewer people working for themselves.

Table 1.3
Households and Inhabited Houses Gibson Square, 1841 - 1881

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1841</th>
<th>1851</th>
<th>1861</th>
<th>1871</th>
<th>1881</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>322</td>
<td>333</td>
<td>362</td>
<td>289</td>
<td>326</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No of Households</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No of Inhabited Houses</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Households Sharing</td>
<td>35.7</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>47.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census Enumerators’ Returns 1841 - 1881

The population in Islington started to grow at an increasing rate between 1841 and 1851. Between those two Census years 39,609 were added to the population and local inhabitants began to realize that the suburban village had gone forever and that the residential suburb was fast taking its place. We have seen that house building continued at a high level until 1881 and at the same time the population continued to increase. (See Table 1.4) In 1911 the population had not only stopped growing, it had actually fallen as the area of rapid expansion moved away from built up boroughs such as Islington to further suburbs such as Tottenham and Walthamstow.

Table 1.4
Decennial Increase or Decrease of the Net Population of Islington

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Increase/Decrease</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1811</td>
<td>4,853</td>
<td>15,065</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1821</td>
<td>7,352</td>
<td>22,417</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1831</td>
<td>14,899</td>
<td>37,316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1841</td>
<td>18,404</td>
<td>55,720</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1851</td>
<td>39,609</td>
<td>95,329</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1861</td>
<td>60,012</td>
<td>155,341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1871</td>
<td>58,437</td>
<td>213,778</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>69,087</td>
<td>282,865</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>36,278</td>
<td>319,143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>15,848</td>
<td>334,991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>-7,588</td>
<td>327,403</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census, 1801 - 1911
Even a contemporary such as Samuel Lewis was aware of the change that was taking place in Islington around 1841 and throughout his book he betrays an ambivalence of attitude between pride at the improved streets of the new developments and regret at the consequent loss of the rural and the picturesque. The open space which had surrounded what little housing existed in the early days, was fast disappearing, and if anything was to be saved concerted action had to be taken. Genuine alarm was expressed by a group of inhabitants of the City of London and the borough of Finsbury in 1841 when they petitioned the Commissioner of Woods and Forests to purchase for public use parks or walks in the area. This resulted in the ill-fated attempt to establish Albert Park. It would have required an Act of Parliament to raise the funds to buy the land and lay out the Park which was to have been sited partly on the estate being developed by Henry Rydon. Feelings ran so high that local people, despite their preference for laissez-faire, were willing to petition the Government to interfere with the process of development, as the editor of the Islington Directory remarked in 1854:

Thus, then, London itself has at length been compelled to hasten to the rescue; and in place of playing the freebooting part, as in ancient times, has now become a humble petitioner for the preservation of some adequate extent of greenery - for the very thing which formerly was so relentlessly set at naught. . . . Those fields, as the auctioneer says, have long been "Going! Going!" and the citizen is in terror at their threatened total destruction; and thus he goes on bended knee to our rulers, and craves for what is called a "People's Park", another in addition to those already conceded, because another is specially wanted for this loyal Finsbury, or Islington district. 

The conflict between the free property market and the preservation of amenity is here amply illustrated. Some developers such as Henry Rydon tried to mitigate the worst effects of unrestrained development
by controlling building within their own estate and by imposing strict convenants which maintained the amenities within their area. When the 'Hollies', a large house and garden at Crouch Hill was redeveloped from 1864 with an exclusive estate of detached villas called Holly Park, the originators of the scheme took pains to draw up a list of convenants which would protect them from further redevelopment at a higher density than they had imposed on what had been a semi-rural estate. Their own action made them aware of the fragility of the amenities they fostered in their own domain.

As has been pointed out Islington was vulnerable in its relation to the changing functions and density of its neighbours which were that much closer to central London. Sir John Summerson in his essay on the Victorian rebuilding of the City of London notes that it was between 1861 and 1871 that the residential population of the City began its absolute decline at a time when the area was undergoing transformation into an international centre of commerce. One effect of the destruction of houses in the City and nearby Clerkenwell was that middle-class families were forced out of the area by the actions of landlords intent on exploiting their property to the limit of the local market, as a former chairman of the Clerkenwell Sanitary Committee testified to the Royal Commission on the Housing of the Working Classes:

The complaint [about the management of the Northampton estate] is that in many of the houses the old tenants do not seem to get the offer of the houses, and that the rents are considerably increased. By that means the old tenants have left the parish and gone into Highbury and round Finsbury Park, and the houses are let out in tenements, or those houses are leased to one individual, and he lets them out in tenements. An influx of middle class residents into Islington from the City and
nearby Clerkenwell could only have contributed to the prosperous development of Islington, but less desirable was the migration of the casual workers and the poor from those areas where public works and commercial development were displacing large numbers. Those streets which had traditionally housed the working classes of Islington continued to perform that function, but now they were becoming grossly overcrowded as Torrens emphasized in his questioning of Islington's Medical Officer of Health at the hearings of the Select Committee on Artizans' and Labourers' Dwellings Improvement:

If you were told that the houses in the small streets throughout Islington are rapidly, and have been for the last 10 years, rapidly increasing in density of population, so that numbers of them are packed full with a family in a single room, would it not shake your opinion? - I know it is so; I know that they have become in many cases single tenements. You have had to deal with the district off Essex-road? - Yes. You find there the population densely pack, do you not? - Portions of it. There is no room for an emigrant population there, is there? - No. If people had gone there from St Luke's, and lower down, they could not have got work? - No; there is nothing for them. Can you tell the Committee any district in Islington where there is room for an extra population to get work? - No.

Laying aside Torrens leading questions, the picture here presented is of a working-class housing sector in Islington which had more than reached the point of saturation.

In 1902 Charles Booth confirmed that Islington south of the North London Railway line had become largely a working-class area. Despite his rather dubious moral conclusions about the inhabitants of the various streets, his assessment of the social dynamic of the Borough seems to be correct:

Most of the changes in the map have been downward. Population from inner London has pressed in, turning pink streets in the south to purple and light blue. The middle-class people of Tufnell Park and Highbury go to Hampstead or further North, and
are succeeded by less wealthy folk. The opening of Clissold Park and Highbury Fields has checked deterioration in their immediate neighbourhood, but an exodus from Canonbury to Harringay and Wood Green is in progress. Of special concern to Booth was the 'great numbers of a nondescript lower middle class employed in the City... who found lodgings among the working classes of the southern part of the Borough. These he felt contributed to an instability in the area and he believed that their presence indicated a period of transition which he hoped would soon pass. There was, however, in the very origins of Islington as a residential suburb the seeds of its instability, dependent as it was on circumstances outside its borders in the commercial areas immediately to the south and west.

The question arises whether changes in occupation coincided with changes in ownership. In 1894 there were 38 building societies recorded as active in Islington, and it can be supposed that the members were not just interested in buying houses for their own occupation. Back in 1860 a representative of the Conservative Land Society observed that 'it was the principle of mutual dependence, and the elevating tendencies of provident habits, which enable a person of the smallest means to be a landowner first, and a landlord afterwards. ...' The owner occupier of small means could find it convenient to buy one or two other houses in his neighbourhood as an investment. If he should prosper and move on to better accommodation in the further suburbs, he could easily keep his few houses for the income they provided. On the other hand owner occupation demanded greater resources from those of slight means than the early building societies could offer, and repossession gave the middle men the opportunity to
buy up houses cheaply. Swenarton and Taylor have pointed out the discontinuities of owner occupation before and after the First World War. They refer to the Select Committee on Town Holdings of 1887 which noted that as the social character of a district changed, property tended to move from possession by the occupier to possession by investors and middlemen. Whether the owner occupier gave up possession through financial difficulties or through prosperity, depended on individual circumstances, but it is likely that both happened in a borough such as Islington. Owner occupation will be considered further in the next chapter, but what should be emphasised here is that multiple occupation of Islington's houses had become a well established pattern especially in the south of the Borough by the turn of the century. By this time too Islington was completely built up and had begun to be ripe for 'redevelopment', an issue very little considered when the housing market is discussed.

By 1900 working-class housing had come to the attention of the commercial press and was no longer the concern only of royal commissions. The gains made by the working class through increased wages and a reduction in prices made it possible for them to join the market in rented houses in the vast suburbs built to the north and south of central London. However, the difficulties experienced in this market were reminiscent of those of the middle-class market in the 1840s when the shortage of houses forced families to take lodgings and to double up with their landlords. In the case of the working classes, fifty years later, the situation was made worse by the much greater increase of population and the constant pressure on land values since the first half of the nineteenth century. Everyone
seemed to have an analysis of the problem. The Estates Gazette in 1900 attributed the working-class housing problem to 'the rapacious and not very scrupulous capitalist of the baser sort' and it stated the problem thus:

"... as regards workmen's dwellings, private enterprise has broken down. ... The providing of houses of this kind in large towns proceeds in a vicious circle. The buildings are, as a rule, erected by a speculative builder who sells them the moment they are let. It happens only too often that the purchaser, caring for little but a high interest upon his money, increases the rents yet spends very little upon the repairs which are speedily needed. ... Buildings in the most lamentable condition are frequently bought by investors of a low class, solely because, despite their ill-repair, high rents can be obtained for them from the unlucky class which cannot very well help itself. ...

As long as unscrupulous property owners could be blamed for the so-called 'house famine', the situation was redeemable. But the increase in the relative wealth of the working classes made it possible for members of the lower middle class with only small means to become landlords, and they were particularly vulnerable to fluctuations in profit margins. As Avner Offer has demonstrated so ably, when the 'honest house-owners', as The Estates Gazette termed them, became disillusioned by the market, house provision, especially for the working classes, became problematic indeed."

'From high values and large sales to low values and low sales' is how Offer has described the dominant trend of the property market between 1902 and 1912. He has argued that high rates, increased building and repair costs, and rival investment opportunities led to a collapse in the housing market in London during these years. By using the Land and House Property Year Book as his reference, he has plotted the fortunes of the Capital's property market for the five yearly
intervals from 1892 to 1912." Offer has taken a representative selection of districts and compared the mean years purchase of leasehold properties sold at the Auction Mart. The years purchase is arrived at by dividing the purchase price by the annual rent, which gives some idea of the return the vendor could expect on his investment. A low rented property and a high purchase price would be to the advantage of the vendor, while a high rented property and a low purchase price would be to the purchaser's advantage. When the latter situation obtains the expected result is a drop in the volume of sales, and this, on the evidence of Offer's figures, is generally what happened in the London property market between 1902 and 1912.

The examination of a similar though cruder sample to Offer's from The Estates Gazette for the first four months of the years 1900, 1905, 1910, and 1914, produces a similar picture to his for Islington. In imitation of Offer's example, the properties have been separated by locality depending on whether they were north or south of the North London Railway line. From the numbers of properties put up for sale and sold at the Auction Mart it appears that the relatively popular leasehold properties in the south of the Borough in 1900 and 1905 became less desirable in 1910 and 1914, with only about 50% of sales completed. (See Table 1.5) Although the number of South Islington properties coming to the market rose in 1914, the proportion sold did not enjoy a similar rise. In North Islington the number brought to market fell from quite high levels in 1900 and 1905, but the proportion sold did not fluctuate greatly. Although Offer argues that the Auction Mart reflected the property market in other parts of the country, the question does arise whether property left unsold after a
sale was not disposed of through other channels.

Table 1.5
Number of Leasehold Properties in Islington for Sale and Sold at the Auction Mart 1900 - 1914

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>South Islington</th>
<th>North Islington</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No. for Sale</td>
<td>No. Sold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1905</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1914</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The Estates Gazette, 1900 - 1914

The years purchase also indicated a fluctuation in Islington's leasehold market. (See Table 1.6) On a smaller sample than Offer's, it would be perhaps rash to make too much of the dramatic fluctuations in the years purchase represented by these figures, but the general trend is similar to his. What is interesting is that the years purchase for the working class south begins to decline in 1905, while it is still rising in the more middle class north. The great discrepancy between 1905 and 1910 for the latter area might seem an anomaly, but it may also be an indication that social changes in the area were taking place resulting in changes within the local housing market.

Table 1.6
Mean Years Purchase of Leasehold Dwelling Houses in Islington Sold at the Auction Mart 1900 - 1914

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>South Islington</th>
<th>North Islington</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>7.10</td>
<td>8.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1905</td>
<td>4.70</td>
<td>9.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>4.30</td>
<td>2.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1914</td>
<td>1.80</td>
<td>4.20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The Estates Gazette, 1900 - 1914

An example of the problems faced by house owners when local conditions altered was the story reported by The Estates Gazette about Henry Cadbury Brown, owner of 71 Hartham Road. The street was in a socially ambiguous area of Lower Holloway, close to salubrious Camden
Road, but also within a few streets of the Caledonian Market. In 1914 under the old quinquennial list for rating purposes Mr Brown's house was evaluated at £48 gross and £40 rateable value. Since the list had been made, the previous tenant had left and Mr Brown found that, because he could not let the house to one tenant, he had to let it to two tenants at a reduced rental. He went to court to apply to have the value of the house reduced to £36 gross and £30 rateable value. The Gazette reported the supporting evidence of Allan Booth of Messrs Booth and Dampney, auctioneers and surveyors and agents of Mr Brown:

They [Messrs Booth and Dampney] had tried to claim a rental of £50 per annum for the whole, but without success. It was reduced to £42, but still it remained unlet, and it was finally let, after a bathroom had been added, in two parts at 10s 6d and 11s 6d per week. There were five rooms in the upper portion and four rooms in the lower part - four floors in all. On the footing of that rental the gross value, in accordance with the scale in common use, should be £36 and rateable value £30, amounting to a reduction of £12.

The court was unsympathetic, especially since the house owner's rental was now £57, although his outgoings would probably be more with two tenants and he had to recoup the expense of the bathroom. The appeal was dismissed with costs and Mr Brown was accused of merely trying to change his quinquennial estimate, but the case pointed up the dilemma faced by owners who increasingly found that what they had to offer no longer fulfilled the local need for small, self-contained units with modern amenities. Confronted with the prospect of installing expensive equipment and of undertaking building work to divide their houses satisfactorily, the property owner could not be blamed for wanting to get out if he could from a form of investment which was becoming a drain on capital rather than a safe source of income.
One point Offer does not draw out from the years purchase at the Auction Mart is that property in the newer suburbs did not fare as poorly as that in the suburbs closer to the centre. In his North West Suburb which included many areas of new houses, fluctuations were slight and it was the only district where the years purchase in 1912 was higher on a greater volume of sales than in 1892, although it was somewhat lower than in 1897 which was closer to the peak year of 1898. It is perhaps worth considering that the age and type of property in different localities could play a significant part in determining its attraction as an investment. In Islington the market was mostly in older property, especially in the southern section of the Borough, and although this property was important locally it could not hope to compete in the normal course of events with the newer property in the outer suburbs. A slow down in suburban building, which The Estates Gazette attributed to the new land tax introduced in 1910, worked to the advantage of a borough like Islington:

On account of the late suspension of building operations in the suburbs, owing to land taxation, increased popularity has been shown towards several places, such as Brixton, Lewisham and Finsbury Park, and there is little doubt that prevailing prices are tempting many small investors who ceased buying in 1909. Agents agree that letting has been especially brisk, and there has not been so few vacant properties in the suburbs for many years, yet prices have not been influenced. There is scope for profitable employment of capital in modernising basement houses, and rentals of flats have improved.

It was in the interests of The Estates Gazette to stimulate the market by its optimism, but its suggestion that owners should invest in the refurbishment of older houses and in flats had significance at this time. While capital was occupied in the renumerative market of housebuilding in the outer suburbs, redevelopment in the inner suburbs
was neglected, and it was redevelopment that would now be necessary to keep Islington from slipping into decline.

The process of redevelopment had already started with the demolition of the older houses dating from the days of the suburban village and their replacement with developments such as Holly Park in Crouch Hill. More pertinent to the needs of the Borough in the populous areas was the appearance of the flat, either purpose built or converted from existing houses. Flats were the only type of dwelling to be added in any number to Islington's housing stock from 1900 to World War I. In the twenty years from 1901 to 1921, dwellings in the Borough increased by 3,445, and the number of self-contained flats in 1916 was 5,442, many built during that period.\(^{46}\) (See Table 1.7) Rents in many of the private blocks of flats, particularly in the northern districts of the Borough were comparable with the rents of houses, and some of the conversions in the better class areas were especially expensive. At Aberdeen Court, a block of flats built on Morrice's Aberdeen Park estate in 1907, rents ranged from £31 to £42 per annum.\(^{47}\) Converted flats at No 140 Highbury New Park were £50 for the ground floor flat, and £47 and £40 for the first and second floor flats. Some of the older industrial dwellings in the Borough such as Beaconsfield Buildings near King Cross and the Peabody Estate in Greenman Street Essex Road, were particularly grim, but then rents were as low as £4 per annum and reached no more than £15. More typical was Thornhill Houses run by the East End Dwelling Company where rents ranged between £13 and £24 and the Samuel Lewis Buildings...
Illus 1 - Peabody Estate, Greenman Street, Islington, 1865.
Illus 2 - Samuel Lewis Trust Estate, Liverpool Road, Islington, 1910.
in Liverpool Road, opened in 1910, were considered good of their kind, and 'very much more in character with West End structures of the sort than model buildings for the poor.' The other type of purpose built flat that should be mentioned was that included in some of the commercial developments along the main shopping streets during the 1880s and 1890s. These depended for their success very much on the prosperity of the shops and businesses beneath them, and for a time at least the drapers and outfitters of Islington held a London-wide reputation which ensured a lively commercial trade in the area. Although the associations surrounding flats were never held in high esteem among most English people of all classes, they may possibly have had a much more appreciated place in the housing stock but for the expansion of house-building in the suburbs during the 1920s and 1930s.

Table 1.7
Number of Various Types of Flats in Islington in 1916

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Private purpose-built flats (including 50 maisons)</td>
<td>2,808</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philanthropic industrial dwellings</td>
<td>1,525</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LCC flats</td>
<td>497</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Converted flats</td>
<td>612</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5,442</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census, 1911, 1921; Islington Rate Books, 1916

Residents of Islington before 1914 would not have considered that their Borough suffered from an extensive slum problem, but they would have agreed that there were 'plague spots' in the borough. Those areas identified under the 1875 Artisans' and Labourers' Dwellings Improvement Act as unfit for human habitation comprised the old courts behind the High Street near the Angel and those further north off Essex Road. The latter included the cottages around Elder Walk
identified by Lewis as the residence of watchmakers in 1840, but now they were the overcrowded slums housing a mobile population. Indeed the worst areas were identified with people from outside the Borough, as the Medical Officer of Health testified to the Select Committee on Artizans' and Labourers' Dwellings concerning Angel Court:

Irish costermongers, and a large number of boys seemed to live there who sold papers about the street, and a great many Irish people generally. ^{61}

If the implication was that outsiders were the cause of any housing problems experienced by Islington, then the whole parish should have been in distress, since most of the population were recent arrivals. As it was those areas containing the oldest and poorest dwellings attracted the poorest tenants, whatever their origin. Such a tenantry meant, of course, that it was unlikely that these areas would ever be redeveloped by their owners with better accommodation, and it was to rectify this seemingly limited situation that the Government initiated their early housing legislation.

J.A. Yelling has pointed out that it was assumed before the turn of the century that slums were an anachronism which could be rectified by the market economy through such agencies as the model dwellings companies. ^{62} Under the 1875 Cross Act, local authorities were expected to assist the market by identifying slum areas within their jurisdiction and by making the cleared sites available to the companies. When the Metropolitan Board of Works drew up a list in 1876 of proposed clearance areas, High Street Islington was included, and eventually the site was acquired by the Improved Industrial Dwellings Company who built a number of flats there commencing in 1882. ^{63} The Essex Road clearance area was sold to various bodies by
1884, and here were erected Edinburgh, Cornwall, and Queen's Cottages, which were not cottages at all but blocks of flats with balcony access.  

In 1889 the London County Council replaced the Metropolitan Board of Works, and Yelling has suggested that its early involvement in housing can be traced to the 1884 Royal Commission on the Housing of the Working Classes and the concern with working class accommodation in the centre of urban areas. The 1890 Housing of the Working Classes Act gave the LCC a choice of options, and much energy went into their Boundary Street estate, but the LCC also tried to involve the local vestries in dealing with clearance areas. One of these was Norfolk Square, an acre of densely populated housing, not far from the Essex Road clearance site in Islington. Yelling has noted that the LCC found the vestries reluctant partners, and as this was Islington's first experience of dealing with a clearance area and with the LCC and the Local Government Board within the context of housing, it is instructive to stop and observe what happened, before moving on to their later experience after the War.  

In September 1893, Islington vestry submitted to the LCC a small improvement scheme under Part II of the 1890 Act for the Norfolk Square area. Although the clearance would result in 214 people being displaced, the vestry's scheme made provision for rehousing 102 persons on the site, with the further suggestion that a third of an acre should be left as open space. The order was confirmed in February 1894, but the vestry seemed to have had trouble in persuading anyone to take the property for building purposes, and in 1895 they were considering turning the whole area into a playspace. With the
Scale: 15 inches = 1 mile.

Map 3 - Essex Road, Islington, showing playground built on site of Norfolk Square.
approval of the LCC, they asked the Local Government Board to allow the whole area to be retained as an open space, but the Board refused, and insisted that the original housing for 102 be erected. Although the inspector at an inquiry held in December 1896 recommended that the property become open space, the Board insisted that part of the site be used for housing the 102. In January 1899 the vestry submitted a scheme for rehousing 72 people, and six months later withdrew this scheme, substituting one for 192 persons. Although the LCC approved this scheme, at another inquiry in December, it was once again recommended that the site be considered as open space. In 1900 St Mary's vestry was formed into the Metropolitan Borough of Islington and the new borough Council accepted the 1899 scheme which received LGB approval in 1901. Then in June 1903 the Council reverted to their request that the whole site become a playspace. Within Islington support for the housing came from the Islington Trades and Labour Council while outside the Borough, it was the Local Government Board which was determined that housing would be built on the cleared site. Another inquiry was held in October 1903, and once again the recommendation was that the housing requirement should be dropped.

An exchange between members of the Local Government Board is instructive since it points up the conflict of interest between the Board who wanted to make sure that rehousing was undertaken, and the Council who, while finding it genuinely difficult to sell an unpromising site, were also reluctant to commit themselves to spending excess on the rates. N.T. Kershaw, Assistant Secretary to the Local Government Board writing to his Permanent Secretary, Sir S. Provis in November 1903 commented:
The Local Authority in this case have changed their minds so frequently that it is a little difficult to take the reasons which they give for their changes of attitude, seriously... What seems to be at bottom of all their applications for modifications is a desire to avoid risk of charges upon the rates arising out of the erection of houses for the working class.67

In order to get the Council to comply, it would in Kershaw's opinion be necessary to use 'strong measures', although he does not specify what these might be. However, he also conceded that even if the Council were made to comply as an example to other authorities, that might not have the desired effect:

This last argument ought not, of course, to weigh with the Board, but it seems to me undesirable that the first case in which such steps are taken should be one in which private enterprise is unwilling to build, even with a nominal ground rent, and in which the chances are all in favour of a material charge falling upon the rates.68

In the end Islington got their playspace, and the Council were spared the experience of building the dwellings themselves which had been one of the suggestions. Before World War I the control of Islington Council fell briefly into the hands of the Progressives in 1903, but Alderman Cufflin was probably representing the sentiments of many when he spoke out at the 1903 Inquiry:

... if his Council erected dwellings it must be at considerable cost to the rates. If other bodies with all their experience could not make it pay he was sure the Council could not do so... He was not in favour of a municipality erecting houses.69

It was resistance such as this which had to be overcome before the cooperation of the local authorities could be guaranteed in the housebuilding initiative launched by the Government after the War.

By 1914 the culture which determined the manner in which Islington's housing stock was owned and occupied was well established. Building in the Borough was virtually complete and the pattern of land
ownership and the geographical position of Islington vis à vis the
City had ensured the area was covered by terraces of densely packed
houses which were however, on the whole, substantially built.
Leasehold was the form of tenure most common in Islington at the start
of its development, although there were tracts of land in the north
sold off as freehold plots by the Freehold Land Societies. As time
went on, it was only to be expected that ownership of land and houses
became more varied as freehold reversions were sold and leases began
to fall in. One thing was sure, multiple occupancy of the houses in
the Borough had become well entrenched as part of the housing culture
even before 1914. As we have seen, this practice was not confined to
the working classes, but pressure exerted by overcrowding in adjacent
boroughs seems to have started the change in the social composition of
Islington noted by Booth in 1902. The working-class tenant encouraged
the lower middle-class landlord, and it may have been the tight
margins of many landlords which contributed to the crisis in the
London housing market between 1902 and 1912 described by Avner Offer.
Even before 1914 the suburbs were luring families out of Islington to
Hornsey, Crouch End, and Wood Green. The desire for small, self-
contained units was beginning to be satisfied by redevelopment
through purpose-built flats and conversions, but building of this type
came to an end with the War. The success and continuity of the post-
War housing culture in Islington was going to depend on how well the
redevelopment of the Borough was managed.
Footnotes - Chapter One


27. Ibid., Vol 7, 1 December 1849, p. 566.


32. Islington Housing Committee Minutes (IHCM), 14 August 1924.


34. The Royal Commission on the Housing of the Working Classes, Vol III, 1885.

35. Report . . . on Artizans' and Labourers' Dwellings Improvement, 1881.


39. The Estates Gazette, 3 March 1900.


41. Ibid., Chapter 17.

42. The Estates Gazette, 21 February 1914.

43. Ibid.
44. Offer, op cit., p. 270.
45. The Estates Gazette, 3 January 1914.
47. Islington Rate Books, 1916.
48. The Estates Gazette, 2 April 1910.
49. VCH, Middlesex, Vol VIII, p. 18.
50. Report ..., on Artizans' and Labourers' Dwellings Improvement, 1881.
51. Ibid.
53. VCH, Middlesex, Vol VIII, p. 17.
54. Ibid.
55. Yelling, op cit., p. 41.
56. PRO HLG 1/54.
57. Ibid.
58. Ibid.
59. Ibid.
Chapter Two - Islington in the 1920s

In the history of housing, World War I has provided a marker between the 19th-century provision of housing and that of the 20th century. The 19th century produced the phenomenal increase in the towns and saw the rise of the private landlord. The 20th century witnessed the proliferation of council housing, the spread of owner-occupation, and the decline of the private rented sector. The discontinuity between one period and the other cannot be denied, and yet in Islington by 1939 council housing accounted for only about 5% of the housing stock and it would appear that only about 10% of houses were owner-occupied. To what extent a locality caught the moment depended on many factors, but a London borough, as part of the Metropolis, did not have the same opportunities and freedom to act as independent agents as did other local authorities. So much hung on the geographical position of the borough and its function within the whole complex of commercial and residential uses. This chapter will consider Islington's function during the 1920s and how this conditioned its population, their employment, and the ownership and occupation of their houses. Then it will explore the public perception of the housing situation and the extent to which this became manifest in public action.

It is well to remember that for half the 20th century Islington had the population of a fair sized provincial city. The number of people living in Leeds just prior to World War I was approximately 450,000, while Islington in 1911 had a population of 327,403. The total population of the Borough dipped in 1911, but rose again in 1921, and permanent decline was not noticeable until 1931. (See Table
2.1) In 1921, Islington retained its function as a residential suburb for the commercial areas of London. Of the 154,728 working population, 84,519 or 54.6% of them lived within the Borough and worked outside, mostly in the City, but also in neighbouring Finsbury and St Pancras, and in Westminster. Transport continued to be good, and the opening of Finsbury Park station to rail and underground trains provided the centre for a network of transport facilities throughout the northern portion of the Borough and into Hornsey and Stoke Newington.

Table 2.1
Population of Metropolitan Borough of Islington 1911 to 1951

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>327,403</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>330,737</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>321,795</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>235,632</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census, 1911 - 1951

If one occupation could be said to dominate the Borough it must be transport, but the inhabitants were engaged in a cross-section of work. (See Table 2.2) Except for shopkeepers there were few employers in Islington, and most of the workers in any given sector worked at the lower end of the scale. Of the 2,984 men working for the railway in 1921, 1,504 were porters. Of the 7,398 communications workers 5,142 were messengers or porters. Work in these jobs was often casual and uncertain at slack periods. One area which was expanding at the time was road transport, and Islington was geographically well placed to provide drivers for a variety of road vehicles from delivery trucks to buses, and including at this time horsedrawn wagons.

The most noticeable increase was among those engaged in commercial work, in the retail trades and as clerks. The seemingly
insatiable need in London for shop assistants and clerks added enormously to the ranks of the white collar workers at the very bottom of the scale.¹

Table 2.2
Leading Occupations Undertaken by Males in Islington 1911 - 1931

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1911</th>
<th>1921</th>
<th>1931</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport</td>
<td>20,053</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>21,242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td>11,590</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>20,440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Processing</td>
<td>10,944</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>2,079</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building Work</td>
<td>10,098</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>6,910</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metal Work</td>
<td>8,035</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>9,444</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper, Printing</td>
<td>5,339</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>4,503</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Employed Males 104,973 100.0 100,388 100.0 109,450 100.0

Source: Census, 1911 - 1931

This was true for women as well as for men. The proportion of women in the Islington work force remained constant during this period, with 33.8% recorded in 1911, 35.1% in 1921 and 35.9% in 1931. Edward Higgs has pointed out that women's work was notoriously under-represented by the census enumerators in the 19th century, and it can be supposed that during the 1920s and 1930s there were many women who took up paid work within the home that was never reported.² Nonetheless it can be said that the type of work undertaken by women and recorded in the Census changed over time with commercial work coming to take a more prominent place in women's working lives. (See Table 2.3) Although domestic work continued to dominate women's work in the Borough, it should be noted that within that sector changes were taking place. Perhaps surprisingly indoor service rose from 6,725 in 1921 to 7,597 ten years later, indicating that there were still a number of households in the Borough where servants were kept. However increases also occurred in waitressing, laundry work, and particularly in
charring and office cleaning. By 1951 commercial work had superceded
domestic work as the main employer of female labour in Islington.

Table 2.3
Leading Occupations Undertaken by Women in Islington 1911 to 1931

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1911</th>
<th>1921</th>
<th>1931</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic work</td>
<td>18,619</td>
<td>34.7</td>
<td>14,209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dressmaking</td>
<td>12,788</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>9,297</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food processing</td>
<td>5,118</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>1,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professions</td>
<td>3,841</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>2,643</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial work</td>
<td>3,564</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>12,491</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Employed Females 53,604 100.0 54,340 100.0 61,329 100.0
Source: Census Returns.

Since Islington became a residential suburb in the 19th century,
its population divided into those who worked beyond its borders and
those who serviced the local residents. Gradually traditional jobs,
previously located in the area such as furniture making, watchmaking,
and printing, declined. Neighbourhoods were no longer identified with
these crafts; for example as early as the 1880s the watchmakers had
long since gone from the Elder Walk area which had become the haunt of
casual workers and the underemployed. Because of the intermittent
nature of their work and its low pay, casual workers needed cheap
accommodation which usually meant that their dwellings were
overcrowded and in poor condition. It was known by those engaged in
this sort of life where such housing was obtainable throughout London,
and there were certain areas in Islington where cheap rooms could be
found. Campbell Road was one place, but there was also Georges Road,
parts of Caledonian Road, and Queensland Road, or 'the Land' as it was
known. The people living in these streets were costermongers or
labourers who worked in the railway yards. The women went charring
and the girls worked in the small factories making brushes or jam.
Their lives were possible because cheap accommodation was available where the letting arrangements were flexible.

In 1929 the Islington Housing Committee noted of Georges Road that 'the rents are comparatively low, and this has caused continued occupation by the inhabitants.' The Committee went on to report that 'Most of the inhabitants are of the labouring classes, some few being in constant work, but many of them casual labour only; some are street traders.' Casual work was linked with irregular payment of rent and an irregular occupation of houses. Children could be split up between parents living in different streets, or be sent to sleep at a neighbour's. The concept of the self-contained home with parents and children together seemed not to exist in these streets. Such a way of life had been common during the upheavals of the working class population during the years of public improvements and the heyday of casual labour. Casual work decreased between the Wars and the way of life that went with it became more of an anomaly. Although many of the men in Campbell Road clung to the culture of 'the Bunk', the younger women, as long as they remained, saw themselves debared forever from the improvements working-class people were making for themselves in the surrounding streets.

The casually employed inhabited one end of the housing market, but a glance at the property advertisements in the Islington Gazette reveals that there was a great variety of accommodation to be had in the Borough during the 1920s. Eight-roomed houses in the Finsbury Park area could be rented on a three year agreement, or a furnished apartment in one of the large houses in Highbury or Tufnell Park could be taken monthly. The latter usually suited a 'business person', and
just as areas of Islington became known as the haunt of casual workers, so there were those districts of larger houses which became the favoured residences of the growing army of commercial workers still being drawn into the City of London. In 1931 there was a net increase of 2,840 in the population within the age group 20 to 29 over the same cohort in 1921 at a time when there was a decline in every other cohort. This suggests that young people were immigrating into the borough at a point in their lives when they were single and working. By 1931 there were fewer children, but there also was a drop in the 30 to 40 age group when families were being completed and this was countered by a rise in the 20 to 29 age group, when the first home was being established and families started. The proximity to the City and the type of housing available would have made Islington a reasonable choice of residence when workers were starting a career and a family and before they moved to the suburbs, even if this meant only Wood Green.

Localities within the Borough provided housing for special social groups, but the general characteristic of Islington was still the same as it had appeared in the 1908 Report of the Board of Trade on the cost of living. Along with St Pancras, Islington was divided into two zones. Its southern wards fell into the inner zone and its northern wards came within the boundaries of the middle zone. The inner zone was characterised by relatively high rents and correspondingly low prices, while in the middle zone the rents on average were lower and prices higher. As we have seen the houses in the southern wards of Islington were older than in the north and they were generally smaller and more densely built. They were also more
densely occupied than those in the north, and although by the so-called 'filtering-up' process, the overcrowded were supposed to be able to move into the greater house room left by the middle classes as they moved out of the inner suburbs, this does not seem to have happened in Islington during the 1920s. In 1931 the number of persons per room, although slightly improved over 1921, still showed a wide discrepancy between the overcrowded south and the wards in the north. Table 2.4 shows that the wards of Barnsbury, St Marys, St Peters, Lower Holloway, and Thornhill all came close to the average of 1.5 persons per room which was considered the standard for overcrowding in 1931, indicating that individual families in these wards were overcrowded.

Table 2.4
Average Persons per Room in the Wards of Islington 1921 and 1931

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ward</th>
<th>1921</th>
<th>1931</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barnsbury</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Marys</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Peters</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Holloway</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thornhill</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canonbury</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highbury</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mildmay</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tollington</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tufnell</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Holloway</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census, 1921 - 1931

These figures do not suggest any large scale change in the distribution of house space between the north and the south during the 1920s, and the fact that the incidence of families sharing their accommodation did not decline over the decade, suggests that although there had been a decline in population, the pressure on house room was still great. There was one indication, however, that some movement
Map 4 - Metropolitan Borough of Islington, showing wards established in 1900.
might be taking place between north and south in that the number of three or more households sharing the larger houses of nine rooms and more rose by 1,269.

By 1931 more families were sharing their dwelling with two or more families than in 1921. The percentage increase was only 2.5, but that represented 4,641 families.

Table 2.5
Proportion of Households in Islington Sharing their Dwellings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1921</th>
<th>1931</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Households not sharing</td>
<td>16.9%</td>
<td>16.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Households sharing with one other family</td>
<td>28.2%</td>
<td>26.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Households sharing with two or more families</td>
<td>54.8%</td>
<td>57.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census, 1921, 1931

As has been shown, sharing in Islington was a practice of long standing, and it was not confined only to the working classes. It should also be noted that there was a large proportion of small households in the Borough, although the larger households were generally to be found in the south where the houses tended to be smaller and more densely occupied. In 1931 it was remarked upon that although the national population was 5.5% higher than in 1921, the number of families had increased by 17.1%. The reason given for these figures was a higher incidence of household formation together with fewer children. In Islington the average family size was 3.59 in 1921 as compared to the national average of 4.14, and by 1931 it was 3.3. The lower average may have been related to the number of one and two person households which was part of the pattern of housing accommodation in the Borough, and certainly the average size of household was smaller in the north where rooms for single working people were more prevalent. (See Table 2.6) That nearly two thirds of
households in 1931 consisted of from 1 to 3 persons could not completely compensate for the fact that so many were forced to share utilities and amenities in houses not generously fitted with either.

Table 2.6
Per cent of Households in Islington of Different Sizes 1921, 1931

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Persons per Household</th>
<th>1921</th>
<th>1931</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 person</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>14.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 persons</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>25.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 persons</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>22.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 persons</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>15.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 persons</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 persons</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 persons and over</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census, 1921, 1931

During the 19th century Islington developed in relation to conditions outside its borders especially in the City where residential property was giving way to commercial development while at the same time the expansion in the commercial sector required an army of white-collar workers able to commute daily into the centre. By the 1920s the housing stock of the Borough was complete, and was now itself a factor in determining the sort of jobs undertaken by the inhabitants. The flexible simplicity of the 19th century terraces in the south of the Borough meant that they could easily be occupied by a number of households and these had been largely taken over by working-class families. The more substantial houses in the north might retain something of their middle-class status, but they also provided rooms in apartments and bedsitting rooms for white-collar workers. Interspersed with both types of accommodation were areas such as Campbell Road where lodging houses and cheap rooms provided space for casual workers. The different types of housing in Islington served different functions within the economic life of the inhabitants of the
Borough, which was itself determined by circumstances in areas of London beyond the borders of Islington.

So what of the other players in the housing market, the house owners? From the Islington Council Rate Books a picture, however imperfect, of the ownership of Islington's housing stock may be constructed, and continuity rather than change seems to have prevailed, at least from World War I through the 1920s. The district selected for study was Barnsbury, because it contained both working- and middle-class housing and some small industrial and commercial property. It was also an area on the knife edge between keeping what social character it had and succumbing to changes outside the control of its population. The first post-War year when all owners appeared in the Rate Books was 1922 which provided the base year of analysis.

Table 2.7
Ownership of Properties in Barnsbury 1922

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Properties</th>
<th>% of total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Types of Owners</td>
<td>2,099</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate Owners</td>
<td>520</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Individual Owners</td>
<td>1,579</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male Owners</td>
<td>1,213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Owners</td>
<td>366</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Islington Rate Books, 1922 - 23

Barnsbury was one of the areas built up during the first half of the 19th century, and thus included mostly terraces averaging 6.5 rooms per house. Of the 2,099 houses occupied in the Barnsbury Ward in 1922, 520 or 24.7% were owned by corporate groups, such as the Drapers' Company, property companies, and small businesses, but most of the properties were owned by individuals, both male and female. (See Table 2.7) At this time then, three quarters of the houses in
Barnsbury were still in the hands of private individuals, no doubt hoping to receive a decent return on their investment.

Although many owners held only one house in the area, others, even among the private individuals, had made property their business. On average each owner had 2.2 properties, an average which differed depending on the type of owner. Men owned an average of 2 properties each, women 1.6, but corporate bodies owned 4.5.

Table 2.8
Distribution of Properties in Barnsbury 1922

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Property Owners</th>
<th>Number of Properties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One property</td>
<td>661</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two properties</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three properties</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four properties</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five to nine properties</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over ten properties</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>948</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Islington Rate Books, 1922 - 23

The pattern of property holding meant that the number of owners was about half the number of properties.

Table 2.9
Number of Owners of Properties in Barnsbury 1922

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Numbers of Owners</th>
<th>% of total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Types of Owners</td>
<td>942</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate Owners</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Individual Owners</td>
<td>827</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male Owners</td>
<td>596</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Owners</td>
<td>231</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Islington Rate Books, 1922 - 23

These figures show that the predominating interest in property ownership in Barnsbury lay in the hands of private individuals, who may or may not live in the area. From the names recorded in the ratebooks it appears that for the most part the owners held one or two houses in close proximity to each other. A very few owned more than
ten properties and even then rarely in different parts of the district. There was a handful of owners who owned property throughout the Borough, but they were very much the exception.

The extent of owner-occupation becomes important at a time when it is assumed that this form of tenure was beginning to gain ground against the private rented sector. Swenarton and Taylor have shown how owner-occupation could fluctuate in urban areas before the spread of the outer suburbs depending on a variety factors such as the stability of wages in relation to the demands of building society payments. In Barnsbury 24% of owners were owner-occupiers, but of these a number also owned further property which they let out. (Table 2.10) With a quarter of owners also owner-occupiers, the tenure appears to have had some importance in the area, but when the number of properties that were occupied by their owner is considered, we find that only 11.5% fell under this category.

Table 2.10
Number of Owner-Occupiers in Barnsby 1922

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Owner-Occupiers</th>
<th>% of total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Owner-Occupiers</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate Owners</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Individual Owners</td>
<td>221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male Owners</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Owners</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Islington Rate Books, 1922 - 23

The picture for Barnsby presented by the figures gleaned from the ratebooks for 1922 reveals a high ownership of property by private individuals, about one quarter of whom lived in the ward. However the predominant tenure was renting, and this meant that the property owners were subject to the conditions which had evolved around the
tenure of renting. As we saw in the previous chapter, the owners of rented property before 1914 experienced a sharp increase in rates and in the cost of repairs which eroded the value of their investment in houses when rents were stagnant because wages were low in relation to prices. After the War the rates continued to rise. In Islington for example the rate of 7/10 in 1913-14 rose to 10/- in 1919-20 and to 17/3 in 1920-21.16 In most instances the rates were paid by the occupiers, but in Barnsbury about 18.3% of properties were compounded which meant that the landlords paid the rates for which they received a small percentage from the Council.17 The increase cost of repairs did not depend only on the rising cost of labour and materials, but also on rising expectations of what amenities might be expected. The houses in Barnsbury by 1922 were at least 70 years old, many of them older than that, and they had been built before bathrooms were common and running water found anywhere except in the scullery. Unless expensive alterations were undertaken as Henry Cadbury Brown had done in his house in Hartham Road,18 the owners could not hope to get the relative level of rents they had in the past.

One aspect of renting which had become entrenched by 1922 was the effect of the Rent Restriction Acts on the level of rent charged. Under the 1915 legislation houses in London with a rateable value of £36 and below were to be let at 'standard rents', that is the rent obtaining on 3 August 1914.19 In 1916, 61.6% of property in Barnsbury came under this category, and when the limits were raised in 1919 and 1920 first to £70 and then to £105 rateable value, practically all the properties in the area came under the Acts. By 1920 a 40% rise in the standard rent had been allowed and after 1923 the rent could be raised
on a change of tenancy. One effect of the Acts that was noted was that they cut down on vacancies, but they also restricted the landlords' ability to manage their properties. Unless tenants failed to pay their rent or acted in a way considered unreasonable by the County Court, they could not be evicted. This restriction coupled with the control of rent, made the rented sector less appealing to the investor and probably acted to inhibit new money coming into the rented sector, especially in the form of capital from large organisations which would have had the resources to redevelop the old housing stock.

The relatively high number of properties owned by women would have had significance for the area, because women would have been among the owners most vulnerable to changes in the housing market. R.J. Morris has described how investment in housing during the 19th century fitted into the family cycle and Elliott and McCrone found evidence of women owners in Edinburgh who were apparently at the end of this cycle. Where women had been left property to provide them with income, they might not have access to capital when repairs and alterations became necessary to maintain the value of the investment. They might also be totally dependent on the income from their houses so that the erosion of the value of their rents could severely reduce their own standard of living. Some women were as capable as men of taking advantage of the market, but others, especially those of an older generation, whose family left them with houses at a time when revenue from houses was still thought to be safe, could find themselves in a desparate situation. If they sold off their property, they would not get enough in the depressed market to invest elsewhere.
and generate sufficient income. The only answer at the time was for them or their agents to let off the rooms in their houses to as many tenants as they could. Agents were not slow to exploit the situation as can be seen from an advertisement in The Property Owners' Journal in May 1920 for an agent in Upper Tollington Park: 'Do not worry over the increasing difficulty of your weekly Property, when for a small payment I will relieve you of the annoyance and trouble of collecting.' Women did not, however, have the monopoly on the poorer properties, and this strategy would have been undertaken by all owners who found themselves circumscribed by post-War conditions in the rented sector.

As will be shown in chapter 5 there was continuity during the twenty years from 1922 to 1942 in Islington's rented sector, and it would seem that far from chasing landlords out of the rented market, the outside interference by the Government acted as a stabilising force. This may not have been good for the market and most probably tended to keep new investment out of the sector, but it also kept the small owners in the sector since the absence of advantageous prices provided them with no incentive to sell up. The other important aspect of the Rent Restriction Acts was the control of the mortgage rate and a stricture on calling in mortgages. The fear in 1919 was that by removing the restrictions on rents and on mortgage interest, mortgages would be called in and landlords would be ruined to the advantage of no one. The mortgage during the 19th century gave the mortgagee great flexibility in his or her investment, and it became one of the forms of investment preferred by trusts since the capital could be obtained at short notice. While money was circulating during
the 19th century building booms, there was little problem with short
term mortgages, but when it was a question of maintaining a mature
housing stock over the long term, landlords, particularly at the lower
end of the scale, depended on a steady mortgage rate and the
confidence that as long as they paid the interest, the principal would
not be recalled.

Martin Daunton has pointed out how rent controls acted to make
the private rented sector of the housing market even less appealing
than it had been in 1914, and he attributes the impotence of the
landlords in this situation to their political isolation:

Private rented house property became a peculiarly isolated
element of capital which lacked political support, and since at
least the beginning of the twentieth century, private landlords
found their position coming under increasing threat. . . . as
landlords moved out of the provision of new housing they became
increasingly confined to a rump of old property which they could
not keep in adequate repair, and which increasingly came to cater
for those with a marginal position in the housing market.24

But by placing restrictions on rents and mortgages, the Government was
also ensuring the long-term survival of the private landlord,
particularly in an inner suburb like Islington, and the Rent
Restriction Acts should be seen in relation with other social
legislation such as unemployment insurance and pensions, which meant
that the working class could continue paying their controlled rents
even at a time of deflationary policies which contributed to low wages
and unemployment. Together these measures meant that people like
private landlords who relied on fixed incomes from their rents could
carry on surviving in a low wage, low price economy.25 Compulsory
purchase for slum clearance was another factor which Daunton suggests
acted to discourage private renting.26 This could have been even more
of a disincentive since it struck at the ground landlords' privilege of redevelopment, and made it less profitable for them to hang on to worn out property, waiting for the leases to fall in. In Islington this became an issue during the 1930s, as will become clear in chapter 5.

The stability sought by the Government through the Rent Restriction Acts seems to have turned to stagnation as the 1920s progressed. While new money invested in the building societies was being channelled into houses being built for sale in the outer suburbs, the private rented sector was increasingly confined to those areas inhabited by the working and lower middle-classes. These were the social groups who were still subjected to low, and often unpredictable wages. At the bottom of the scale, salaried workers could make less than skilled wage earners, but they were not subject to unemployment to the same extent and although low, their salaries were regular. They were also more likely to have a career structure which allowed for periodic increments and a better chance to save. However, until the building societies cast their net wider to draw in more clients with lower downpayments and longer periods of repayment, many white collar workers remained in the private rented sector, as yet unable to move out to the suburbs and owner occupation.

Similarly, until working class spending power increased, wage earners could not even 'filter up' into the greater house space provided by the larger houses in the north of Islington which continued to be occupied by middle-class families and white-collar lodgers. When in the 1930s the working classes through a combination of circumstances including lower unemployment and more regular work, higher wages,
smaller families, and higher female employment had more spending power, much of the fabric of Islington's private rented sector was suffering from years of neglect.

What had seemed like isolated housing difficulties before the War, converged after 1918 into the general 'housing problem'. Shortcomings in housing provision became apparent during the War with the dislocation which accompanied the concentration of munitions production. Not surprisingly the local housing cultures in the centres of munitions work were unable to cope with the influx of people. As David Englander has shown, not just the inability to produce new dwellings quickly, but the redistribution of house room was also a problem, complicated by questions of class. Because the working class were vital to the war effort, they assumed political importance, eclipsing for the moment middle-class interests, and housing, so much a part of their working conditions, became a political issue. Mark Swenarton has sought to demonstrate that the Government's immediate post-War housing initiative had a political and ideological dimension which penetrated even into the design of what was built. He argues that if the housing problem had been seen as one of labour reproduction, as it had been in some circles before the War, then employers would have urged state intervention, which they did not. From the documents it appears that the perceptions and motivations of individuals within the Government differed and that there was an ideological dimension in what was undertaken, but the objective after the War seems not to have been to solve the housing problem but to maintain stability through a return to conditions obtaining in August 1914. If this could be achieved, then somehow, it
was believed, a 'natural' process of housing provision could be re-established.

There was a brief period after the War of consensus when everyone seemed to agree that there was a need for more houses for the straightforward reason that lack of building during hostilities had caused a shortage. Those in favour of Government subsidies and local authority involvement in housing production succeeded in convincing the country that a finite period of Government intervention would return the building industry to pre-War conditions which would then remove the need for public interference. This proposition begged the questions whether it was possible to return to the conditions of pre-War housing provision, and whether those conditions had been satisfactory even prior to 1914.

Before the War, changes in taxation had made building speculation a less appealing activity than it had been previously. In their annual appraisal of the property market in 1914 The Estates Gazette attributed the poor state of affairs to the Liberals' People's Budget:

In regard to the position of urban property the outstanding fact, in all industrial communities, would seem to be that the interference with building enterprise caused by the Finance Act of 1910 is causing a real scarcity of small houses. . . . the results of this legislation have already been sufficiently unfortunate to demonstrate the unwisdom of crude interferences with supply and demand. 31

Offer has pointed out that the Lumsden case in 1911 confirmed the speculators' fears by establishing that the builders' profits were liable for increment value duty. 32 The land taxes had been intended to ameliorate an already existing problem by acting to release more building land, but their influence, real or imagined, was still seen after the War as a restraining factor. E.J. Strohmenger, accountant
general to the Ministry of Health pointed this out to the Minister's Secretary in December 1920:

Ordinarily the jerry-builder made his profit on the land and frequently sold the house itself either at the cost of erection or very little more. He would first arrange to take land at a ground rent of say £5 a plot, build his house, sell it at the actual cost or £25 more and create an improved ground rent of £2 a plot more than he himself paid. As a rule the land owner bought the improved ground rent from the builder so that the house owner then held directly under the land owner. What the builder feared was that the effect of the Increment Value Duty would be to take a large slice out of the one profit he made from his house building enterprise.33

If he could not make money out of the land transaction, the builder had to seek his profit from the house by selling it freehold immediately to the owner-occupier at a higher price than he could get if it were rented. And this was the pattern which emerged in the private sector when building began again after the War. The Government's task to return the housing market to its pre-War state was a hopeless one and would therefore, the Treasury feared, be never ending.34

The provision of more new houses was one problem, but what to do with the already existing houses in the city centres, many of which were worn out, was different although often seen as the same in the public mind. What made unhealthy areas of special interest in the 1920s was that the building leases of the Victorian period were reaching their term and the question of redevelopment was beginning to be of pressing importance. The other end of the building lease, so to speak, was the right of the ground landlord to redevelop the land and the buildings on the expiration of the lease in whichever way brought him the most advantage, given the circumstances at the time. In 1919 the Unhealthy Areas Committee was set up under the chairmanship of
Neville Chamberlain, and among its number were members of the new planning professions, such as G.L. Pepler, a disciple of Patrick Geddes and the chief technical planning officer at the Local Government Board, and Capt Richard Reiss, a dedicated proponent of the Garden City. Pepler identified a number of conditions in London, dependent on the way development had taken place in the past, which led to what he called 'senile decay'. Where leases had only a few years left to run and leaseholders could not afford to repair their houses, provision in the 1919 Housing Act for loans spread over a number of years were useless and decay was left unchecked. When house property was acquired for industrial purposes the result was congestion among the local population and often the rise in site value of the houses remaining. Local congestion led to single family houses being inhabited by more than one family and to the consequent insanitary conditions.

The recommendations of the Unhealthily Areas Committee were far-reaching and they proposed a strategic plan for London which went well beyond any previous suggestions. Industry, transport, and housing were to be co-ordinated so that much of the activity now found in the congested inner city would be transferred to open sites beyond the boundaries. Alfred Marshall's proposals of the 1880s for working class suburbs was greatly extended into a scheme for the sort of new towns which were not to appear until after the Second World War. In the initial stages of the process, Pepler believed that there was a role for Government in tackling 'some schemes in the first instance in order to provide an object lesson.' Government would also be needed to facilitate the change by setting up an administrative area around
London large enough to facilitate the kind of planning the Committee were advocating. Apparently a federal system was under discussion at the time, as was noted in the Committee's draft report on London:

At the present time the Speaker's Committee is considering the question of devolution and we believe that they have under consideration the setting up of local parliaments. 33

It was proposed that a parliament for London and the Home Counties be included in such a system with powers to implement strategic planning for the whole area. In the meantime the Unhealthy Areas Committee had the much less grandiose suggestion that local authorities take over rundown house property and manage it on Octavia Hill lines.

The reaction of the Metropolitan Borough Councils to the suggestions of the Chamberlain Report and the Government's housing initiative of 1919 was mixed, depending on their circumstances as much as their political complexion. Woolwich, which was not overcrowded, was very active in producing a cottage estate on 334 acres at Eltham, 39 but most boroughs, especially in the centre and in the inner suburbs found it difficult to procure sites that were reasonably priced and did not require a great deal of rehousing. With the LCC responsible for Parts I and II of the 1919 Housing Act which dealt with the clearance of unhealthy areas and the LCC's involvement in out of county cottage estates, the Metropolitan Boroughs might be forgiven for believing that housing was not their concern. Certainly perceptions of housing conditions in Islington fluctuated and with them demand for action on the part of the Council, a demand always tempered with the thought that ratepayers' money was at stake.

The Islington Council did not appoint a housing committee until May 1919, before the Housing Act became law, but three months after
the Ministry of Health's circular setting out the responsibilities of the local authorities. This move gained approval in the local press:

A welcome sign of alertness to pressing responsibility marked Friday's meeting of the Islington Borough Council. There has been comment about the lack of local movement in regard to housing reform, with plain hints that its importance and urgency have not been griped by the Upper-street body as by most municipal authorities. Accepting the view that a scheme for Islington should be submitted with all possible speed, the Council has now appointed a special committee. . . . The borough expects it [a scheme of real penetrating reform], and will await with interest and hopefulness the proposals for helping Islington to a better state. The borough, in many districts, supplies no lack of instances of urgent, even pathetic, need.40

The comments in this report in The Islington Gazette suggest that people did believe that there was a housing problem in the Borough centred around rundown property. But, as will be shown, the powers given to the Council were not necessarily appropriate to the circumstances in Islington.

In the summer of 1919 when the Housing Committee began its work, the majority on the Council belonged to the Municipal Reform Party which favoured an economical use of the rates. Among the Aldermen and Councillors were those engaged in the property business, and there were some like Thomas Wakelin Saint who could remember the Council's early brush with the LCC and the Local Government Board over Norfolk Square. Nonetheless the Council pressed forward with some energy in getting housing schemes approved by the Ministry of Health, and it is true that when the Labour group took control after the November 1919 elections they initiated no new schemes over those already proposed by the Municipal Reform group. The Labour Party in Islington had a troubled history with the early years plagued by splits as Paul Thompson has shown.41 When they won a majority in 1919, although the
party had won control of half the 28 Metropolitan Boroughs, there was
general consternation in the more conservative circles in Islington
such as those represented by The Islington Gazette which commented:

The apathy of three-fourths of the electorate combined with the
large proportion of women voters among those who polled has given
them their triumph. 42

It is interesting to note that support for the Council's involvement
in the Borough's housing did not depend on support for the Labour
party, and, as will become clear, in dealings with the Ministry of
Health, political affiliation seemed to mean little. After staggering
rises in the rate from 10/- in the pound in 1920 to 18/6 in 1922, the
Municipal Reform Party were triumphantly returned in 1922 with 80% of
the Council's seats and continued in power until 1934 with what they
took to be a mandate to keep rates as low as possible. 43

There was, of course, a spectrum of opinion across the Borough
about the extent of Islington's housing problem and how best to solve
it. When the Council's newly appointed Housing Committee asked local
estate agents whether they had any empty properties on their books
which would be suitable for conversion into flats most answered in the
negative, and nearly all agreed that there was a need for both middle
and working-class houses in the Borough, but one agent expressed the
sentiment which many probably felt:

The present demand for houses only temporarily exceeds the
supply, and in our opinion Islington is not a suitable borough in
which to build private houses. As soon as building re-commences
in the outer suburbs, Islington will automatically adjust itself
on the housing question. 44

There were, as there had been in the 1890s when the LCC tried to
involve the Islington Vestry in the Norfolk Square scheme, housing
'black spots'. In August 1919 Brand Street, off Holloway Road, was
described as 'one of the black spots of the Borough which requires to be wiped out'. The difficulty with the majority of these areas was that they were overcrowded and their demolition would have meant a programme of rehousing which would have taxed the resources of the Borough, not only in capital expenditure but also in management.

Islington Council, at least until the legislation of the 1930s pushed them into special needs housing, preferred to house those who could be relied upon to pay their rent regularly and not to cause management headaches. When in 1928 Burnard Place was compulsorily cleared for an electricity sub-station, the Council arranged with the LCC that the latter would house the very poor inhabitants of Burnard Place while Islington Council undertook to build dwellings to house the equivalent number of better class tenants.

As far as the Council was concerned the best sites for new housing were the large houses, set in generous gardens and usually situated in the north of the Borough, which were often vacant or the residence of only a few tenants who would not find it difficult to obtain other accommodation. The ordinary inhabitant of Islington, however, saw this as an upside down situation, whereby the Council demolished perfectly good property which could be let out in the private market, while ignoring overcrowded and often derelict property in other parts of the Borough. There was support in the Council for this point of view as can be seen from the statement given out by a joint meeting of the Finance, Housing, and Law and General Purposes Committees in July 1924:

... in the opinion of the Joint Meeting the much needed housing accommodation required should be provided in districts where there are large areas of land available, and that cheap and convenient travelling facilities should be provided to enable
working class people to live amidst healthier surroundings and enjoy greater amenities than obtain in densely populated areas, and that so far as regards the Borough of Islington the efforts of the Council should be directed as far as practicable to the improvement of unhealthy areas and dwelling houses. 47

As will be explained in the next chapter, the Council gained possession of a house and land in Holly Park, the exclusive estate in Crouch Hill. When they wanted to build flats there in 1924, the Holly Park Association petitioned the Ministry of Health, claiming that the flats would spoil the amenities of the estate for all time and produce a rapid deterioration of property. Even though the Council were prepared to build what might be considered middle-class flats, the Association saw no merit at all in the Council's intervention:

Flats and Apartments of this kind are going begging in large numbers, as can be seen from the Advertisement Columns of local papers - therefore the ultimate fate of the proposed Flats will be that they will degenerate into Tenement Dwellings with their accompanying nuisances, or else remain empty, either of which would incur a big loss to the Rate-payer. 48

The implied message was that the Council should be concerned with those unable to help themselves and should leave the middle-class areas of the Borough alone. Surprisingly, The Islington and Holloway Press, which usually supported the ratepayers, criticised the Association for having enjoyed an exclusivity which put them outside the housing problems of the rest of the Borough, a reaction which pointed up the ambivalent feelings in Islington about the housing situation and the Council's position.

From time to time the local press commented on housing difficulties in the Borough, and whereas greedy landlords had formerly been the villains, the practice of sub-letting came under increasing criticism as the 1920s proceeded. It has been shown that more
families in 1931 were sharing with two or more households than in 1921, and although multiple occupation was beginning to be commoner in the larger houses, it was still the smaller houses where most overcrowding occurred. In May 1928 two distressing cases appeared in the press. In one instance a child had died of complications from measles, and when the circumstances were investigated, it was found that the family lived in one room in Benwell Road, which they rented for 6/- per week. Even more shocking was the situation at 41 Winchester Street, Kings Cross, where the head tenant let 7 rooms to 18 people and paid only 1/- a week in rent himself. It was found that a couple and their four young children were living in the house in 'a small, dungeon-like basement room, where the only light and ventilation came from a grating just above the pavement'. What is interesting in these reports is the element of dismayed surprise that such conditions should exist in Islington:

A letter in our correspondence columns reveals yet another shocking case of overcrowding in the very heart of Islington, and there is every reason to believe that a vast number of similar cases have not yet had the light of publicity thrown upon them. Is it really in 1928, ten years after the end of the war to end war, for people to exist in such terrible squalor? Certainly it should not be, and we are of opinion that a little more supervision on the part of the authorities, and a little less profiteering on the part of those people who have the power of sub-letting parts of houses would ease the situation considerably.

But such supervision as suggested here had its own problems, since sharing between households was so pervasive. In 1925 the LCC drew up new by-laws which allowed for the registration of lodging houses, defined as working-class dwellings occupied by more than one family. Islington Council protested against such a broad definition which, if left standing, would have included 14,292 houses of the Borough's
approximately 42,090 dwellings, or about one third.\textsuperscript{32} It seemed that when more than just the numbers of new houses was involved, public intervention in the local housing culture was caught in contingent circumstances difficult to forecast, and yet as time went on the problem seemed to be much more complex than the mere numbers of new dwellings.

Islington's housing culture between the wars was mature, the result first, of the middle-class housing boom of the 19th-century, which turned the Borough into a residential area with a large service economy, and second, of the working-class overcrowding caused by the urban 'improvements', including the railways, which also ensured a supply of casual work. From 1900 to 1931, the housing culture seems to have remained remarkably static. Land taxes and the Rent Restriction Acts tended to discourage new money coming into privately rented houses, but controlled rents acted as a stabilising influence by reducing vacancies and working-class mobility. The controlled rents also helped to keep prices down to a level which ensured the survival of the small rentiers who were unable to get their equity out of their property even if they did sell up. By the 1930s when greater housing opportunities existed for the middle classes outside the Borough, when the old constituency of middle-class landlords started dying off, and when the working classes through higher wages were able to afford more house room, the culture began to change. Those areas of Islington, still inhabited by middle-class households were more and more infiltrated by working-class people, at last able to afford to live at a distance from their work, on a wage which permitted them to rent a bit more room in the larger houses of the northern wards. To
what extent the local authority should intervene in any part of this process was of continuing concern, for although some working-class people were able to move into more generous accommodation, there were many others who had to double up in the smaller, older houses in the south of the Borough. Like other local authorities Islington Council were drawn into the Government's housing initiatives, starting with the 1919 Housing Act. The next chapter will consider how the Council intervened under this legislation, and what were the constraints, both Governmental and local, which led them to produce the dwellings they did at this time.
Footnotes - Chapter Two


2. Census, 1921.


8. IHCM, 4 April 1929.


12. Report of an Enquiry by the Board of Trade into Working Class Rents, Housing, Retail Prices and Standard Rate of Wages, 1908.


17. Islington Rate Books, Barnsbury, 1922 - 23.

18. See Chapter 1 above.


24. Daunton, op cit., p. 31.


27. Ibid., p. 31.


31. The Estates Gazette, 3 January 1914.


33. PRO HLG 68/29.


35. PRO HLG 101/258e.

36. Ibid.

37. Daunton, op cit., p. 43.

38. PRO HLG 101/258e.


40. The Islington Gazette, 5 May 1919.


42. The Islington Gazette, 4 November 1919.

43. Islington Metropolitan Borough Council Minutes, 3 August 1922.

44. IHCM, 13 June 1919.


47. *Ibid.*, 2 July 1924.

48. PRO HLG 49/54.


50. *Ibid*.

51. *Ibid*.

52. Islington Metropolitan Borough Council *Minutes*, 16 April 1926.
Chapter Three - Islington Council's Housing Under the 1919 Act

Under the 1919 Housing Act Islington provided 498 dwellings at a cost of £563,682.\(^1\) Of these, 328 were newly built flats in four schemes, while the rest were conversions of existing buildings into self-contained flats, part of the Ministry of Health's short-lived attempt to produce additional dwellings in London quickly and cheaply. Arrangements for the acquisition by the Council of most of the sites and houses for their 1919 housing scheme were well under way by the time of the local elections in November when Labour took control from Municipal Reform. Indeed some of the properties had been offered to the Council even before the formation of a Housing Committee in the spring of 1919. Therefore the Council's housing programme was largely decided under the aegis of Municipal Reform, but carried out under Labour. If it were asked what housing policy Islington Council held, it would have to be admitted that they had no positive policy but reacted to the Ministry's admonitions on the one hand, and to offers of property from the public on the other.

A Housing Committee was formed in May 1919 with a membership of ten aldermen and councillors. This number was increased to twenty after the November local elections, although only three of the old Committee remained.\(^2\) At least one councillor, Mason Bradbear, belonged to the property business as an estate agent, and the new chairman in November, Alderman Addington, was a clerk of works. The second Housing Committee also included three women members whereas the original Committee was all male. The Housing Committee worked very closely with Clarence Fletcher, the Town Clerk, who seemed to have taken a very prominent part, not just in informing them of their
duties, but also in the daily running of the Borough's housing programme. The Town Clerk was the first Council officer contacted by the Local Government Board when they were seeking cooperation with the Council over housing, and as a solicitor he was also well placed to interpret the Council's responsibilities under the Housing Act.

In April 1919 the Local Government Board appointed commissioners in the regions to advise local authorities and to process their applications for permission to purchase land and obtain loans as well as approve their proposed housing schemes. After the preliminary approval of the Board and later the Ministry of Health, the commissioners were supposed to handle the whole procedure entailed in producing a housing scheme up to the point when costs were given final approval. By this system it was hoped to combine scrutiny from the centre with flexibility in the regions. No commission was set up for London until July when the London Housing Board was formed. As will be shown, the relationship between the Board and the Islington Housing Committee was not always cordial, and their relationship was not always aided by what seemed to the Committee obstructionist intervention by the Ministry. Thus instead of having to deal with one agency of central Government, the Committee ended up having to deal with two.

The Committee was also constrained to a certain extent by the London County Council. It was to the LCC that the Committee had to apply for permission to borrow and it was from them that much of the money borrowed for land purchase and building was to come. The LCC was the body which approved building standards and fire precautions, but they were also sometimes in competition with the Council for sites
with the result, at least in one case, of the price being raised by a hopeful vendor.  

The main purpose of the subsidised housing programme in 1919 was to produce more housing units throughout the country, and for most local authorities this meant choosing a greenfield site and building an estate of cottages. Of the inner Metropolitan Boroughs, St. Pancras was able to find a site near Highgate Cemetery where they could build the Brookfield estate, a mixture of flats and cottage maisonettes, but Islington from the first was committed to building flats. As will become apparent this may have had as much to do with the Committee's perception of the local housing market as it did with the lack of free building land, although this must have been uppermost in their minds. In London there was also a programme initiated by the Minister of Health to convert existing houses into self-contained flats, a programme which furnished 170 of the Council's dwellings under their 1919 housing scheme.  

These two dwelling types, the purpose-built flat and the converted flat, made up only a small proportion of Islington's housing stock at the time. As was shown in Chapter 2, 83% of Islington households shared their dwelling with at least one other family in 1921, so that when the Council began their intervention into the housing market with the self-contained flat, although they were entering what had been an expanding area of the market before the War, it was still small in terms of Islington's housing stock. It was also the part of the market which had catered for the better off, those lower middle-class and skilled working-class residents who were the potential house buyers of the 1930s. It must be asked, then, for whom...
the Council's dwellings were intended and who benefitted, but these questions should be seen in terms of what limited properties were available on the market for development by the Council, and how the Ministry constrained them still further in their selection of sites as well as in the choice of type and standard of dwellings. In other words, what dwellings Islington Council provided under the 1919 legislation cannot be seen as the fulfillment of a well thought out housing policy, but rather as a reaction to initiatives from both the Ministry and the property market.

The 1919 Housing Act was the first piece of legislation to push Islington Council into the uncertain realm of the local housing market. This chapter traces the Council's progress through their 1919 housing scheme by considering the acquisition of their properties, the building production of their dwellings, and the financing of the scheme. Later chapters 7 and 8 will consider what the Council built and the rents and management of their dwellings which determined the type of access to Council housing experienced by the people of Islington.

In February 1919 the Local Government Board sent out a circular to local authorities outlining the procedures required in developing their housing schemes under the Housing Act which was to come into effect at the end of July. There had been previous warning of the forthcoming Housing Act with publication of the Tudor Walters report in November 1918. In December 1918 Messrs Debenham Yewson and Chinnocks offered the Council through the Town Clerk an estate of three acres in Highbury on behalf of their clients, E.W. and Alexander Pulling. Once it was known that the Council would be acquiring
sites, other members of the public were ready to step forward with property for sale.

In the first weeks of its existence during May and June 1919, Islington's Housing Committee had to consider a number of sites in the Borough which were being pressed upon them. Besides the one at Highbury, there was property held by the City Corporation off the Caledonian Road around the Metropolitan Cattle Market; a block of old houses owned by the Marquess of Northampton behind Upper Street; some small industrial property owned by the Melhuish family behind Highbury Station; and what turned out to be rather unpromising property in the south of the Borough owned by the Salaman Estates, a family trust. Another property they considered was the Cornwallis Road Institution which had been used as an internment prison for aliens during the War, but which previously had been a workhouse and was no longer required by the local Guardians. Likewise the Alexandria Orphanage in Hazellville Road, used as a Belgian Military Hospital, was also considered as a possible site since its owners, the Shoreditch Guardians, no longer wanted it.

It was important for the Council that they acquire freehold sites, large enough for estates which would give them a reasonable return, but which would not require much compensation for existing tenancies. Since Islington was largely leasehold and freeholders usually did not own concentrated blocks of houses, these requirements put a constraint on what properties the Housing Committee could realistically consider. They did send out a questionnaire to estate agents requesting information about vacant property in the Borough. The thirteen responses they received were not encouraging, with only
two agents reporting a total of four vacant sites suitable for new
building.10

The Highbury Park site consisted of seven houses, one lock-up
shop, out-buildings and glass houses. The houses had been built by
Thomas Cubitt in the early decades of the 19th century, and this early
development was why the leases of all the houses except one were ready
to expire at Midsummer 1919.11 Number 2 Highbury Grange, a more
recent house, had 39 years remaining in its lease, so it was necessary
to incorporate it into the eventual housing estate. At the end of
June the Housing Committee were dismayed to find that this property
was also being considered by the LCC for a proposed open-air school
for tubercular children, a circumstance which may have led the vendor
to ask £2,000 over the district valuer's market value of £10,000.12

By August the LCC had decided against the school and the way was clear
for the Committee to carry on with negotiations on the basis of the
valuation of the district valuer.

Halton Road first came to the notice of the Housing Committee in
their capacity as enforcers of Section 28 of the new Act, by which
they could prevail on owners of unhealthy houses to put them right.
In June the Medical Officer of Health arranged to see the agent of the
Marquess of Northampton, the owner of much of that area of Canonbury
just east of Upper Street, with regard to dilapidated houses in Halton
Road. Although the Marquess intended turning the houses in
neighbouring Canonbury Villas into self-contained flats, he was
'loathe to spend money on these houses' as they were old and rundown,
and he thought they should be demolished and replaced by new
buildings.13 This meeting put Halton Road on the Housing Committee's
Laycock Street, the property behind Highbury Station, was offered to the Committee in May by Messrs Drivers, Jonas & Co., agents for the Melhuish family. This was a two acre site, occupied by small industries like bookbinding and cardboard box manufacture, as well as by fifteen cottages. Although the vendors had taken the initiative, they were not ready to bargain with the Committee, but stuck to their asking price of £17,000, a sign perhaps that their reasons for selling were not pressing.

Properties owned by the Salaman Estates in south Islington were first offered in June. These sites turned out to be houses in two streets of small shops and rooms, Maygood and William Streets, near the insalubrious Chapel Market. Both presented problems, such as a beer house with a tenancy continuing for another two and half years, and the rights of the Regents Canal Company whose canal ran beneath the streets. In the 1916 Rate Books, some of the houses were listed as empty and out of assessment, so it would appear that these properties were on the margins of the market, and the cheerful flexibility of the vendors did nothing to win the confidence of the Committee, who could be forgiven for thinking that the Salaman Estates were trying to unload their unprofitable property onto the Council.

In June the City Corporation decided against using property around the Cattle Market themselves for their own housing purposes and offered the Committee two old lodging houses for conversion into self-contained flats. City and Queens Mansions had originally been hotels in the heyday of the market, patronised by cattle farmers and drovers, but with the decline of the market they became tenements and
in 1919 City Mansions was empty and Queens Mansions partially so. None of the tenements were self-contained and the sanitary arrangements consisted of trough latrines and common sinks, \(^{17}\) so that the amount of work required to let the dwellings as flats was considerable.

Finally the Cornwallis Road Institution and the Alexandra Orphanage were offered by their owning bodies, either for conversion of the existing buildings, or for new purpose-built housing. \(^{18}\) Since both these institutions had been given alternative functions during the War, and since changes in the social security provision may have made them appear no longer necessary in post-War Islington, their owners wanted them sold. The problem would be in getting rid of such substantial sites to one buyer, and the prospect of the Council's Housing Committee taking over the whole property must have been an appealing one to the two owners. From the Committee's point of view such large sites without complicated leaseholds would be very welcome.

When at last the Ministry of Health's commission for London, the London Housing Board, was established in July, they sent a representative to inspect the sites in Islington. Their representative, E.A. Strauss, may not have been completely disinterested in the decisions taken by the Council since he had been born and brought up in Highbury, \(^{19}\) and he would have had an opinion as to the appropriate locations for the Council's dwellings. One issue he raised was whether Highbury Park could be economically developed with working-class dwellings given the rents that would have to be charged to cover the cost of the land. Already discussion had taken place within the Housing Committee concerning the erection of flats in
Highbury Park and whether they could be made to conform with other properties in the area; but it was agreed that there were two sections of the community in need of housing accommodation and that if Laycock Street, for example, could be developed for the lower end of housing need, then Highbury Park would cater for the more affluent end.20

The London Housing Board recommended that the Housing Committee obtain land values from the District Valuer and draw up plans for the dwellings they proposed to erect. For this they needed professional assistance and on the urging of the Board they appointed an architect for their 1919 Housing Scheme, E.C.P. Monson.21 Monson had come from a family of engineers and architects and had obtained his formal training at Kings College London. He had gained experience in housing design through his work with the philanthropic Sutton Trust, for whom he had designed blocks of flats in large estates at Old Street, Rotherhithe, and Chelsea and a cottage estate, built during the War at Alum Rock in Birmingham. In comparison to the size of the estates he had designed for the Sutton Trust, Islington's demands were modest, and the flats he designed for them, although bearing a family resemblance were of a higher space standard and at a lower density.

Of the properties mentioned above the ones finally acquired by the Council were Highbury Park for £10,000, Halton Road for £11,200, and City and Queens Mansions together for £19,070. Two other sites which were both in the north of the Borough, 88 Hazellville Road and 9 Warlersville Road, were bought by compulsory purchase order in conjunction with the Ministry of Health's programme for converting already existing houses into self-contained flats, a programme which will be dealt with in detail shortly.22
Map 5 - Highbury.
Hatched area shows site of Addington Mansions.

Scale: 15 inches = 1 mile.
Scale:
15 inches = 1 mile

Map 6 - St Mary Ward. Hatched area shows site of Halton Mansions.
Scale:
15 inches = 1 mile

Map 7 - Upper Holloway. Hatched area shows site of Manchester Mansions.
Scale:
15 inches = 1 mile

Map 8 - Upper Holloway. Hatched area shows site of Warltersville Mansions
Another property in Highbury Park was offered to the Council by the Griffiths Estate in October 1919 and although the Housing Committee was keen to acquire it, the asking price of £20,000 for 3.6 acres, or approximately £6,000 per acre, was considered too expensive by the Housing Board. Added to the price was the fact that there were existing leasehold tenancies which meant that the Council would not be able to obtain complete possession for some years. Monson produced a design which included among the new blocks of flats conversions of the leased houses until the time the leases expired, but such a building programme would, as the Board pointed out, go on long after the assisted housing scheme had come to a close, and the Board refused to recommend the purchase of the site.

The Salaman Estates and Laycock Street were also refused, the former with little regret on the part of the Committee, the latter not without a fight. In May 1919 the vendors' selling price for the Laycock Street site was £17,000 which the District Valuer considered £5,000 over the market price. In the autumn when negotiations began the Committee's offer of £10,000 was promptly rejected by the vendors. In late January 1920 the District Valuer was requested to re-open negotiations at his value of £12,000. It was perhaps an indication of the post-war revival of the property market that although the vendors' asking price remained £17,000, the Valuer considered that the property had appreciated since June 1919 and he now recommended a market value of £14,335. This figure provided the basis for further negotiations and an agreement was reached in early March when the architect began to draw up plans for 152 flats. However, the Ministry stepped in and refused to approve the site because the cost of the land, at nearly
£7,000 per acre, was too high. In their opinion the proposed flats would produce an unacceptably high deficit of £46 per tenement per annum, and they could not accept the unnecessary demolition of the 15 cottages called for in the architect's scheme. A second attempt was made with another scheme of 120 flats which left the 15 cottages as they were, but although hopes rose over the summer, the Ministry finally refused the scheme in September 1920 when the reason they gave was that for the time being the present commitment of the Council, other Metropolitan Boroughs, and the LCC would absorb practically all the labour and money available.26

The Cornwallis Road Institution was also refused during the spring of 1920, a period during the housing programme when the Ministry was seriously worried over the finance available for the construction of houses throughout the country. The architect's plan for a new built estate on this 5½ acre site included 443 flats for 2,604 persons, which would result in a density of 473 persons per acre. The estimated cost for this estate was £420,250, three quarters as much again as the Council's total expenditure under the 1919 legislation.26 Not surprisingly this project was not approved despite the Housing Committee's plea that while the need for additional housing in Islington was 'particularly urgent', it was impossible to obtain sites for new flats. Of all the Council's properties, only Nos 10 and 11 Warltersville Road were not purchased in 1919, but in the autumn of 1920, and these were for a combination of converted and new built flats similar to the ones at neighbouring No 9 Warltersville Road.

The properties which were offered by the public to the Council
after the summer of 1919 consisted of individual houses only and were in connection with the Council's involvement in the Ministry's project to convert already existing houses into self-contained flats. Although the conversion programme provided a fraction of London's housing under the 1919 legislation, its story illustrates very well the difficulties which could be encountered when Government became involved in the intricacies of a mature housing market. The programme was based on two assumptions: one was that local authorities could not be trusted to get on with providing housing without leadership from the centre, and the other was that no progress would be made on whatever schemes might be set in train until after the summer recess. There was some truth in the latter since that year Islington Council did not meet from late July until early October. The Health Minister, Dr Addison, was particularly anxious that something should be seen to be done about the housing shortage before winter, and on 6 August 1919 at a meeting with the Metropolitan Boroughs he urged the local authorities to exercise their powers under clause 12 of the Housing Act which enabled them to convert existing houses in their areas.27

Not satisfied with urging the local authorities to act, during the summer the Minister evolved a scheme whereby the Ministry could themselves buy empty houses which they would then hand over to the Office of Works to convert into flats, or to the local authorities for the same purpose.28 By claiming that once the Ministry had shown the way, the local authorities would undertake the burden of the conversions themselves, Addison convinced the Treasury to make £500,000 available for this scheme on the proviso that the local authorities paid back all the expenditure by 31 March 1920. They
could then of course claim these payments over the penny rate from the housing subsidy, but on taking possession of the properties they would be responsible for their maintenance.

The conversions project soon became concentrated in the London area where Metropolitan Boroughs were encouraged to send lists of empty houses they considered suitable for conversion to the London Housing Board. The houses were then inspected by surveyors of the Office of Works and those suitable were bought and plans drawn up. The conversions were undertaken by the Office of Works through local contractors or by the local authorities. Trouble began as soon as the London Housing Board actively started negotiating for the purchase of the properties. In a number of cases it was difficult to establish ownership, while in others the owners asked for exorbitant prices. This called for compulsory purchase orders which could cause delay by being challenged in the Courts. Although the properties were all supposed to be empty, by the time the Housing Board came to make their offer, in the volatile housing market some of the houses were already sold or let. Therefore concluding transactions took longer than anyone expected and by 31 March 1920 some purchases were still incomplete. There were also far fewer houses suitable and available for conversion than was first supposed. In September 1919 the Ministry was working on the assumption that 400 houses out of a possible 3,200 would actually come to the point of conversion. By January 1920 the London Housing Board forecast between 350 and 380 being converted. When the scheme finally finished 157 houses had been converted into a total of 521 flats, at a cost of £361,000 or around £693 per flat. This was approximately £300 per flat more than had
been at first anticipated, and in 1921 at the end of the project, Strohmenger, the Accountant General at the Ministry of Health, was moved to remark, 'We have got out of this rather foolish piece of panic administration very much better than I anticipated.'

From the first there seems to have been some misunderstanding between Islington and the London Housing Board about which properties were suitable for conversion. Confusion may have arisen over the definition of 'conversion' and 'repair', the latter being dealt with under section 28 of the Housing Act. One of the tasks given to the local authorities, under section 28, was to survey their area for unfit houses which they could then order to be put into repair by the owners. If the owners failed to do this, the local authorities could have the work done themselves, charging the owners for it later. From May 1919 the Housing Committee had compiled lists of empty properties in the Borough which were then handed to the Public Health Committee for comment and possible recommendation for action under section 28. In late July the Town Clerk forwarded on request such lists of empty properties to the London Housing Board who intended to use them as a basis for determining which houses should be converted into flats in Islington. Under section 28 there was no obligation to provide separate units within the house, but only to repair insanitary defects, and since sharing houses among households was so common in the Borough, a mistake as to the intention of the Housing Board's use of the lists could have easily occurred.

The Housing Board authorised the Office of Works to use the lists sent in by the Town Clerk not as provisional, but as more definitive than was ever intended. On the 13, 14, and 15 August, while the Town
Clerk was on holiday, the Office of Works surveyors came to the Borough and inspected the properties on the lists. What then seems to have happened was that the Office of Works drew up plans for the conversion of the houses their surveyors had recommended, but without the advice of the London Housing Board or without consulting the Islington Housing Committee. The financial department of the Board became involved with negotiations for purchase, and it is not clear whether the Board was really sure which properties were being acquired. Sometime after, in a memorandum dated 23 May 1921, a member of the Housing Board wrote to a colleague at the Treasury:

> Although I was not at the London Housing Board during the time when the 'rush' to which Col. Norton refers took place, I am sure that from the general conversion files and from discussion with officers of the Board that this part of the work of the Board had been in a chaotic state.

A combination of pressure for haste from the Minister and doubtful procedures on the part of the Board and the Office of Works, meant that Islington was faced with the prospect of taking over what the Committee regarded as very dubious property.

The London Housing Board succeeded in acquiring the worst and the best of Islington housing property by purchasing three terraced houses in the infamous Campbell Road, and Park House, a large detached villa in Holly Park, the unadopted estate in Crouch Hill. The Housing Committee dug their heels in over numbers 29, 31, and 95 Campbell Road because there were certain properties in Islington they were adamant about not accepting, and houses in the infamous Campbell Road were among them. These were not the homes of the 'decent poor', but were the shelter of the remnants of a wilder breed of people, common in 19th century London, but becoming scarcer as another style of urban
behaviour became more widely accepted. Jerry White's account of the street leaves little doubt about the reasons why the Housing Committee refused to accept property in the area; even if the houses had been in excellent repair instead of having an LCC dangerous structure notice on them. The culture of the street would have made converted flats there impossible to manage. The criticism made by the Housing Committee was that the Housing Board was acting without consulting them, and the acquisition of property like that of the Campbell Road houses was the result of ignoring the expertise of the local authority.

Not only the type of properties selected by the Office of Works for conversion, but also the manner in which they proposed to execute the conversions they had undertaken to do themselves came under severe criticism. In October 1919 a rumour developed that Park House in Holly Park was going to be divided up by the Office of Works in such a way that it would cause the depreciation of the surrounding property. When the Housing Committee finally got hold of the plans of the proposed conversion, everyone's worst fears were realised. The house was to be divided into one maisonette and eight flats whose living rooms were to be between six and a half and eight feet wide. In addition, a hut in the garden was to be made into a dwelling at the expense of light and air to the adjacent basement and ground floor flats. In the opinion of the Housing Committee such a scheme should not even be contemplated for working-class dwellings. As for the residents of Holly Park, they felt that such high densities in a neighbouring house would depreciate the value of their properties, but that a more generous conversion would ensure that the flats were let
Scale:
15 inches = 1 mile

Map 9 - Upper Holloway. Hatched area shows site of Holly Park.
at good rents.\footnote{33} The Town Clerk deplored the lack of awareness of local conditions exhibited by the Board in this instance:

\begin{quote}
Obviously if the Committee had been consulted they would have informed the Board that this house was one of the most desirable in Islington, situated in one of the best thoroughfares, and it would have suggested to the Board that a broadminded scheme should have been prepared for the provision of flats of say five rooms each, and the entire omission of the proposed hut.\ldots \footnote{34}
\end{quote}

Here was the opposite situation to Campbell Road since the Committee approved of the property acquired, but thought that the conversion would create conditions which would be detrimental to the surrounding property. At this point, in November 1919, the London Housing Board appeared confident that their judgment outweighed that of the local authority, as this remark made by one of its officers reveals:

\begin{quote}
In order to humour the Housing Committee we might in future ask them to see the Office of Works sketch plans before they proceed with the working drawings and perhaps the Minister would like to suggest this in his reply to the Town Clerk.\footnote{35}
\end{quote}

This confirms the impression that the members of the London Housing Board considered the Metropolitan Boroughs as recalcitrant children rather than as partners in the Government's housing programmes.

Some of the properties that the Housing Committee were finally obliged to take over from the London Housing Board were similar to those belonging to the Salaman Estates in South Islington, that is small houses and shops which were really on the margins of the market. Those few properties that the Committee undertook to acquire themselves for conversion, like 13 Highbury New Park and 93 Highbury Quadrant, were large houses in pleasant residential areas which were already being used as flats and apartments by white-collar workers. By acquiring this sort of property the Committee were putting themselves into direct competition with the private market. At the
beginning of January 1920 a Highbury house agent, F. Copping, was passing around a circular which criticised the Council's policy of turning empty houses into flats.

... The Council have acquired several noble, well-appointed houses in the best thoroughfares, including Highbury New park, for housing of the working classes, under the Act passed last year. In adopting this course, the Council have ignored local amenities, which they must observe, and also the enormous depreciation likely to result from forcing the working classes to dwell in all the best thoroughfares. This will drive all the better residents from Islington and lead to the borough sinking to the lowest level of any metropolitan entity. ... The committee have acquired these properties in competition with hundreds of private buyers, each prepared to occupy or convert at their own expense, whereas if done by the Council, a perpetual charge on the rates will result.  

He suggested a residents' petition to the Ministry of Health in protest, or alternatively a threat to apply for an injunction to restrain the Council from carrying out its policy. This was an instance of the Council being given too much credit for their autonomy when they were actually under pressure to act from the Ministry.

After complaints by the Housing Committee, the Office of Works completed only 4 conversions in Islington, leaving the Council to undertake the other 16. The dubious quality of the four conversions planned and supervised by the Office of Works fed the continuing distrust the Housing Committee had for their ability to interfere in the Council's housing programme. One of the worst cases was that of 31 Highbury Grove, a large detached house in a rundown condition, already used as a boarding house. Because they had noticed problems with basement flats in Greenwich, the London Housing Board recommended that the Office of Works revise their plan for this house from one flat on each of the four floors, to two flats on the first and second floors and one maisonette on the basement and ground floors. The
Office of Works came up with a revised plan which provided a maisonette consisting of living room, kitchen, five bedrooms and a spare room, a dwelling far larger than could be let for under 30/- per week, the limit set by the Ministry for the rents of the converted flats. Unfortunately neither the London Housing Board nor the Office of Works informed the Housing Committee of the change and work went ahead on the giant maisonette which was not only too large to let, but was also extremely damp. In June 1920 after the Housing Committee had inspected the house, Monson, their architect, sent six pages of complaints about the conversion to the Office of Works and the Medical Officer of Health reported that the basement was unfit for human habitation mainly because of the damp. The Housing Committee reckoned that the maisonette would cost a tenant £130 per annum to run, and they pointed out that there had been no enquiries for the flat despite the housing shortage. A London Housing Board report in July 1920 acknowledged the Housing Committee's grievance as well as the Board's irritation with the Office of Works: 'The case, so far as I can see seems to be a pretty bad one and the criticisms made by the Borough officials appear to have been justified'.

Only a month after lettings were made at Hazellville Road, the first of the Office of Works' conversions to be completed, complaints were being received from the tenants about the state of the flats. Monson made a report of the defects on behalf of the Housing Committee and it was agreed that the Council should not take possession of the flats until the work was rectified. On the arrival of the completion report from the Office of Works concerning another of their conversions at 4 Colebrooke Row, the Housing Committee declared that
the work was unsatisfactory and they refused to take over the premises until the Council's architect was satisfied. By the end of July, Monson was simply able to send his report on the work at Park House to the London Housing Board for the defects listed to be immediately taken in hand. There were other points of contention such as the refusal of the Office of Works to provide washing coppers and their failure to lay on electricity for lighting purposes. Then as the year progressed there were more complaints, particularly about damp in the basement flats. At the end of October evidence of dry rot was discovered at Park House. The tenants of the Council's conversions also complained of damp, but any evidence of defects in the Office of Works' conversions served to fuel the already existing resistance on the part of the Housing Committee to any outside interference in their housing programme.

The last conflict over the conversions arose in March 1921 when the Ministry of Health presented the Council with the final account for the work done by the Office of Works. For the four conversions they undertook in the Borough, the Office of Works had not bothered tendering but had employed the Pitcher Construction Company, a local firm of contractors, on a prime cost basis rather than a lump sum. Estimates were not made on a bill of quantities or a detailed specification, but from rough notes and sketch plans. When it came time for the Council to pay the Ministry for the four conversions, the Housing Committee found that the total cost came to £14,689.18.5, £5,628 over what had been estimated. They refused to pay the excess, for, as the Town Clerk pointed out, the 1921 changes in the Housing Act made it likely that in future the Council could not recover the
Illus 3 - 29 Aberdeen Park. Conversion designed by E.C.P. Monson.

Ground floor plan, original house and conversion.
Illus 4 - 29 Aberdeen Park. Basement floor plan, original house and conversion.
whole loss incurred in the management of these flats because of the excessive capital cost of their acquisition and conversion. There followed an acrimonious debate between the Housing Committee and the Office of Works over the poor quality of work and its high cost, and the Council even took steps to have the matter brought up in the House of Commons. However, in the end, after legal threats, the Housing Committee grudgingly recommended that the Council make the payment.

Despite their disagreements with the London Housing Board and the Ministry of Health over the conversions, Islington's Housing Committee pursued their purpose-built flats with energy after they had gained possession of the sites.\textsuperscript{43} Once the architect had drawn up the plans and specifications, tenders were advertised in \textit{The Builder} so that builders around the country could tender if they wished. One of the reasons for the Government's housing programme in 1919 was the supposed inability of the building industry to respond to the need for new housing after the hiatus of the war. Sheila Marriner has pointed out the sort of liquidity problems suffered by builders undertaking public house building, particularly in comparison to the Office of Works who were allowed payments in advance,\textsuperscript{44} and some of the actions of the builders who tendered for Islington's new flats are explained by the financial climate of the time.

Tenders for the largest estates, Addington Mansions and Halton Mansions, were won by quite large firms although not without complications. The winning tender for Addington Mansions was that of Alfred Monk of Lower Edmonton, who had interestingly been the contractor for Monson's Sutton Trust estate in Birmingham. However, soon after winning the tender Mr. Monk went to the architect and
explained he wished to withdraw his tender of £174,779 because through a clerical error his was a good £15,000 less than the nearest on the list. The architect found this explanation hard to accept, but nevertheless new tenders were advertised on the basis of a revised bill of quantities. This action was criticised by the London Master Builders who ordered its members not to participate in this round of tendering. Paul Wilding has pointed out how local Builders' Federations became involved in negotiations with local authorities over prices and Madge Dresser's research on Bristol has revealed the part played by the Bristol Association of Building Trades Employers in ensuring the Council's housing work for their members. The London Master Builders may have been trying to keep London housing work for London builders, and the only builder to put in a tender was from outside London, W.E. Davey of Southend. In order to get over the impasse with the London Master Builders, whom the architect accused of collusion, the Housing Committee appealed to the London Housing Board who agreed that the two contractors with the next lowest tenders on the original list, as well as W.E. Davey, should put in new tenders on the basis of the revised quantities. In the end W.E. Davey's tender was the lowest at £154,832, £22,439 less than Patman and Fotheringham, a local builder and their nearest competitor. The Ministry requested that before a contract was made, Davey give proof of financial ability, and shortly after, when Davey proposed converting his business into a limited liability company, his contract was accepted only on condition that he personally guarantee the completion of the contract.

Rice and Son of Stockwell had been the other contractor asked to
tender with Patman and Fotheringham and W.E. Davey for Addington Mansions, and it was this firm in March 1920 which put in the winning tender for Halton Mansions. Once the Housing Committee had ascertained the lowest tender, they then had to submit it via the London Housing Board to the Ministry of Health for approval. After three months and negotiations with the architect on what could easily be cut from the specifications, Rice’s tender was finally accepted. By then the tender had been amended from £222,560 to £171,419. When they approved the scheme, the London Housing Board had required that construction of the central blocks of the estate go ahead first in the back gardens of the 28 houses occupying the site, before interference with any of the tenancies. An arrangement with the builders ensured that the £4,000 retention money was shared between the two stages of the scheme so that they did not have to wait until the end of the whole contract before receiving any of that money.43

Before starting work, Rice and Son asked that a clause be inserted in their contract providing for an extension of time for the completion of the work if they were unable to obtain labour and materials. Then shortly after beginning construction in September 1920, they asked that the contract be increased by £2,332 on account of establishment charges and working expenses in connection with the increased cost of labour. The Housing Committee agreed to this payment as long as no further payments were requested for this reason.44 Despite their access to the gardens of the site, in October 1921, Rice asked for £2,000 in compensation for loss of time in gaining vacant possession. The delay came about because the Council had difficulty in rehousing the tenants in Halton Road, some of whom
they had to house temporarily in the new flats at reduced rents.\textsuperscript{51}

The Council's conversion work was for the most part undertaken by small firms, although the amount of work necessary on City and Queens Mansions at Caledonian Market was quite substantial. A number of the conversions were done by Thomas Shillitoe of Norwood who was also responsible for Manchester Mansions and much of Warltersville Mansions, a combined conversion and new build estate. George Bennett of Hornsey Rise and Randall and Son of Holloway were responsible for most of the other conversions.

A labour shortage has often been given as a serious impediment to the rapid completion of the 1919 house building programme, but neither a labour shortage nor labour troubles were particularly marked during the building of the Council's dwellings.\textsuperscript{52} At City Mansions, where Hooper and Ryder of Highgate were the contractors, there was a one day strike in April 1920 over the employment of non-union men. This dispute was settled when the men joined the union. A more complicated industrial dispute broke out in May 1921 at Queens Mansions.\textsuperscript{53} The London District Council of the National Federation of Building Trade Operatives accused the contractor, Messrs. Small and Son of Clerkenwell, of refusing to allow ticket stewards to be elected, of employing non-union men, and of permitting painters' labourers carrying out painting work at labourers' rates of pay. The trade unionists withdrew their labour and the contractors simply hired non-union men in their place. The dispute was finally settled after a meeting of the NFBTO and the contractors with the Town Clerk and the architect.

Another issue arose in connection with work going on at No 9
Warltersville Road. In October 1920 the National Builders' Labourers and Constructional Workers' Society reported that members in the Borough were not able to get work on Shillitoe's Warltersville Road site where men from outside the Borough appeared to have preference. In the same month the Holloway Employment Committee had asked the Housing Committee that they employ local labour on their building work, and the architect had requested the contractors to take on local labour when possible. Gradually unemployment took over from housing need as the priority, with the Government promoting a scheme in June 1921 for training ex-service men in the building industry. From this time, the Council's flat building and local employment were inextricably entwined.

Besides the shortage of labour, lack of building materials has also been given as an obstacle to the 1919 housing programme. Islington joined with other Labour Boroughs in February 1920 in passing a resolution that a strong protest be made against 'the tyrannical operations of the ring which is holding to ransom the municipal authorities in connection with the projected housing schemes'. To assist with post-war building the Government had established the Department of Building Materials Supply, but in May 1920 a General Housing Memorandum explained that because of the 'largely increased demands for materials which may be expected during this year and the following years it has been decided that building materials (other than light castings, sanitary ware, drain pipes, and glass) should as a rule be purchased independently of the D.B.M.S.' However in October 1921 when the Ministry of Health was trying to wind up the D.B.M.S., they put pressure on the local authorities to take
over the remaining supplies. Monson calculated that although the Council would save 34% on the price of cement, taking into consideration the time needed to check accounts and invoices, as well as the trouble involved in returning empty sacks, it would be cheaper to authorise the builders to buy their own supplies of cement and bricks on the open market.

In April 1920 it was decided to set up a sub-committee to consider whether the Council should establish a direct labour organisation which would tender for the building of the Council’s new housing, for the conversions, and for subsequent repairs. The sub-committee decided that a works department should be formed and a committee of nine members undertook to organise it. Although the Works Department may have put in tenders for what work remained, nothing more is heard of the Department in connection with the Council’s 1919 Housing Scheme until a repair programme was begun later in the 1920s.

Lack of finance has also been given as one of the reasons along with the scarcity of labour and materials for the shortcomings of the 1919 housing programme. Sheila Marriner has claimed that many of the problems faced both by local authorities and contractors basically ‘stemmed from the failure of fund-raising issues to attract sufficient response from the investing public’. For Islington the lack of finance posed a greater problem than the shortage of labour or materials.

The London County Council was both the body which sanctioned loans for the metropolitan boroughs and also loaned the money. While they were prepared to sanction loans of 80 years, 60 years was the
maximum period for which they would loan money. The LCC was not merely a rubber stamp when they considered loan sanctions, for they actually vetted the applications and could make suggestions about the estimates. Thus they suggested that Islington's Housing Committee include an increased estimate for annual repairs on one of their conversion schemes. Under some circumstances the LCC had to find money at short notice, as they did when four of the metropolitan boroughs needed to borrow £134,887 before the end of March 1920 to pay the Ministry of Health for work connected with the conversion programme. In February 1920 the loan system had begun to break down under the strain of demand. The LCC wrote to Islington to the effect that since it appeared that £13,000,000 would be needed during the next three years for all London's needs, ready money would be in short supply. They urged the Housing Committee to look to other sources for their funds.

The shortage of finance particularly affected the Halton Road project which had reached the point of contract approval at this time. In May 1920 a loan was obtained from the Commercial Union Insurance Company for £50,000 at 6%. This loan was approved, but an offer of a loan of £100,000 by Messrs Seymour and Graham, estate agents, was refused by the Ministry. Seymour and Graham wanted 7% interest plus a 10% procuration fee, terms the Ministry would have considered if the interest could be reduced to 6%, which proved impossible. A month later a loan for this sum at 7% interest was approved, indicating that either the Ministry relented or that this loan was from another source, and that 7% was then considered a reasonable amount of interest. The Town Clerk advised against

* Fee for negotiating a loan.

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entering into a contract with Rice and Son until sanction of the necessary loan and the guarantee of the availability of the money had been obtained. Rice, perhaps anxious that he would lose the contract if the Council could not finance the Halton Road scheme, offered to find someone to loan the balance of his contract over the £69,000 which had already been earmarked for the project. In the event he was able to arrange a loan of £50,000 for 5 years at 7% with the Law Union and Rock Insurance Company, the same rate payable on loans granted by the LCC. The procuration fee was only 4%, but the Council had to agree to insure the Halton Road scheme for fire risk with the company. This proposal was sent to the Housing Finance Advisory Committee, called the Goschen Committee, a body set up by the Treasury to regulate local authority borrowing and to consider alternate sources of finance. Ultimately the loan was approved in July.

The Goschen Committee, chaired by Sir W. H. N. Goschen, was established in May 1920 when interest rates were in danger of rising with the surge of borrowing on the part of the local authorities.*- Only loans for housing required approval from the Ministry of Health with the result that loans refused for housing purposes were being diverted by the local authorities to other purposes. This put pressure on the interest rate, and the purpose of the Committee was to keep the rate of borrowing for house building purposes down to an acceptable level while judging each case that came to them on its merits. In April 1921 Strohmenger noted the value of the Committee under volatile circumstances:

... the work the Committee have done has resulted in a considerable saving to the taxpayers as there is not the slightest doubt that if local authorities had been left to themselves to scramble for issues and compete against one another

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the cost of much of the money that would have been raised in this way would have been considerably higher than has in fact been the case.

Having unleashed local authority borrowing by guaranteeing the cost of their housing production over a penny rate, the Ministry of Health then had to take action to control the effect this would have on the cost of borrowing itself.

During the spring of 1920 the campaign for Local Housing Bonds was launched to overcome some of the difficulty the local authorities were having in financing their housing schemes. The bonds came in denominations of £5 upwards, paying an interest of 6%. The LCC was the sponsoring agent in London, while the Metropolitan Boroughs could join the scheme if they wished. Islington waited until July 1920 before participating, and although the bonds did not seem to play a large part in the financing of their housing projects, they still considered them a source of capital, however small. When Brewis Estates Ltd. offered the Housing Committee three houses in Hornsey Lane in October 1920, they indicated that they were prepared to accept Local Housing Bonds in part payment. With other sources of funds still available in London, the bonds may not have been as attractive as in other localities, although Sheila Marriner suggests that overall the campaign was not an outstanding success.

By October 1920 the Ministry was trying to dampen the enthusiasm Islington's Housing Committee had for building. They wrote the Committee to the effect that the 'Council will concentrate upon the work of carrying out the considerable schemes they have in hand which, together with those of other metropolitan borough councils and of the LCC, will absorb practically all the labour and money available for
building purposes for the time being. In November the London Housing Board objected to the Council's plans to build a new housing estate on the Tyndale Place site. This scheme was important for the Council since it was intended to deflect political criticism from their plans to erect an expensive new town hall. The objections the Board made were the shortage of labour, the heavy cost of materials, and the lack of available finance. A delegation to the Board consisting of the Town Clerk, the mayor, and the architect, claimed that labour and materials were not a problem for Islington. As for finance, the Council had borrowed or were able to borrow the sum of £308,444. The total commitments of the Council of £500,000 were spread over two years and they were confident of finding further funds through the London Housing Bonds and through private loans. Another source they mentioned was National Saving Certificates, from the sale of which local authorities could borrow since October 1920 half the proceeds. However, it was obvious that even from the autumn of 1920, the 1919 housing programme in Islington had reached its limit and the Tyndale Place site had to await development under the 1924 Housing Act.

Islington's character was split between that of an inner metropolitan borough with the problems of congestion and poor housing found in neighbouring Shoreditch and Finsbury, and that of a residential suburb, with large Victorian villas set in leafy gardens. What it did lack was open building sites. Among London's boroughs contributing to the 1919 housing programme, the most active were those outside the built-up centre such as Hammersmith, Lambeth, Lewisham, Greenwich, Wandsworth, and Deptford. These Boroughs were able to
build cottage estates, some quite extensive, while the scarcity and
cost of land nearer the centre meant that only flats were possible,
and the inner boroughs built very few of these. Islington's
neighbour, St. Pancras, built at least two schemes: the Brookfield
Estate consisting of 2 cottages, 19 maisonettes, and 10 blocks of
flats; and Una House, 3 blocks of flats in Prince of Wales Road.
Hampstead built an estate of 4 blocks at South End Green, while small
amounts of building went on in Shoreditch, Poplar, Stepney,
Bermondsey, Hackney, Stoke Newington, Kensington, and Chiswick. In
comparison, Islington's 328 new flats in four estates were
considerable, and as far as the number of dwelling units go, greater
than those produced by the two cottage-building boroughs of Lambeth
and Deptford.

Islington's participation in the Ministry's conversion programme
was also respectable if comparisons are made with the other
metropolitan boroughs. Lewisham seems to have led the way with at
least 24 conversions completed to Islington's 20, while the other
areas where conversions were carried out in any number were Greenwich,
Kensington, Wandsworth and Shoreditch.² It would seem, then, that
Islington, while not providing as many dwellings as the outlying
boroughs who were able to build cottage estates, nevertheless produced
far more flats than any other inner borough.

In 1919 the Islington Metropolitan Borough Council had no
municipal housing under its control. By the end of the 1919 housing
programme they had charge of 498 dwellings. As we have seen these
dwellings were for the most part found in the north of the Borough
where the Housing Committee were best able to obtain freehold sites

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with relatively little demolition necessary. Although they were forced to accept what they considered inferior properties from the London Housing Board under the Ministry's conversion project, still most of their converted properties were in the large houses in the mainly residential areas, not in the crowded streets of the commercial sections of the Borough. The history of the conversions also reveals the inclination of the Housing Committee to select, if possible, properties in locations which would attract the sort of tenant who could be depended upon to pay the rent and fit into respectable flat life. The course they followed was partly determined by what was on offer in the market and what was demanded of them by the Ministry of Health, and it was a success of a kind that they were able to reconcile the two to the extent that they did.
1. My account of Islington Metropolitan Borough Council's new built dwellings under the 1919 Housing Act is largely derived from the Minutes of the Borough's Housing Committee (IHCM), 1919 to 1922.

2. IHCM, 9 May and 27 November 1919.


4. IHCM, 11 July 1919.

5. Ibid, 27 June 1919.

6. PRO HLG 49/9.

7. Census, 1921.


9. IHCM, 9 May 1919.

10. Ibid, 13 June 1919.


12. IHCM, 21 May and 27 June 1919.


15. Ibid, 13 June, 25 August, and 26 September 1919.


17. PRO HLG 49/9.

18. IHCM, 13 June and 25 September 1919.


20. IHCM, 13 June 1919.

21. Ibid, 20 August 1919. See also Royal Institute of British Architects Manuscript Biography File for details of E.C.P. Monson's previous work.

22. IHCM, 26 September and 24 October 1919.


25. Ibid. 14 October 1920.

26. Ibid. 12 February 1920.

27. Ibid. 20 August 1919.

28. See PRO HLG 49/9 for details of the conversion schemes in London.

29. PRO T161 Box 6.

30. PRO HLG 49/9.


32. IHCM. 10 October 1919.

33. Ibid. 24 October 1919.

34. PRO, HLG 49/9.

35. Ibid.


37. See Appendix 1 for conversions carried out by the Islington Metropolitan Borough Council and the Office of Works under the 1919 Housing Act.

38. PRO HLG 49/9.


40. PRO, HGL 49/9.

41. IHCM. 22 April 1920.

42. PRO HLG 49/9

43. See Appendix 2 for new estates built by Islington Metropolitan Borough Council under the 1919 Housing Act.


45. IHCM. 26 February and 10 March 1920.

47. Ibid, 8 April 1920.
49. Ibid, 22 July 1920.
51. Ibid, 19 October 1921.
52. See Wilding, op cit., pp. 312 - 319, for a discussion of the shortage of labour and materials.
53. Ibid, 12 May and 23 May 1921.
54. Ibid, 14 October 1920.
56. IHCM, 12 February 1920.
58. Ibid, No. 57, and IHCM, 10 October 1921.
59. IHCM, 12 April 1920.
60. Marriner, op cit., p. 152.
61. IHCM, 27 November 1919.
62. PRO HLG 49/9
63. Ibid, 26 February 1920.
64. Ibid, May and June 1920.
65. Marriner, op cit., p. 155.
66. PRO HLG 48/698.
67. IHCM, 28 October 1920.
69. IHCM, 14 October 1920.
71. Information derived from the weekly tenders published in The Builder, 1919 and 1920.
72. See PRO HGL 49/9.
Chapter Four - Islington Council's Housing Under the 1924 Housing Act

The Housing Committee of the Metropolitan Borough of Islington were finally put off more building under the 1919 legislation in the autumn of 1921 when the Ministry of Health refused to approve their proposals for flats at Laycock Street. For the next two years they concentrated on completing what schemes they had in hand and on learning to manage their newly acquired property. In chapter 3 was seen how the Council acquired their sites under the 1919 legislation with little regard to a housing strategy. It was simply a question of providing more houses for the Borough. The purpose of the subsequent Housing Acts, first in 1923 and then in 1924, was to provide housing more specifically for those able to pay only low rents. Although the local authorities under these acts were allowed more discretion than under the 1919 Act, still the Ministry of Health and the LCC were concerned that the costs of the sites chosen and the houses built were not so high as to preclude low rents. As will be shown, this ministerial policy did not necessarily fit with the preoccupations of Islington Council.

In November 1922 the Municipal Reform party was returned with a majority in the local elections. Although the size of their majority fluctuated, over the next twelve years they continued in power and oversaw the production of all the Council's dwellings under the 1924 Housing Act. Four estates containing 385 dwellings were built under the subsidies, but the four may be considered in two groups: Tyndale and Laycock Mansions, begun in 1924; and Avenell and Leyden Mansions which were not started until after pressure was put on the Housing Committee in 1927 to provide more housing in the Borough. 'The
Highlands', containing 71 flats, was built without subsidies in 1933. Both Tyndale and Laycock Mansions were proposed under the 1923 Housing Act, but by the time they were approved they qualified for the higher subsidies under the Wheatley Act of 1924. None of the Council's dwellings were subsidised by the Chamberlain Act, although the policy behind the Act had an effect on what the Council built at this time. In this chapter I shall consider these two phases of dwelling production under the 1924 Act, with special regard to the selection of sites and Islington's housing market during the 1920s.

In the spring of 1923 there was renewed interest in housing, culminating in the Chamberlain Act passed in July of that year, which provided for a fixed local authority subsidy and financial encouragement for private sector house builders. Just as the ideas behind the 1919 Act were to be found in the Tudor Walters Report, so the Chamberlain Act looked back, however askew, to the recommendations of the Chamberlain Commission of 1920 - 21 on unhealthy areas. Unhealthy areas had been dealt with in the provisions of the 1919 Housing Act, but the general thrust of that Act had been to encourage the erection of as many new dwellings as possible. That many people were living not just in overcrowded conditions caused by a general shortage of houses, but also in unhealthy, near derelict dwellings was not lost on post-War observers. As we have seen, the Chamberlain Commission recommended that rather than replacing inner city slums with new flats, the existing housing stock should be repaired on a temporary basis, until such time as the new housing could be built in the outer locations, preferably by private enterprise. By introducing Octavia Hill methods of management, the Commissioners hoped to extend
the life of the old dwellings and prepare the tenants for their new life in houses and gardens of their own.

The strategic planning suggested by the Chamberlain Commission had almost totally disappeared from the Chamberlain Act when it came into force in 1923. However, the intention of this Act was to involve local authorities, particularly in cities, in emergency housing provision, while encouraging private housing production, especially in the suburbs. Such a policy would, it was hoped, hasten the time when most people would live outside the large centres which could then be given over to commercial purposes. One of the hidden corollaries of this policy was that the standard of public dwellings would not compete with private housing, but would be sufficient to alleviate the worst slum conditions. This aspect of the Act was taken seriously by the LCC which reduced standards in the few inner city flats they undertook at this time, but the Islington Housing Committee could not accept that their housing should be aimed at rehousing slum dwellers, with all the attendant problems that that entailed, and they continued to provide for the general need of the Borough, although the question of what constituted working-class housing suitable for local authority intervention continued to plague the Housing Committee. What they were prepared to build and what they were allowed to build, must be seen within the context of these different ideas on the function of public housing.

In January 1923 when the Municipal Reform party had only just taken up once again the leadership of the Council, Alderman Montague, a Labour member, proposed a motion concerning the housing situation in the Borough which resulted in a resolution being sent to the Ministry
of Health urging the necessity for better and additional housing in Islington. The resolution also asked if the Council might submit for the Minister's consideration schemes which were intended to alleviate in part 'the pressing need for housing accommodation'. The Ministry's reply stated that careful consideration would be given to schemes submitted by the Council 'for the erection of working class dwellings without State assistance'. This statement opened the way for the Housing Committee to entertain once more the possibility of building new dwellings within the Borough.

The concern of Alderman Montague reflected a more general perception in the Borough that a housing problem still existed, for example in March 1923 the Islington Women's Co-operative Guild asked permission to send a deputation to the Council to put their views on the housing shortage. Their request was refused, but in the same month a conference consisting of members of the Housing Committee and other members of the Council was called to consider housing policy. Following what the Ministry had suggested, the Town Clerk recommended that the Council should proceed with schemes without relying on any State subsidy, thus ensuring that the Council retained within their control the type of dwellings, their rents, and the conditions under which they were let.

The Council's architect, E.C.P. Monson, produced three schemes for sites which had previously been rejected for one reason or another: Laycock Street; Tyndale Place; and Loxford House. Without subsidy the total deficit on the year for the three schemes would be £5,290 or £15.10.0 per flat per year. Such a sum would amount to 0.43% of the £1,211,362 projected as Islington's income from the rate for 1923.
Nevertheless, when the central government subsidy of £6 per dwelling was announced in Circular 388 and the LCC subsidy of £3 per dwelling in Circular 388a, the Housing Committee decided to take advantage of these. And in December 1924, when it was apparent that the Wheatley subsidies would be even more generous, they were quick to transfer their building schemes to this legislation.

It was soon discovered that Loxford House, a large house in Highbury which had been considered by the Housing Committee in 1919 as a possible site and which had since been used as a children's home, was to be demolished to make way for a new home for the National Children's Home and Orphanage. This left Laycock Street and Tyndale Place. The history of the former site was discussed in Chapter 3, and it is interesting to note that the property was still for sale in 1923 at its 1920 price. Tyndale Place we have also come across as the site of a scheme intended by the Council to complement their proposed town hall, but stifled by the London Housing Board in November 1920 on the grounds of lack of funds. This had been a blow to the Council which were hoping that the housing estate would counter mounting criticism of the extravagance of the new town hall.

Unlike 1919, not many properties were offered to the Housing Committee when they first began to reconsider building new dwellings. The Rydon family, the ground landlords of Highbury New Park, offered them the freehold of the two converted houses on the estate whose leaseholds the Council already held. This offer was refused as was the one of the old family home, Pyrland House, for £3,600. In January 1924 the Committee set up a sub-committee to view and report on possible building sites. They viewed Loraine Place, a terrace of
houses in Holloway Road, which had first been offered to the Council in May 1921 for £35,000. Two years later the price was still the same, but the site, it was felt, would be too constricting for new flats. Properties in Parkhurst Road and Barnsbury Road were also considered for small estates, but neither were suitable in the end.

No 86a Hazellville Road was once again on the market after having been used as a training college since the War. The District Valuer estimated the freehold at £28,200, but it was decided the existing buildings were unsuitable for conversion, and the Committee were hesitant about asking the Ministry for permission to demolish after their previous experience, particularly with the Cornwallis Road Institute. Finally the viewing sub-committee looked at Ravenscourt which was on the market for £3,000. This house adjoined the Council's Park House property in the private estate of Holly Park off Crouch Hill. Although Ravenscourt was rejected for purchase, the visit made to it by the sub-committee seems to have reopened the question of what to do with the orchard land next to Park House, and the subsequent events sharply illustrate the sort of conflict which could be encountered by the Housing Committee in their relations with the Ministry on the one hand, which had a policy of limited improvement and rehousing, and with local residents on the other, who wanted to keep their middle-class suburb secure.

Park House, it will be remembered, was situated in the private estate of Holly Park, and was one of the properties purchased by the Ministry of Health and converted by the Office of Works in the 1919-1920 conversion campaign. As described in Chapter 3, the Housing Committee had to deal with irate neighbours of Park House in the
autumn of 1919 when they formed themselves into a residents' association to counter the move by the Office of Works to convert Park House into eight flats and a maisonette. One of the residents, Alderman Vorley, organised a petition which stated that if this proposal were carried out 'it would cause great depreciation in the value of the property in Holly Park and interfere with the amenities of the whole neighbourhood'. The Holly Park Association appealed to the nineteenth-century covenants of the estate which prohibited any owner from building or altering their property to the detriment of the whole estate, and they threatened to place on the Council the whole responsibility for the upkeep of the estate if a scheme was allowed which caused the deterioration of the property. The Housing Committee were able to persuade the Office of Works to reduce the density of the conversion to three maisonettes and two flats which seems to have pacified the residents.

While Park House was being converted during 1920, the Housing Committee did consider their architect's designs for a block of 36 new flats to be built in the grounds of the house at a cost of £40,000. Such a scheme would be similar to the one at Hazellville Road where the Council built 31 flats after the Office of Works had converted the existing house and stables. Although the London Housing Board did not give their approval for this scheme, the extra land around the house posed a problem, since although it was being paid for by the assisted housing scheme, it was not generating any revenue. By June 1921 when the Ministry of Health were closing down the 1919 housing programme, they were looking for ways to reduce the financial drain of under-utilized property. The London Housing Board recommended that the
Housing Committee let the spare land at Park House either for
allotments or for some other purpose. It was pointed out to the
Committee that since the orchard land was reserved for a Part III
scheme, the tenants should pay a reasonable rent for its use, even if
the Ministry refused to allow the Council to build. At least one
tenant objected to such a suggestion saying that the gardens and
grounds were the great attraction to him, and if he were deprived of
their use, the value of his flat would be greatly reduced. In the
event the Housing Committee left the land as it was.

In August 1923 the Ministry of Health put out a circular
encouraging local authorities to use up land acquired under the 1919
programme for housing under the current Act. The Housing Committee
saw themselves fulfilling this request by renewing their interest in
the Park House site in spring 1924, when they asked the architect to
resubmit his scheme of 1920. The new proposal was in fact for 48
flats in three blocks four storeys high. This time the estimated
building costs were £23,850 or £497 per flat, as compared with £1,111
per flat in the 1920 scheme.

Alderman Vorley and the Holly Park residents were quick to
respond by appealing to the Housing Committee to allow them to present
their objections which they were permitted to do at a Committee
meeting:

Crowding 48 families barrack-like into the Flats of the type
proposed would, we know, from examples elsewhere introduce many
undesirable features which we very strongly object to, our chief
reason being that the amenities for which we and our predecessors
have laboured will be destroyed.

The residents proposed that the Association should purchase the land
so that the Council could use the proceeds to buy a site elsewhere.
Alternatively, the Association themselves were willing to erect two buildings, 'reasonably artistic' with double fronts and three storeys to house 12 families in 'a good class of Flat'. These conditions they felt would overcome any strictures in the covenant. The Housing Committee responded by asking the architect to revise his design.

Of a number of schemes presented by the architect in September 1924, the Housing Committee selected one with 34 flats costing £25,705 or £756 per flat, substantially more than in the previous scheme. The financial breakdown of this proposal showed a profit of £40 per annum on the total project, but this included Government subsidies from both the Ministry and the LCC and fairly high rents of 26/- for a 4 room flat and 22/- for 3 rooms. The reaction from both the Ministry and the LCC was the same: the accommodation proposed could not be considered as working-class and so subsidies could not be granted. Thus the Committee were caught between the residents on one side demanding 'middle-class' housing, and the Ministry on the other demanding 'working-class' housing. Interestingly, the local press which usually took the side of the private property owner, did not sympathise with the Holly Park residents, and it seemed to be the general opinion that they were being greedy; that they had enjoyed their exclusive enclave long enough; and that they had no idea of the real state of the housing shortage in the rest of the Borough.

The Ministry for their part recommended that the Committee accept the residents' offer to buy the property, but the Housing Committee had one more attempt to build their flats. The architect claimed that by adding 3/- per week to the rents (31/6 for 4 rooms and 26/- for 3, rather more than 3/- over the rents given above), the scheme would
show a surplus of £250 a year, thus dispensing with the need for a subsidy. The Ministry had in 1923 encouraged the Housing Committee to go ahead with plans for building without subsidies, but as the Council's Solicitor now pointed out, the Committee could only undertake working-class housing, whether with or without subsidies.

[The Housing Acts are] clearly limited to the provision of houses for the working classes. I do not think there is any power to provide houses for any other class, and if houses or flats were erected obviously unsuitable or beyond the means of the working class, I think the Auditor would disallow the amount. I cannot advise the Council to incur the cost of erecting houses where the Ministry has refused the subsidy on the ground that the flats in question are obviously beyond what the working class people could afford.

When he was asked who were the 'working class', he replied, 'Roughly I suppose it may be taken to mean persons who earn their livelihood by manual labour and are paid a weekly salary'. By that definition, many in the Council's dwellings at that time had no business there. After a long period of negotiation and ministerial interference, the Holly Park Association finally bought the land for £870 in October 1926.

The Tyndale Place scheme also posed problems for the Housing Committee when they came to seek subsidies and loan sanction for building new flats suitable to the site around the new town hall, since the Ministry and the LCC wanted them to adopt a much lower standard of dwelling than the Council could accept given the history of the town hall development. In the summer of 1920 the Labour dominated Council had proposed erecting a new town hall to replace the old vestry buildings, and a site was found at Tyndale Place in Upper Street for which the estimated price was £30,000. A 20 member committee was set up in October to consider schemes for the town hall and new municipal offices 'to include adequate accommodation for the
purpose of carrying out the work which will result from the additional responsibilities which it is anticipated will be cast upon borough councils at no distant date'. Such statements, hinting at increased Council activity, were not to the liking of the Islington Ratepayers' Defence League nor the Ratepayers' Association, both of whom protested strongly against what they saw as an unwarranted drain on the rates. The residents of Tyndale Place were also distressed by the proposal and sought reassurances that they would not be evicted without the electors deciding on the new town hall.

When the town hall committee reported, the residents' fears had been considered and blocks of flats had been included in the scheme. The architect estimated the building cost for two halls, a Council Chamber, and municipal offices would be £436,000, while the flats would add another £88,000 to that amount. This would mean that the 56 proposed flats would cost nearly £1,500 each to build. About a third of the site would be given over to housing which would put the cost of the building land at about £9,798, adding another £175 to the cost of each flat. These flats then would be over £100 dearer than those at Addington Mansions, the most expensive of the Council's estates built under the 1919 Act. It was estimated that less than 50 families would be disturbed, or approximately 200 people, and they would be offered accommodation in the new flats.

Further information provided by the quantity surveyor revealed that the town hall, as proposed and even without the housing, would cost a total of £553,000 to build and outfit. After the Ministry gave its final refusal for the housing, the committee brought out an alternative town hall proposal which was estimated at £330,000. In
the report of the town hall committee in March 1921 when they announced the truncated scheme, they made the point that they were unable to include the housing because of Ministerial pressure:

For the time being, quite apart from merits the Ministry of Health is not prepared to consider any further housing schemes from Islington, and consideration of the more recent proposals of the Housing Committee has been deferred indefinitely. . . . We refer particularly to this matter because it has frequently been advanced against the proposal to secure necessary and adequate office accommodation at the present time, that the Council would be diverting labour from housing schemes in the Borough which ought to be their chief concern. Housing has been the principal concern of the Council, and it is still, but it cannot be stated too emphatically that the Council will not, for the present, be allowed to undertake any further housing schemes, irrespective of the question of building Municipal Offices. 

This was the end of the Tyndale Place housing scheme until 1923. In the meantime the proposed town hall was further reduced in scale to a building costing £73,909, and intended only as the first stage in a development which would be completed at a later date.

The Municipal Reform party attributed in part the failure of the Labour Party in the 1922 election to their attempted extravagence over the town hall. Yet in the spring of 1923 the new Mayor, S.C. Harper, was proposing to add an extension to the new town hall which was now completely inadequate for the Council's needs. Renewed interest in the town hall coincided with the renewed plans for a housing scheme to share its site. By chance the Laycock Street and Tyndale Place sites became linked chronologically so that they inevitably came to be considered together, a circumstance which was to have a detrimental effect on the scheme finally built at Laycock Street.

One of the supposed advantages of the new Act over the 1919 Act was that supervision of the local authorities would be cut to a minimum. Since the subsidy was finite for each dwelling, there was no
Map 10 - St Mary Ward. Hatched areas show sites of Tyndale and Laycock Mansions.
need for the Ministry to interfere further once the schemes were
approved. However, in London the LCC was still the sanctioning agent
for any borrowing by the metropolitan boroughs who still relied on the
LCC for their loans. Questions were first raised over Tyndale Place
in December 1923 when the Ministry queried the cost of the proposed
site since its proportionate cost had now risen to £18,500, or £11,000
an acre. 23 Knowing the Ministry of old, the Housing Committee
appointed a sub-committee to deal with any trouble. But it was the
LCC in their capacity as loan sanctioning agent which tried to
dissuade the Committee from building on such an expensive site. Early
in 1924, when the Committee applied for loan sanction for the £67,800
construction cost, the Comptroller of the LCC informed them that the
LCC was now adjusting the loan periods in such a way that schemes
should be self-supporting after the expiration of the subsidy period
of 20 years. This would put a yearly deficit on the Committee's
scheme of £3,243, or £32 per tenement per year. Although a deficit of
£46 per tenement per year had occurred during the 1919 housing
programme, this was obviously now unacceptable. The cost of the whole
scheme was from 10% to 15% higher than those schemes with which the
LCC had been dealing. 30

The LCC architects took members of the Islington Housing
Committee around flats the LCC had recently built in Brady Street,
Bethnal Green. These were the type of flats the chief architect of
the LCC, Topham Forest, had recommended in 1919 for the inner areas
while the Council was concentrating on their cottage estates outside
the County boundaries. 31 They were of five storeys with the two top
floors arranged as maisonettes. Access was by balcony, with one
staircase shared by a large number of flats. As the Town Clerk commented, the LCC schemes were 'rehousing schemes and were of a much lower standard than the schemes contemplated by the Borough Council which were intended for the provision of additional housing accommodation'. How could the Committee contemplate surrounding the new town hall with 'model dwellings'? Their solution to the problem was to cut back on the cost of the scheme at Laycock Street.

As has already been mentioned, Tyndale Place and Laycock Street, by coincidence, had become linked, chronologically if in no other way. When it came to make the required savings on the estimated construction costs, although about £4,500 was saved on Tyndale Place, over £10,000 was cut from the costs at Laycock Street. The savings were achieved by converting the blocks to balcony access; by turning the two top floors into maisonettes; by reducing the standard of amenities like the quality of bricks, electric light installation, and plumbing; by the elimination of pram and coal sheds; and by substituting dust shoots for bins and pails. Despite the fact the LCC's criticism had been aimed specifically at the Tyndale Place project, the greatest savings were made at Laycock Street, even to the extent that the grounds of the estate were left unplanted and even unpaved until the tenants petitioned for paving. The grounds of Tyndale Place, on the other hand, were planted with flowering trees and grass, and surrounded by railings and gates. Its inauspicious beginning plagued the Laycock Street estate throughout its career, and finally local pressure forced its demolition in the 1970's.

Concern continued in the Borough about the housing situation. In March 1924 the Islington Unemployment Committee and the Southwest and
Illus 5 - Tyndale Mansions, 1924 - 26.
Holloway Women's Co-op Guild sent a deputation to the Mayor to ask the Council to do something about evictions in the Borough. They thought that the local authority could take over empty houses in the area, or at least could rate empty property so landlords would not be so ready to leave their houses vacant. Even the local press accepted the housing shortage as a fact. However, a joint meeting of the Finance, Housing, and Law and General Purposes Committees called to discuss the Housing (Financial Provisions) Bill took a negative stand on more municipal housing in Islington:

We are of opinion that it would be more satisfactory to provide the much-needed housing accommodation in districts where undeveloped land is available, also cheap and convenient travelling facilities to enable working class people to live amidst healthier surroundings and enjoy greater amenities than is possible in densely populated areas, than for local authorities to build blocks of flats in places where the density of population has already exceeded a reasonable limit. So far as the borough of Islington is concerned we hold strongly the view that the efforts of the Council should be directed to the improvement of unhealthy areas and dwelling houses, but we recognise that the operations of the Rent Restrictions Acts render such a course difficult of realisation at the present time.

This statement brought the Council's housing production under the 1924 subsidies to a temporary close.

In November 1927, Labour Councillor Naish put forward the following resolution:

... in view of the housing shortage in the borough and the large number of unsatisfied applicants for accommodation still on the lists of the Housing Department, the Housing Committee be requested to inspect and report upon vacant or unsatisfactorily developed sites within the borough with a view to the early resumption of the erection of flats.

This resolution was carried and the Council embarked on the eventual production under the 1924 subsidies of two more estates, adding another 151 to the existing 234 flats at Tyndale and Laycock Mansions.
The problem of finding suitable sites still had to be overcome, and the Housing Committee set about this task by first asking the rate collectors of the thirteen rating districts to report on empty property in the Borough. They also inquired of two of the landowners who had supplied them with sites in 1919, the Corporation of the City of London and the Marquess of Northampton, if they had any land for building.

The City Corporation had nothing available at the Metropolitan Cattle Market, their largest holding in the Borough, but the Marquess of Northampton thought he might be able to sell some property to the Council, especially if they were willing to help him with his own future development of west Canonbury. A site was eventually acquired from the Marquess which was used for Wakelin House, the Council's slum clearance scheme, to be discussed in Chapter 6. Of the properties submitted by the rate collectors, many seemed to be marginal in terms of the market, such as the group of houses in Lower Holloway which formed 'a block of very poor and dilapidated houses'. Others had been considered previously by the Housing Committee. The Salaman Estates in Barnsbury appeared again and so did the Bookbinders' Cottage Homes, almshouses in Balls Pond Road which had been offered to the Council twice before, once for £14,500 in June 1924 and again for £12,000 in 1926. One of the houses of Fred Griffiths' Highbury Park estate came up again, too. A portion of the grounds of the National Children's Home and Orphanage, the former site of Loxford House, was also available for building, and of the 24 properties put forward by the rate collectors, this was the one the Housing Committee went after. The site, at the rear of the Children's Home and fronting onto Avenell
Road, contained about half an acre, and after some negotiations the Orphanage Committee accepted £1,650 for it. The neighbourhood surrounding the site was a mixture of working class and middle class, just on the edge of Highbury, a location geographically and socially removed from those unhealthy areas the Council had acknowledged as public responsibility at their special meeting in July 1924.

A few properties were still being offered to the Council. Late in 1928 'The Homestead' at 110 Hornsey Lane, a house, stables, and land covering over an acre, became available for £6,000 freehold. The difficulty with this property was that a deed dated July 1881 placed restrictions on what could be built on the site. Only private dwellings were permitted at a minimum cost per dwelling of £1,500. Messrs. Lewis and Sons, the solicitors acting on behalf of the owners, were asked whether their clients would be prepared to make an application under section 84 of the Law of Property Act 1925 for the discharge or modification of the restrictions. The solicitors responded by saying that the restrictions did not prevent the erection of private residential flats as long as they cost £1,500 each. That was, of course, the main stumbling block for the Council, since flats costing that much would not be considered 'working-class' by the Ministry.

Watson Surr of Warltersville Road enquired in 1928 if the Housing Committee would be interested in Lochbie, a house and grounds in Crouch Hill, very near Warltersville Mansions. The asking price was £3,500, but after inspection the Housing Committee decided the house was not suitable for conversion and the property was sold to Matthews Estates Ltd. who converted the house and built new flats in the
In the following year Watson Surr died and his own house, Warltersville House, was sold at auction to the Council for £5,500. This property was directly across the road from Warltersville Mansions and very near Manchester Mansions in Hazellville Road. Once more the Housing Committee had chosen a site in a predominantly residential area of the Borough, indeed only a stone's throw from Holly Park. The residents of Heathville Road behind the site, must have been alarmed by the prospect of large blocks of flats looming over their back gardens since they sent a request that 'in preparation of [their] scheme the Council take into account the smallness of the gardens in Heathville Road'. The proximity of the estate to the adjacent houses can be gauged by the fact that the architect had to change his scheme several times to make allowances for ancient lights. Even after the flats were built, at least one Heathville Road resident was unhappy with his new neighbours and wrote to the Committee enquiring:

... whether he is to be subjected to huge pieces of metal tubing being thrown into his garden, and stating that screeching noises all day long are contrary to assurance given him before the Council's dwellings were erected on the Warltersville House site that the neighbourhood would not be spoiled either by the type of building or the kind of tenant.

One of the effects of concentrating the Council's flats in one area was to greatly increase the population of children, and the problem of where the children of the Warltersville Road area were to play became an issue in the 1930's which united Council tenants with their neighbours.

When the Medical Officer of Health began his systematic inspection of houses under the 1930 Slum Clearance Act, a few of the
properties he condemned, such as houses in Vittoria Street, were offered to the Council. Another unlikely offer was that of Pentonville Prison, although if anyone was interested in that property for housing, it was the LCC which already had a large estate next door.

In 1932 the Housing Manager reported on five possible sites. Four were considered not large enough, and the one in Northampton Street near Essex Road seemed destined by the Marquess of Northampton for industrial use. In the end the Housing Committee acquired for £3,200 'The Highlands', a large house and garden in Crouch Hill and a neighbour of Holly Park, which belonged to the London and North Eastern Railway Company. At first the Housing Manager estimated that only 32 flats could be built on the site, making the project unviable. The architect came back with a scheme for 30 flats and 18 maisonettes and the claim that 'generally the premises would be such as not to adversely affect the surrounding properties'. The Housing (Financial Provisions) Act, 1933 repealed the Wheatley subsidy on all dwellings not approved by 7 December 1932, and in response to this move, the architect redesigned the scheme so that by generating a small net income over expenditure, the 71 flats would not require any outside subsidies.

When the Council came to build the dwellings on their sites at Tyndale Place and Laycock Street, the extreme shortage of labour and materials of 1920 had eased, but the following slump had contributed to labour troubles of a different sort. As tenders were called, the building operatives were involved in the 1924 strike. George Bollom of Acton submitted the winning tender for Tyndale Mansions, but he
Scale: 15 inches = 1 mile.

Map 11 - Upper Holloway. Hatched area shows site of 'The Highlands'.
insisted on adding a clause to the contract which would cover any increase resulting from a settlement of the dispute. Even though Bollom did not think the additional cost would amount to more than £1,500, the Housing Committee could not commit themselves to an open ended contract and they gave the contract to the firm producing the next lowest tender, Thomas Shillitoe. Firms tendering for the Laycock Street scheme were asked if their tenders were based on the increased rates of wages, and Messrs Allen Fairhead and Sons Ltd of Enfield who submitted the winning tender had to add £1,750 to cover the increases.

Although the operatives' strike caused the Housing Committee some inconvenience, two other problems were more persistent. One was the uncertain solvency of building firms at this time, and the other was the requirement of the Wheatley Act that 75% of building work on the new estates should go to local men. Sheila Marriner has described how vulnerable building firms were after the War and we have seen how W.E. Davey wanted to convert his firm into a limited liability company, a move a number of contractors were making. Not long after Thomas Shillitoe took over the contract for Tyndale Place, the firm ran into financial difficulty and ultimately had to give up the contract. New tenders were called which resulted in Bollom getting the contract back for £51,057, £1,336 more than his previous tender. He also had to take out at his own expense a guarantee policy with an approved Assurance Company for the full amount of the contract.

When R. Mansell of Croydon won the contract for Avenell Road with a tender of £22,870, the Committee asked for sureties of £5,000. Mansell thought this too much, and the sum of £2,000 was agreed
In the end Mansell was slow in completing the new dwellings, a situation which recurred at the Warltersville House site where Leyden Mansions was building and at 'The Highlands'. At all these estates the shortage of competent local workmen was given as the excuse.

Section 3 (1) of the 1924 Housing Act required that a fair wages clause be included in all contracts for the construction of houses undertaken by local authorities. Part of the requirement was that 75% of the operatives were to be local men. This stipulation, especially with regards to bricklayers, was claimed by Mansell and later by Messrs Eadie Towers and Co at Leyden Mansions and by Messrs Gee, Walker and Slater Ltd at 'The Highlands', to hold up work, since in their opinion local, skilled operatives were not available. At Leyden Mansions the foreman spoke disparagingly of 'Islington crocks' who were not able to keep up a brisk pace on the brickwork, but a shortage of Flettons on the site may also have contributed to the slow progress. The architect took to monitoring the level of local labour at Leyden Mansions and subsequently at 'The Highlands'. In his opinion, a high percentage of local workers could be employed on unskilled jobs, but that for bricklaying, plastering and plumbing, where skill was important, the contractor should be free to employ whoever was considered best for the job. A high fixed percentage of local labour caused delays and poor workmanship by dropping the 'incentive of the survival of the fittest'. However, other factors were also causing delays like the lack of Flettons at Leyden Mansions, and in passing the architect noted that slow progress at 'The Highlands' was caused by the foreman's lack of control and foresight.
In the ten years when the Council was building under the 1924 Housing Act, they produced 456 dwellings. This number seems small when compared to the 43,162 dwellings in the Borough in 1931, but as a proportion of the net increase in dwellings from 1921 to 1931, it formed a respectable 15.8%. The opportunities for private provision of new housing in Islington were regarded during the 1920's as hampered by lack of building land. Despite the encouragement given to local authorities in the 1923 Act to help private house builders, the Housing Committee were not very active in this direction. The joint Committee meeting on housing policy in March 1923 recommended the acceptance of the Small Dwellings Acquisition Act which had been rejected in October 1919. Not many applications for advances under the Act were made, but there is record of five in December 1924 and six in March 1926. The average advance in 1924 was £510 and in 1926, £604.

The Committee did try to further one private scheme. In February 1923 the trustees of the Highbury New Park estate offered the Committee No 23 plus its 3 acre site for £3,600. The offer was refused, but a year later the Town Clerk approached the LCC with a proposal for a loan for the erection by private enterprise on the same site of six blocks of flats, each containing eight flats. The cost of the proposed flats would have exceeded £1,500 each, beyond the limit under which the LCC had powers through section 5 of the 1923 Act to make loans for private housing schemes. The flats, which had been designed by E.C.P. Monson, the Council's architect, were superior even to those Islington built under the 1919 legislation, and included a maid’s room, so it would have been difficult to argue these were
'working-class' dwellings. In the event a private developer, W.P. Render, built a small estate of houses on the site.

The distinction between private development in the Borough and the Council's provision of flats became blurred particularly in the late 1920's. Indeed the owners of 'The Highlands' site offered it first to W.P. Render for £2,500 before going to the Council who agreed to buy it for £3,200. When they discovered the £700 anomaly, the Housing Committee sought the help of the Estate and Rating Surveyor to reduce the price to £2,900. Another instance of the Housing Committee being offered a site, subsequently taken up privately, was Lochbie. This was a house on Crouch Hill owned by Watson Surr who gave the Council the option to buy in March 1928. After the Council refused it, the site was bought by Matthews Estates Ltd of Tottenham Court Road who converted the house into flats and provided purpose-built flats on the rest of the site. When Warltersville House became available on the death of Watson Surr, Matthews considered acquiring that site as well, but deferred to the Council as long as the Council's flats were not detrimental to the Lochbie House site:

We are more particularly concerned that the ground adjoining Lochbie should not be used as a drying ground, or for any other purpose that would cause nuisance or annoyance to our tenants, and if we could be satisfied in that regard, we would drop any idea of purchasing the property.

The Council's architect changed the plans of Leyden Mansions to ensure that the sensibilities of Lochbie residents were respected, although a proposal in 1936 to allow Council tenants to hang out washing next to Lochbie brought prompt protests. Matthews Estates, it appears, were having difficulties in letting the flats at Lochbie, and washing in the adjoining courtyard would only add to these.
What might have caused Matthews' letting problems at Lochbie in 1936 must be considered in a later chapter, but at least until 1932 there seems to have been a demand for purpose-built flats as investment. The Housing Committee had three offers for their flats between 1929 and 1932. In September 1929 Messrs Philip and George Green of Westminster Bridge Road wanted to purchase Addington Mansions on behalf of a client who was interested in an investment of such a property. Messrs Garland and Smith and Co of Mount Street approached the Council in February 1931 enquiring whether they wanted to dispose of their properties to 'an influential source' who wished to purchase a residential block of flats for investment. And finally in November 1932 Ernest Ruthin of Kings Mews, Bloomsbury inquired whether the Council was willing to negotiate the disposal of their housing estates as he had a client who required income-bearing investments. These three instances suggest not only that purpose-built flats were considered a good investment, but that the flats provided by the Council were regarded as competitive in the private sector and likely to give a good return.

The locations of the Council's flats reflected their preference for sites entailing the minimum amount of trouble with rehousing and compensation, which meant that their housing tended to occur in the less crowded areas of the Borough. Of the two estates near the commercial section, Laycock Mansions had been considered since 1919 as a relatively less expensive estate to balance against Addington Mansions in Highbury; while Tyndale Mansions in its position near the town hall had the two-fold intention of enhancing the site and of offsetting criticism of the extravagance of the town hall. Even in July
1925 concern about public opinion moved the Chairman of the Housing Committee to suggest that a notice board be placed on the building site of the new flats so the public would be aware that this was not part of the town hall extension. The other three estates were in the northern, residential areas of the Borough, away from the most overcrowded section, and the former addresses of the tenants reveal that most of them were drawn from nearby districts, and not the overcrowded streets of the south. This distribution of the Council's estates would not be remarkable if the policy of general need housing provision begun in 1919 had been continued without qualification. As has been shown, even the Council in 1924 claimed that general need housing was the province of the private sector, while public intervention should be confined to improvement programmes as a holding action until enough houses could be built in the outer suburbs.

At the opening of 'The Highlands' in 1934, the chairman of the Housing Committee, Alderman Sargent, congratulated the Council on their housing effort which, he claimed, had been sufficient to satisfy the outstanding need in Islington. He made this claim because recently the Committee had found it increasingly difficult to let the Council's flats. The Islington Gazette took up the apparent satisfaction of need for the Council's dwellings and asked if there were other factors which might be operating:

It seems but a few years since the long waiting list of applicants was frequently referred to when the local housing question came under discussion. That the shortage has now been so overcome as to find it difficult to let is indeed a big change. It is not only the case with the Council flats, but with many private houses, where apartments are offered the letting has come upon slack times. The question arises, is it all due to migration to the suburbs, or is there another factor that rents are too high?
Despite the interest private investors showed in purpose built flats in Islington, there are indications that the prosperity of the Borough as a whole was suffering. As early as 1923 the local press noticed that retail trade in the area was not making the expected recovery after the slump of 1921. This was attributed to the draw of the large West End stores and the poor organisation of local retailers.\textsuperscript{55} That the depression in the retail trade was not a passing phase but part of a longer term problem was indicated in 1932 by G.H. Higgins' request to the Housing Committee that the rent of his grocery shop at 82 Aubert Park be reduced. It was reported in the Committee Minutes that rents in the neighbourhood had fallen, and Higgins' turnover, despite a constant increase in the volume of his trade, had decreased to about one third of the boom years.\textsuperscript{55} The next chapter will turn to the 1930s, and try to gauge the social climate in which Islington Council sought to build their dwellings under the 1930 and 1935 Housing Acts, and whether changed circumstances had any effect on their housing policy and the sites they chose for their flats.
Footnotes - Chapter Four

1. See Appendix 3 for estates built by the Islington Metropolitan Borough Council under the 1924 Housing Act.


3. PRO HLG 101/258 for individual submissions.


5. Ibid., 8 February 1923.


8. Ibid., 12 April 1923.


11. Ibid., 10 January, 11 February, and 8 April 1924.

12. Ibid., 24 October 1919.

13. Ibid., 8 July 1920.


15. Ibid., 7 December 1921.


17. *IHCM*, 8 May 1924.

18. Ibid., 3 July 1924.

19. Ibid., 4 September 1924.


23. Ibid., 7 October 1920.

24. Ibid., 4 November 1920.

25. Ibid.
26. Ibid., 6 January 1921.
27. Ibid., 3 March 1921.
29. IHCM, 11 December 1923.
30. Ibid., 13 March 1924.
32. IHCM, 13 March 1924.
33. Ibid.
34. Islington Metropolitan Borough Council Minutes, 18 July 1924.
35. Ibid., 18 November 1927.
36. IHCM, 5 January and 2 February 1928.
37. Ibid., 12 July 1928.
38. Ibid., 3 January and 7 February 1929.
39. Ibid., 1 March 1928.
40. Ibid., 4 April and 10 May 1929.
41. Ibid., 4 July 1929.
42. Ibid., 12 March 1931.
43. Ibid., 5 February 1931 and 6 March 1930.
44. Ibid., 1 September 1932.
45. Ibid., 5 January 1933 and 3 November 1932.
46. Ibid., 10 July 1924.
47. Islington Metropolitan Borough Council, Minutes, 17 October 1924.
49. IHCM, 16 October 1924.
50. Ibid., 5 March 1929.
51. Ibid., 1 May and 3 July 1930.
52. Ibid., 2 November 1933.
54. IHCM, 19 December 1924 and 19 March 1926.
55. Ibid., 8 February 1923.
56. Ibid., 13 March 1924.
57. Ibid., 5 January 1933.
58. Ibid., 18 April 1929.
59. Ibid., 30 October 1929.
60. Ibid., 12 March 1931.
61. Ibid., 3 November 1932.
62. IHCM, 2 July 1925.
63. The Islington Gazette, 6 July 1934.
64. Ibid., 10 July 1934.
66. IHCM, 1 September 1932.
Chapter Five - Islington in the 1930s

By the end of the Second World War, except for Canonbury which kept something of its social standing, Islington had 'gone down' and had come to be identified as a working-class borough. The transformation dated from the middle years of the 1930s, when cheap mortgages and the extension of the Piccadilly line drew white-collar workers out of the flats and apartments in the northern wards into the outer suburbs, and when increased wages finally allowed the working classes to move into the better areas such as Tufnell Park and Highbury. An understanding of the changes in the Borough is, however, subject to contradictions and obscurity, especially since, without the Census for 1941, it is difficult to make comparisons between conditions at the beginning of the decade and those at the end. This chapter considers what information there is about change in the Borough, and then discusses redevelopment and the implications that had for the acquisition of sites by Islington Council for its housing production under the legislation of the 1930s.

What continued to distinguish Islington from the other metropolitan boroughs was the size of its population. Although Islington was eighth in order of area, its population was second only to Wandsworth which had nearly three times its acreage. From 1921 to 1931 the population of Islington decreased by 8,942, or 2.7%, but by 1951 the population had dropped much more significantly, by 86,163 or 26.7% since 1931. (See Table 5.1) Some of this reduction was the result of removal due to bomb damage and of measures taken after the War to move people out of the central areas. There were indications, however, even before the War, that people were leaving Islington,
although others were still moving in, thus counteracting a precipitous decline.

Table 5.1  
Population of Metropolitan Borough of Islington 1931 to 1961  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>330,737</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>321,795</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>235,632</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>228,345</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census, 1921 - 1961

One indicator that people were leaving the Borough was the electoral register, which showed not just a decline in overall numbers, but also that substantial numbers of names were being deleted through removals from the area.

Table 5.2  
Total on Electoral Register for Metropolitan Borough of Islington 1933 to 1937  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>211,193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1934</td>
<td>205,560</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935</td>
<td>203,225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936</td>
<td>204,141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1937</td>
<td>198,154</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The Islington Gazette, 1933 - 1937

In 1934 46,586 names were deleted through removals and The Islington Gazette noted that this was the greatest yet recorded:

The attraction of the suburbs may be the chief accounting factor, or perhaps occupational calls, making transference of residence to other districts necessary, have been heavier than usual. 3

That same year, 1934, 43,471 names were added to the Register, but the net decrease over the previous year was 5,633 which meant that the 2,518 who had died and 3,115 of those who had left the Borough were not replaced. By 1937 the number on the Register had fallen by over 13,000 since 1933, indicating that those moving into the Borough were no longer compensating for those moving out or dying. 4 This decline was corroborated by the Registrar General's estimate for the
population of Islington in 1938, reported by the Medical Officer of Health. The figure given was 292,300, or 9.1% less than the population in 1931.6

Islington’s function within the metropolitan area remained primarily as a residential district for the City and the West End, although industrial and commercial enterprises had long been established in the Borough, particularly in the wards bordering Finsbury and Shoreditch. How robust this sector was is difficult to judge. In 1934, Islington Council heard that empty factories in the Borough were reducing the amount of rate received, while a leader in The Islington and Holloway Press, which appeared in the summer of 1935, declared: 'What is happening rapidly is that Islington is changing. It is becoming industrialized'.6 Although there were still workshops for small-scale engineering and printing, as well as for repair work, most firms wishing to establish factories for the 'new' industries such as the manufacture of electrical appliances and motor cars, preferred sites in the outer suburbs where they could be free to expand unrestricted, and where a combination of rapid transport and suburban house building ensured that they had access to a skilled workforce. Jerry White has noted that Islington’s geographical position between the centre and the new suburbs meant that it tended to be bypassed by new firms wishing to expand quickly:

The borough continued to take an important share of London’s food processing, electrical engineering (especially radio and battery assembly), clothing, furniture making, printing, chemicals, toy and brush making – but there was a tendency for firms established in the 1920s to seek more or better or cheaper space in outer London during the 1930s (particularly in vehicles and vehicle and aeroplane parts, and food and drink manufacture).7

Cossor and Co Ltd, the radio valve manufacturer in Highbury Grove, was
an example of an electrical engineering firm which continued to operate in the Borough and which during the 1930s employed 3,000 at its works.  

Without the 1941 Census it is difficult to trace movements in employment in Islington during the 1930s. The Borough's proximity to the City and the West End meant that transport, clerical, and commercial work continued to predominate among the occupations of males over 14. Nationally during the 1930s, there was a significant increase in the proportion employed in the distributive and service industries, and since Islington was so well placed in relation to the West End, it may be supposed that many people were able to get work in the large West End shops as well as in the offices of the City. The service sector was also a source of employment for both men and women, as theatres and restaurants required waiters and cleaners who lived geographically near enough to work unsociable hours.

Any discussion of conditions during the 1930s must include mention of unemployment. London and the southeast were spared the worst, and even in 1932, at the lowest point of the slump, London's insured unemployed averaged 13.5%. This compares to an average of 36.5% without work in Wales. The figure we have for Islington refers to 1931, when the proportion of all insured persons unemployed was 13.2% in comparison to 12.4% for the whole County at that time. This put Islington above the average, but not nearly as high as those boroughs such as Bermondsey and Poplar that depended on the docks for their work. However, in absolute terms, Islington, with its high population, topped the other Metropolitan Boroughs with 15,901 unemployed, while the next closest, Stepney, had 3,742 fewer.
W.R. Garside has pointed out that 'it was the slump of 1920 - 21 which inaugurated mass unemployment', but that what distinguished unemployment during the 1930s was its tendency to be long-term. Although this was much more the case in areas outside London, it seems likely that unemployment during the slump had an effect on the type of work that survived, even in the capital. Philips and Whiteside have noted that after World War I the market for casual work was contracting, and Jerry White has claimed this phenomenon was particularly the case in London during the 1930s:

Trends towards decasualising labour supply intensified in local authority services, dock labour and road haulage, and we have seen how men might become regulars in the 1930s when they had been casuals in the 1920s.

The type of work which declined was especially the sort of employment undertaken by those living in 'the black spots' of Islington such as Campbell and Queensland Roads. Costermongering and street singing disappeared, replaced by thieving, which was just as enterprising but less public. When employment picked up again after the slump, the wages for unskilled work improved relative to other occupations, and increased the spending power of the poorest paid.

The decline in casual work and the improved wages for the unskilled meant that streets like Campbell Road began to lose their function in the domestic economy of the poorest inhabitants of Islington who gradually, towards the end of the decade, were able to afford better accommodation in the surrounding streets.

It was shown in Chapter 2 that the types of dwellings available in Islington during the 1920s determined to some extent the type of people who found accommodation there. It was also noted that
generally speaking, the southern wards tended to be overcrowded, while
the larger houses in the north, although sometimes let as apartments
or converted into flats, were less so. During the 1930s, when
overcrowding became the key issue for those dealing with urban housing
problems, Islington was something of an anomaly.

If overcrowding was judged by the percentage of the population
living more than 2 people to a room, then Islington ranked tenth among
the metropolitan boroughs in 1931.13 At the top of the list were
Finsbury and Shoreditch, the two boroughs adjoining Islington on its
southern borders, but whereas they both had nearly 30% of their
population living in overcrowded conditions, only 16% of the people
living in Islington were considered overcrowded. However, again
because of the size of its population, the absolute numbers of
overcrowded in Islington at 49,449 were second only to those in
Stepney and this figure was nearly 14,000 more than the number of
overcrowded in the next borough, Southwark.13

But if the average number of families per dwellings is
considered, Islington was more similar to St Pancras and Paddington,
and these three were in a class of their own, averaging over 2
families per dwelling.20 The borough closest to them was Finsbury
with an average of 1.84 families per dwelling. What distinguished
Islington, St Pancras, and Paddington, was that they had both large
working-class populations which had to share their dwellings, and a
stock of relatively large houses, so that although they were not among
the worst as far as overcrowding went, the actual experience of
sharing by their people was greater than in the other boroughs.

Later in the decade when the overcrowding legislation of 1935
came into effect, the anomaly of Islington's position became evident. One of the functions of the 1935 Act was to make it an offence for tenants to rents rooms knowing they were overcrowded. In order to make this part of the legislation effective, surveys were undertaken to determine what constituted overcrowding for every working-class dwelling. Of the 46,000 dwellings in Islington, 44,400 were included in the survey, and of these 12,886 were considered in danger of overcrowding. It was estimated that 6,757 families or 7.6%, were actually living below the overcrowding standard, while 3.8% was the average for England and Wales.

When it came to determining the 'appointed day', six months after which it would be an offence to let or rent an overcrowded dwelling, the Ministry of Health decided to treat each borough in London on its merits, depending on the seriousness of its overcrowding and the measures taken to reveal it. In September 1936, the dates were announced for all but the boroughs with the worst overcrowding, and no definite date was given for these. There were three days named, 1 January 1937, 1 July 1937, and 1 January 1938. Islington came under the latter date, but the Housing Committee asked to be considered with the worst boroughs without a date. This would put Islington in company with such boroughs as Bermondsey, Bethnal Green, Stepney, Poplar, Shoreditch, and Finsbury, all with a reputation of having some of the worst housing conditions in London. This points up the peculiar position of Islington, with areas of both overcrowded working-class dwellings and of houses still occupied by a dwindling, but persistent middle class.

And what of the house owners in the Borough, did they change over
time? The Rate Books of 1943 - 44 allow a return to the Barnsbury sample and to compare house ownership with what it was twenty years before. The total number of houses occupied in the ward was now slightly higher, but otherwise the boundaries of the ward were the same. Two aspects of the figures are immediately striking: first the profile of ownership was almost the same as it was in 1923 and, second, nearly 40% of properties were in the same hands in 1944 as in 1922. Among the corporate groups, the Drapers' Company still held its property in the area, and this would have contributed to stability of ownership. Of the 2,260 houses, 510 were corporately owned, while the other 1,750 were in private hands.

Table 5.3
Ownership of Properties in Barnsbury 1923 and 1944

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Owners</th>
<th>1923</th>
<th>1944</th>
<th>% of Total 1923</th>
<th>% of Total 1944</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Types of Owners</td>
<td>2,099</td>
<td>2,260</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate Owners</td>
<td>520</td>
<td>510</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>22.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Individual Owners</td>
<td>1,579</td>
<td>1,750</td>
<td>75.2</td>
<td>77.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male Owners</td>
<td>1,213</td>
<td>1,345</td>
<td>57.7</td>
<td>59.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Owners</td>
<td>366</td>
<td>405</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>17.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Islington Rate Books, 1923, 1944

What slight changes there were in the ownership of the properties, is echoed in the number of owners themselves.

Table 5.4
Number of Owners of Properties in Barnsbury 1923 and 1944

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Owners</th>
<th>1922</th>
<th>1942</th>
<th>% of Total 1922</th>
<th>% of Total 1942</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Types of Owners</td>
<td>942</td>
<td>1,012</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate Owners</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Individual Owners</td>
<td>827</td>
<td>896</td>
<td>87.8</td>
<td>88.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male Owners</td>
<td>596</td>
<td>635</td>
<td>63.2</td>
<td>62.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Owners</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>25.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Islington Rate Books, 1923, 1944

It is perhaps surprising that more houses were not in the hands of
property companies by 1944, but this may have been because by this
time the property was suitable neither for commercial or industrial
redevelopment nor for residential redevelopment in flats. Indeed, the
distribution of properties between the various types of owners was
almost identical with twenty years previously.

Table 5.5
Average Properties per Owner in Barnsbury 1923 and 1944

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1923</th>
<th>1944</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Types of Owners</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate Owners</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Individual Owners</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>1.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male Owners</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Owners</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Islington Rate Books, 1923, 1944

Three quarters of the property was still in the hands of individuals
who for the most part owned one or two houses, with only a very few
owning more.

Table 5.6
Proportion of Properties per Owner

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1923</th>
<th>1944</th>
<th>1923</th>
<th>1944</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% of Owners</td>
<td>% of Properties</td>
<td>% of Owners</td>
<td>% of Properties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Property</td>
<td>69.7</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>67.3</td>
<td>30.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Properties</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Properties</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Properties</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 - 9 Properties</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>14.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 10 Properties</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>30.2</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>27.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Islington Rate Books, 1923, 1944

If property companies were unprepared to buy the Barnsbury
property, what of owner-occupation? In fact the proportion of
properties occupied by their owners went down from 11.5% to 9%, and
despite the overall increase in the number of owners involved in the
ward, the number of owner-occupiers fell absolutely. (See Table 5.7)
The greatest drop was in the number of female owner-occupiers, perhaps
an indication that the status of the neighbourhood was changing and that it was less attractive for women to live there on their own. Nearly 24% of owners were also occupiers in 1922, while in 1942, only 20.5% were both owners and occupiers. This was not a dramatic decrease, but together with the absence of a significant presence by property companies, it suggests that the housing market in Barnsbury was not drawing in new investment and was static if not stagnant. Without comparative material, it cannot be certain that the 40% of properties still in the same hands after twenty years was a high proportion or not, but it seems high after such a long period, and reinforces the impression that there was very little movement in the Barnsbury housing market.

Table 5.7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Owner-Occupiers in Barnsbury 1922 and 1942</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Owner-Occupiers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1923</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Types of Owners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate Owners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Individual Owners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male Owners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Owners</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Islington Rate Books, 1923, 1944

Barnsbury would have been typical of many of the working-class areas of Islington, densely built up with small terraced houses. With so many different owners, it was difficult for any one owner to buy up enough property to make redevelopment worthwhile, and the restrictions of controlled rents discouraged property companies from buying into the area. In Chapter 2 it was noted that the Rent Restriction Acts have been blamed for the decline in the private rented sector, but they may also have acted as a deterrent to change. From being a
temporary measure against exploitation, the Acts had become part of a 
policy of long-term deflation, and like unemployment insurance, 
controlled rents acted to stabilise prices albeit at a depressed 
level. This benefitted those living on fixed incomes derived from 
rents, and may have led house owners to hang on as private landlords 
for longer than would otherwise have been the case. If there had been 
profits to be made in the private rented sector, it is likely that 
property companies would have been much more active in buying up 
houses from the small owners and would soon have dominated the market. 
Far from chasing landlords out of private renting, the Rent 
Restriction Acts may have locked some people in, especially when the 
properties were owned by families for a moderate income over the long 
term rather than for profit.

Ross McKibbin has suggested that although landlords would have 
benefitted from the lifting of restrictions on controlled rents, they 
preferred the social differentiation which depended on measures like 
the Rent Restriction Acts to keep wages low and thus their own social 
position intact. If rents had been allowed to rise rapidly, not 
only would the landlords be forced to put more capital into their 
houses in order to compete, but Government would be asked to provide 
even more public housing for the poorer working class who, with their 
low wages, would not be able to afford the higher rents. Despite the 
fact that the Rent Restriction Acts were an interference in the 
private market, they were not as much an interference as would be 
required without them. This may have been why controlled rents were 
tolerated long after their initial wartime purpose had passed and 
despite their obvious drawbacks.
One effect the Rent Restriction Acts had was to discourage 'filtering up', the process by which those at the bottom end of the housing market could move up into the houses left behind by people moving to the new houses in the suburbs. Tenancies protected and rents controlled under the 1923 Rent Restrictions Act were decontrolled when dwellings came into the landlord's possession. This meant that a tenant in a controlled tenancy would be reluctant to leave his dwelling, however unsatisfactory, for an empty house which would have been decontrolled. Such a move could lead to the tenant losing his security of tenure and to a considerable increase in rent.

In 1931 the Ministry of Labour supplied figures which showed that only one eighth of working class tenancies had been decontrolled since 1923, implying that seven eighths of working class tenants had not moved since that year. It is likely that clandestine exchanges of tenancies were taking place especially among family members, but the immobility suggested by these figures goes some way to explain the worst cases reported by the Medical Officer of Health in Islington, where for example one family in 1931 had been living in appalling conditions for eight years. It might also explain in part why overcrowding in the south of the Borough did not seem to have been relieved by movement into the northern wards.

Housing was returning to the central position it held just after the war as a serious social problem along with unemployment, and various Government sponsored enquiries into the nature of the problem were carried out during the early years of the 1930s. In 1933 the Departmental Committee on Housing chaired by Lord Moyne reported on their task of suggesting ways of providing better working-class
dwellings without spending more public money on new building. Rather than seek their answer in a general increase in the housing stock, the Committee turned their attention to the condition of existing rented accommodation. Many houses, not necessarily in designated slum areas, were in very poor repair. Two sorts of landlords seemed responsible for bad conditions. First there were the large number of small owners who had not the resources to make satisfactory repairs and who took no steps to manage their property but only collected the rents. Local authorities were reluctant to move against these landlords, it was claimed, because often the landlords' whole capital was tied up in their properties and their interest was only the equity of a mortgage. Second there were the speculating landlords, familiar since the Royal Commission on Housing of the Working Classes reported in 1884. They bought up short leased property with no repairing covenant and let the houses at the highest rent they could until the lease expired.

The Committee regarded both these types of landlords as archaic because they did not 'discharge fully the modern obligations of ownership'. The owners of working-class housing were, as they said, in a position of offering a commodity to the public and they had 'no right to offer a debased or adulterated form of that commodity'. Although the Committee reaffirmed their faith in private property and private ownership, they thought that the time had come to remove working-class housing from the unsatisfactory owner and place it in public or quasi-public hands. Slum landlords should not receive speculative or accidental profit as a result of a rise in value since buying their property, as they had 'no just claim to unearned
increment of this character'. An owner who sought excessive profits from working-class housing should have his money returned so he could invest it somewhere else. In his place local authorities or public utility societies would run the dwellings on Octavia Hill lines, and housing management would replace Treasury spending as a means of stopping the spread of the slums.

The sorts of landlords referred to in the Report of the Departmental Committee on Housing were to be found in Islington, as well as in the other inner suburbs of London, and their persistence was beginning to have an effect on the prosperity of the Borough. The Islington Gazette noted that the exodus to the outer suburbs was leaving behind an outdated housing stock which no longer attracted the sort of investment needed to keep the Borough economically vibrant. Flight from Islington could only be reversed by changing the physical fabric of the place, an idea expressed in a leader for 10 July 1934:

... who can doubt that in Islington there is an immense quantity of houses - not to be classed of the slum property type, but none the less cumbersome, out-of-date and ill-appointed in comparison to modern habitations - that ought to be swept away to give place to a new planning system and homes that would attract the people?33

The newspaper, without positively advocating municipal provision of new housing, still expressed the hope that after Labour won the majority in the 1934 local election, initiatives in housing would follow:

Islington, in all truth, needs the reforming hand. Apart from the slum sites, there is much other old property that calls for pulling down and rebuilding on up-to-date lines. If this is said to be no concern of the Council, that it can do nothing off its own bat, it can at least be an influencing agency with property owners. No one can doubt how urgent it is that the owners should realise the onus upon them. Islington's population is decreasing. In recent years people have migrated in large numbers, and the flow will continue unless modernised houses and
blocks of flats to suit all classes are available. It was obvious that just as in the first half of the 19th century Islington had been 'ripe for development', the Borough was now 'ripe for redevelopment', but the question was where this redevelopment would come from, and if it would regenerate those parts which were badly in need of the necessary new investment. As might be expected, the private sector showed little interest in those areas of the Borough where redevelopment would cost them most, in the overcrowded wards of the south, and these areas were left to the LCC and Islington Council to tackle. But the less densely built up north began to attract developers to the sort of property the County planners were now anxious to preserve and to sites that the local authorities were keen to exploit for their own housing purposes.

In 1933 the LCC proposed including an area of north Islington and part of neighbouring Stoke Newington in a town planning scheme under the 1932 Town Planning Act, with the intention of controlling redevelopment there. The area in question included Highbury New Park and Aberdeen Park, the two estates built in the mid-19th century by Rydon and Morrice, and which had retained something of their social status and residential character. Now the small industrial enclave in Highbury Grove and one to the south of Stoke Newington Church Street were threatening the character of the neighbourhood. Lancelot Fletcher, counsel for the LCC at an inquiry held in October 1933, pointed out that 'Messrs Cossor Ltd., the radio valve manufacturers, have established themselves firmly on land west [sic] of Highbury Fields and south of Clissold Park.' Besides industrial development the large gardens of the area were being built upon and houses were
being demolished to make way for blocks of flats. In fact, the redevelopment potential of the northern districts of Islington was threatening to destroy the difference between north and south as suggested in this minute of 1934:

Such changes as are occurring and threatening the general character of the area are haphazard commercial and industrial rebuilding or conversion creeping up from the south, including probably a growing tendency to conversion of houses to flats (whether as separate tenements or otherwise).  

If the area in question was part of a town planning scheme then under the Town and Country Planning Act of 1932 the LCC could have some control over the redevelopment that took place there.

Another area where a town planning scheme was established in 1934 was just to the north of Islington in the Urban District of Hornsey. The character of the area in question was very similar to the northern extreme of Islington, but even here redevelopment was threatening to change the character of what the local residents had come to expect would continue untouched. In their application for town planning status for the area, the Hornsey Town Council stated that:

. . . large houses with large gardens which on the termination of the present tenancy or the death of the owner-occupier, as the case may be, are never likely to be again occupied as dwelling houses. (All houses of this class within the Borough when they come into the market are in fact being purchased by builders for the purpose of demolition of the dwelling house and development of the site, generally by the erection of flats). . . .

If the builders had been content to build discrete blocks, in keeping with the residential character of the neighbourhood, the Council would not have minded so much, but one developer had tried to erect a twelve storey block and only agreed to reduce it to six storeys after persuasion by the Council. Hornsey Lane, the road dividing Hornsey from Islington, was of especial concern:
At Hornsey Lane a block of flats is about to be built on the site of an old house and adjoining ground near Northwood Avenue. The houses in Hornsey Lane are large old-fashioned houses. In addition to the flats about to be built as already mentioned some of the houses have already changed their character. On the south side of the Lane (in the Borough of Islington) one house has become a petrol station. The remainder of this portion consists either of old houses with sufficient grounds to tempt re-development or with more modern houses immediately adjoining the unbuilt parts and these latter should be included to secure the general object of the scheme. 40

If not much was happening in the property market south of the North London Railway line, it was becoming difficult for local authorities to keep up with events in the more spacious suburbs of the north.

Chris Hamnett and Bill Randolph have given some attention to the purpose-built flat in London, and they found that its history is linked with that of the property investment companies, rather than with the small builders and landlords who involved themselves with house property. 41 During the building boom of the 1930s, flats, like those being proposed for north Islington and Hornsey, took their place in the housing market along with the new houses in the outer suburbs. Hamnett and Randolph note:

The growth of flat rather than house building is more difficult to explain in the absence of detailed research, but numerous contemporary reports in the Estates Gazette point to the profitability of redeveloping the sites of larger, older suburban houses as blocks of flats and it would appear that the rising army of the white-collar middle class referred to by Marriott comprised the 'target market' for flats. 42

It will be remembered that at the end of the 1920s, property companies were interested in Islington Council's flats for investment, particularly in the Warltersville Road area, close to the border with Hornsey. And while Islington was building Leyden Mansions, a private firm, Matthews Estates Ltd, was building Lochbie on the next lot. In the context of these suburban flats, the categories of public and
private had become blurred.

But as has been pointed out, Islington had a dual character. In the south there was serious overcrowding, on the same scale as that found in the slum boroughs of Stepney and Bethnal Green, while in the north, in Highbury, Tufnell Park, and the further reaches of Upper Holloway, large houses and gardens still remained intact, although even these were discretely multi-occupied by white-collar workers. In 1936 the LCC claimed that 2,500 dwellings were needed to rehouse the overcrowded families living in the Borough. If this was to be done in Islington itself with 5 storey flats at 50 dwellings per acre, the LCC and Islington Council would require 50 acres in the Borough for new building. As has been shown there was popular support for the redevelopment of worn-out property in the worst areas, and the only controversy concerned the amount of compensation that should be paid to the slum landlords.

In 1934 when Islington Council declared Church Lane a slum clearance area, they ensured that their new flats in Sebbon Street would receive a rehousing subsidy by virtue of the linkage with a clearance area, but they also condemned the owners of the property in Church Lane to a lower compensation than they would have received under an improvement order. There were those in the Borough who believed that the low rate of compensation was unfair, while others felt that owners who let their property fall into such ruin did not deserve to receive more than the value of the cleared site. The issue became clouded, however, when the authorities required property which was not classed as slums in order to make up a viable site, as the LCC did in the Vittoria Street clearance area. Shops were
pulled down without compensating the shopowners for their business, even though the properties were not strictly speaking slums. Although this grievance was rectified by Section 44 of the 1936 Housing Act which allowed compensation for lost business, the apparent arbitrariness of these decisions caused considerable alarm among those on the fringes of the more rundown areas of the Borough.

Real panic resulted, however, once the LCC and later Islington Council started making known their plans for building in the Borough in response to the overcrowding legislation of 1935. Most people of whatever political persuasion in Islington seemed to agree that there was slum property in the Borough that needed to be cleared away, and that new blocks of flats like the Barnsbury Estate built on the Vittoria Street site could only enhance their neighbourhoods. But when it was announced at the beginning of 1935 that the LCC intended to buy the site of Loraine Place in Holloway Road for an estate, local property owners became alarmed.\textsuperscript{46} They seem to have forgotten that this same site had been offered to Islington Council for housing purposes in 1921 and again at the end of 1923. In rather contradictory style, it was claimed in 1935 that the houses in Loraine Place were 'some of the finest old property in the borough', but that the cleared site should be turned into a landscaped open space of 5½ acres.\textsuperscript{47} Efforts were made by the Islington Ratepayers' Association to have the site accepted by the LCC as an open space, but without success. The LCC gave assurances that the character of the dwellings and the class of persons to be accommodated would not detract from the amenities of the neighbourhood. They added that the 'the dwellings will have elevations treated on modern lines, not inferior in
appearance to flats erected by private enterprise.48 Because the LCC was responsible for housing across the County, they could not guarantee that the tenants at Loraine Place would all come from Islington, but they allotted 30 flats for Islington families moved from overcrowded and cleared areas.43 For those Islington residents who opposed the scheme, it was particularly galling that slum dwellers from other parts of London would come to disrupt life in what they considered an area unsuitable for such dwellings.

Except for Holly Park, Islington Council had been successful in building flats in the middle-class areas of the Borough during the 1920s and 1930s. The situation was now different for two reasons. First, the legislation under which Islington and the LCC were building required that the tenants of the new flats be in need of rehousing from slum clearance areas or overcrowded conditions. After 1933, local authorities were not allowed to build general need dwellings for those on their housing list. Those requiring rehousing were identified with the poorest working classes, although given the shortage of rented accommodation in London that may not always have been the case. Second, the demand for middle-class flats, as has already been noted, gave a greater redevelopment value to those residential areas, where the large houses and gardens and quiet streets provided the space and the amenities for a middle-class clientele. While many owners and residents were anxious about the threat to the character of their districts from working-class flats, there must have been many property owners who were looking to the time when the developer would knock on their door with an offer they could not refuse. It was no wonder then that the intentions of the LCC and
Islington Council were viewed with suspicion and then outright hostility.

After 12 years of a Municipal Reform majority, Labour gained control of Islington Council in November 1934. Almost immediately the near-moribund Islington Ratepayers' Association was reactivated by its members in anticipation that the Council would begin spending money and raising the rates. They were doubly alarmed because with a Labour majority at the LCC it seemed to them that there was no check on the spending ambitions of the 'socialists'. In 1935 the Council announced that most of the rehousing required under the Slum Clearance and Overcrowding Acts would be carried out by the LCC. This statement, far from reassuring the Ratepayers, led them to believe that the two Labour councils were plotting expensive and unpopular housing schemes for the Borough. Their fears were no doubt fuelled by the reputation the LCC had gained during the 1920s as 'a wolf on the prowl' looking for sites both in and outside the County's boundaries.

The first public manifestation of the conflict between the residents and property owners of Islington on the one hand and the local authorities on the other, occurred in November 1936. The LCC had made a compulsory purchase order in May on 18 houses in Tufnell Park Road, on the edge of a middle-class neighbourhood which was one of the Conservative strongholds in the Borough. Just as Islington Council had found it far easier during the 1920s to build on the sites of large redundant villas in the better parts of the Borough, so the LCC sought low density sites in areas like Tufnell Park where they would not have to pay high compensation nor rehouse an excessive
number of people. In November a public inquiry was held at the Town
Hall by the Ministry of Health to hear the objections to the scheme. H. G. Robinson for the LCC explained that the site provided
accommodation for 150 persons, but that the proposed flats would house
1,100, thus redeveloping the site in a more rational way:

It was [he was reported as saying] a site which would presumably
soon require re-development. The present houses were built some
70 or 80 years ago as single family houses, and in the main they
had now ceased to be so occupied. Some were let in flats, and
others let out in rooms as furnished apartments. Many of the big
gardens which belonged to the houses were doomed to some other
use in the near future; in fact, he submitted that the process
had already started.

The line that both the LCC and Islington Council took was that houses
built as single family dwellings ought to be used for that purpose and
when they started to be multiply occupied, then they should be
replaced. This argument seemed a little disingenuous in Islington
where so many of the houses were shared, even in the middle class
areas.

The objectors argued from a less reasoned position, although
given their immediate interests, from a more realistic one. They
considered that working-class flats would cause the depreciation in
the value of the adjoining property and that if any new building was
undertaken it ought to be flats for professional and semi-professional
people who could afford a rent of £2 a week. Montague Evans, surveyor
and architect, complained that the proposed flats introduced the
policy of 'mixed development', that is mixing working class and middle
class in the same area, a policy he considered would not work. Frank
Hunt, the valuer for the LCC, was unmoved by this sort of sentiment:

I knew 'class' would be brought up. I can only consider it
snobbery to neglect the immediate needs of the community on
Exception was taken as much to the density at which the LCC intended to build as to the type of people they intended to rehouse on the estate. If the 150 living on the site in Tufnell Park Road had been replaced by the same number of working-class people, there probably would have been little protest, but since it was intended to rehouse over seven times that number on the site, a resulting change in character was considered inevitable.

Barely was the month out before the next inquiry was held, this time concerning the site in Hornsey Lane which Islington Council wanted to purchase for a housing scheme of 209 dwellings. The Housing Committee expected trouble and 'having regard to intense opposition likely to be raised in connection with Hornsey Lane housing scheme', they had taken on junior counsel to assist the solicitor kept by them on retainer to advise on their housing sites. Islington Council had made a compulsory purchase order on the 6 October 1936 on 17 houses in Hornsey Lane and Hazellville Road occupied by 172 residents. It will be remembered that Hornsey Lane formed the boundary between Islington and Hornsey, and featured in the town planning scheme of 1934. In the past a number of large villas had been built in its semi-rural setting, but on the Hornsey side one of these villas had been demolished to make way for a very large private flat development called Northwood Hall. On the Islington side, council housing was not unknown in the area, since there was already Islington's Manchester Mansions a little way down the hill in Hazellville Road and a large LCC estate had been built on the site of the old Shoreditch Guardians.
Scale: 15 inches = 1 mile

Map 12 - Upper Holloway. Hatched area shows site of Hornsey Lane estate.
school beyond that.

The argument for the Council was similar to that used by the LCC to justify their purchase of the Tufnell Park site, and indeed they had the services of Frank Hunt, the LCC's valuer, to support their case. The houses, they claimed, were old and past their usefulness as single family dwellings. E. C. P. Monson attested to the age of the houses, claiming that one of them was nearly 200 years old, and far from being a reason for conservation, the age of the houses confirmed him in the belief that the area should be redeveloped. When asked by the counsel for the objectors if Hornsey Lane would go up in the world he answered:

It will go down in the world first as the houses get older and older and then, as new properties come along, the rateable value will go up. All we are going to do is to hasten the process. This was the line taken by Frank Hunt and also by H. E. Robertson, representing the Council, who remarked '... the Council's proposals for Hornsey-lane were only following the ordinary procedure that was going on in all the older parts of London'.

A Hornsey Lane and District Preservation Society had been formed and they put forward the objection to the Council's scheme that it would be deleterious to the semi-rural character of the area. However, Islington Council and Hornsey District Council had already agreed under the town planning scheme to widen Hornsey lane to 50 feet which would change its character regardless. More to the point was the fear that the presence of a working-class estate would bring down property values and reduce the redevelopment potential of the neighbourhood. Montague Evans was quoted as saying;

... every house in Hornsey-lane was a high-class residence, there were no people of the working-class type on the site in
question. The Council's policy would put into a good class neighbourhood a different type of person altogether. It would establish a policy of mixed development, which in his opinion was unpracticable and very undesirable. It would depreciate the value of the adjoining property.53

There were testimonials that property prices had already started to drop with the news of the Council's proposals and the valuation officer of Hornsey Council was reported to have said that:

Islington Council's proposals had brought property dealings in Hornsey-lane to a standstill. If the proposals went through the most likely thing that would happen to Hornsey-lane would be rapid deterioration.60

The presence of the Northwood Hall development reminded everyone of the redevelopment potential of the area, but with a large Council estate in the neighbourhood the redevelopment value would be substantially reduced. Those owners who had held onto old houses with the prospect of selling their property to private developers for middle-class flats were understandably put out by the sudden reduction in the value of their investment brought about by what they considered the arbitrary decision of the Council. Despite the protestations at the loss of the rural character of the area it was the loss of the potential profit which hurt, and as Frank Hunt remarked,'If it were not for the fact that you think that people of the working class are going to live in these buildings there would be no objection of any kind'.61

The same arguments were rehearsed again in February 1937 when there was an inquiry concerning what was called Tufnell Park Scheme No 2, a proposal by the LCC to build 709 dwellings for 3,400 inhabitants on 13 acres in the Tufnell Park area.62 Following fast on the heels of this inquiry was one involving Islington Council's proposals for an
estate close by in Brecknock Road. When asked if the area had undergone rapid change in recent years, Councillor Alexander answered:

Yes. Fifteen years ago I would have termed the Brecknock Road district as a better class residential area. Since that time, in my opinion, the place has 'gone done in tone' (If I may use the expression), in so far as there are more people living there than there were and the property does not appear to be in the same degree of nice maintenance that it was in those days - that is in external appearance.63

The Council's solicitor and architect claimed that the new flats would actually improve the area and as Monson said 'If these are not put up something of the same sort will be put up by somebody else.' In fact no one except the residents of the houses concerned seemed to object to this scheme, but when in the same year the LCC proposed demolishing 30 houses in Highbury New Park for 353 flats, the local residents were convinced that their area was ruined and that no part of Islington was safe from the invasion of the slum dwellers.64 At a Ratepayers' Association meeting around the same time the chairman claimed that 'the Labour Party's policy of covering Islington with "barrack-like flats" had driven out of the borough many of the best citizens. . . .' And he added:

It appears to me that in the future Islington will be one mass of flats. I am sorry, because at the moment we are losing some of our best citizens who are finding it impossible to live in the borough under the present conditions.65

With the prospect of 'ugly blocks of flats' appearing in Highbury New Park, it was anticipated that many residents of that area would see no option but to move out. The vicar of St Augustine's church was quoted in the press as saying:

The erection of these flats will lower the tone of the neighbourhood and those who will not be turned out of their homes by the scheme will leave the district. . . . The place will be ruined.66
Despite the protestations, it is likely that the change spoken of by Councillor Alexander concerning Brecknock Road, would soon have spread to other areas of the Borough still in middle-class occupation. The proximity of Islington to the City and the West End lent it an attraction which its outworn housing stock did not warrant, and when the Piccadilly line reached out in 1933 as far as Cockfosters where purpose-built flats were being constructed along with houses, the geographical convenience of Islington for the white-collar worker really became, for the time being, irrelevant. It should be noted that the LCC did not build on its sites until after the Second World War, so that the effect of their intervention in Islington's housing market would initially to have been simply to reduce the value of the houses on their sites and that of the surrounding property without redeveloping the areas.

The economic and social forces working on Islington during the 1930s seem to have acted simultaneously to reinforce continuity within the housing market and to precipitate change. There was evidence that absolute decline was beginning in the size of the population, although the reduction in the salaries of public employees during the economies of the National Government could have kept the lower paid white-collar workers in the houses and flats of the better residential areas longer than would otherwise have been the case. By 1934, it seems, enough people were leaving that houses were falling vacant, despite overcrowding in parts of the Borough. It took a combination of a decline in casual work, improved wage rates, and smaller families to get the working classes into the neighbourhoods once the preserve of the middle classes, and latterly occupied by white-collar workers.
House owners, on the other hand, were hanging on to their houses, at least in Barnsbury. The Rent Restriction Acts which were intended to contribute to stability may have done their job too well and have resulted in stagnation, with owners unable to extract themselves easily from a form of property for which there was little new investment. By the 1930s, Islington house property was beginning to reach the end of its 99 year lease, and the question of redevelopment became of interest to the local authorities as well as to private owners. The Islington Gazette was full of talk of rebuilding London in order to bring people back who had left for the suburbs. But there were a number of possibilities that needed to be considered. Should industrial and commercial development be allowed to replace residential property? Would private flat development replace the outworn houses now in multiple occupation? The LCC under the Town Planning Act of 1932 sought to have some influence over what happened, but that really depended on the market, and Islington's position within the metropolitan area. In the end it was the latter which determined the sort of drift which took place. Industry during the 1930s was no longer interested in cramped central sites and moved out to the industrial suburbs. Flat development, although not wholly absent from the Borough, soon passed to the new residential suburbs. In the meantime, the LCC and Islington Council fought with the house owners for the sites that the owners had hoped private developers would take from them at good prices. The next chapter will consider Islington Council's purchase of their sites for dwellings built under the legislation of the 1930s.
Footnotes - Chapter Five


20. *Ibid*.


22. IHCM, 6 February 1936.

24. Islington Rate Books, District 8, Barnsbury, 1943 - 44.
27. PRO HLG 68/29.
30. IHCM, 1 October 1931.
32. Ibid.
33. The Islington Gazette, 10 July 1934.
34. Ibid., 10 November 1934.
35. PRO HLG 4/38.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid.
38. PRO HLG 4/1213.
39. Ibid.
40. Ibid.
42. Ibid., p. 163.
43. The Islington Gazette, 13 November 1936.
44. The Islington and Holloway Press, 6 and 13 January 1934.
45. The Islington Gazette, 18 July 1934.
46. The Islington and Holloway Press, 26 January 1935.
47. Ibid.
48. IHCM, 4 July 1935.
49. Ibid., 7 May 1936.


55. IHCM, 10 September 1936.


57. Ibid., 1 December 1936.

58. Ibid.

59. Ibid.

60. Ibid.

61. Ibid.

62. Ibid., 3 February 1937.

63. Ibid., 18 June 1937.


65. Ibid., 5 February 1937.

66. Ibid., 13 March 1937.

Chapter Six - Islington Council's Dwellings Under the Housing Acts of 1930 and 1935

By the close of 1939, Islington Metropolitan Borough Council had built 874 dwellings under the 1930 and 1935 Housing Acts and they had immediate plans to build 274 more. These Housing Acts had been drawn up with the intention of supplying houses directly to those in obvious need. Overcrowding, defined in the 1931 Census as 1 5 persons per room, continued to persist in the cities, even though more houses were being built in the suburbs. 'Filtering up' was not taking place as it had been believed that it would once the private building sector recovered from the effects of the War. It had to be admitted once again that the lower end of the market was more intransigent than had been hoped, and that low wages required low rents. Since the new housing initiative was intended specifically to tackle bad housing conditions, the subsidies were given for the number of people rehoused and for houses and flats built on expensive inner city sites. Local authorities were to be directly involved in changing the structure of the housing market in their areas, by removing the slum property where the poor lived and replacing it with new housing of a superior quality but at a low rent. Here was an opportunity for Islington Council, given the mature market and housing stock in the Borough, to make some impact on local conditions. To what extent it succeeded will be the subject of this chapter, which will examine what sites were acquired and what was built by the Council under the special needs legislation.

Although Islington Council was active during the 1930s in producing dwellings under the various housing acts, there was a difference in the energy employed by Municipal Reform while they

* For a discussion of the various definitions of overcrowding see *Census of England and Wales, 1931, 'Housing Report and Tables', pp. xxvi-xxxv.*
remained in power and Labour when they took over in November 1934. The Municipal Reform Party, it will be remembered, were committed to a policy of low rates. Nevertheless they did build 456 dwellings in five schemes during the twelve years they were in control from 1922 to 1934. However, whenever they were asked by other boroughs to support calls for further housing action by the Government they generally declined, and it was a Labour councillor in 1927 who moved the resolution that the Housing Committee should search out sites suitable for building. This, it will be recalled from Chapter 4, led the Committee to apply to the rate collectors for each district to supply them with a list of empty properties.

In September 1930 the LCC requested information from the Borough which would aid them in preparing their statement to the Minister of Health regarding the measures to be taken under the 1930 Housing Act. The LCC wanted to know the number of new houses the Council intended building under Part III, the clearance and reconstruction schemes the Council had undertaken and had proposed for the next five years, and the number of dwellings likely to be provided in connection with improvement areas and with the demolition of individual insanitary areas. Such a comprehensive programme was beyond what the Housing Committee had considered their remit up to that time and it required far more organisation than they could manage on their own. In December 1930, as the result of motions from Councillor McArthur Johnson and Alderman Jordan, a joint meeting of the Housing and Public Health Committees was convened in order to deal with the provisions of the Housing Act. Ever since the 1919 legislation, Islington Council had regarded clearance areas and special need housing as the province
of the LCC and not their concern. During the 1920s it was the LCC who dealt with the 'black spots' such as Brand Street and Georges Road, and the Council, as we have seen, provided flats only for general needs. At a meeting with the LCC early in 1931, the Council were urged to undertake a clearance area of their own. 5

The intention of the slum clearance legislation was not just to clear the slums, but to rehouse the residents in decent, low rent accommodation. The difficulty of past attempts to clear away bad housing, as Yelling points out in the case of Boundary Street, was that the original occupiers were not the beneficiaries of what replaced the old. 6 To rectify this, a clearance area now had preferably to be connected to a rehousing scheme. Eventually, in 1933, the Joint Committee identified their chosen clearance area as Church Lane and Rothery Street, a couple of small and ancient streets just to the south of St Mary's, Islington's parish church. But it was the Finance Committee that pointed out that a proposed housing scheme, not far from the clearance area behind the town hall, could be used to rehouse those to be displaced and thus qualify for the Government grant intended for this purpose. 7

It was fortuitous that the Council had a housing scheme ready to go ahead at this time, since they had been negotiating for the site of this particular scheme since 1928. The site in Sebbon Street formed a small part of the extensive estate of the Marquess of Northampton and had been drawn to the attention of the Housing Committee during the survey of the Rate Collectors, undertaken after the call for more housing by Councillor Naish in 1927. 8 The 6th Marquess of Northampton, unlike many owners of urban property, took an interest in
Scale: 15 inches = 1 mile

Map 13 - St Mary Ward. Hatched area shows site of Wakelin House.
improving his estate which dated from the first fifty years of the
nineteenth century. The Council's Halton Mansions, built under the
1919 Act, occupied the site of some of the Marquess' houses, and he
and his agent had been active during the 1920s overseeing the
conversion of many of his better houses into flats. In the spring of
1928 the Marquess came to the Council to ask their help with his plans
to redevelop his property which would entail the rearrangement of
several streets behind the town hall. The area for redevelopment was
in close proximity to the Council's Tyndale Mansions, and this seemed
an opportunity for the Council to suggest that, as part of the
redevelopment, they take an expanded site in Sebbon Street for an
addition to their existing flats. The Marquess agreed on condition
the Council construct a 20 foot path from Sebbon Street to Upper
Street. A complication arose because there was an LCC school behind
the town hall, and in order to be satisfied that the school had
adequate access, the LCC insisted that the path be widened to form a
40 foot road. Both sides dug in and nothing could be done until
December 1932 when the LCC finally acknowledged that the 40 foot road
was not necessary and as long as there was 40 feet between the new
buildings and the LCC property, they would sanction the 20 foot
path. In February 1933 E.C.P. Monson presented a scheme for 109
flats and a month later the Finance Committee suggested linking the
scheme with the Church Lane clearance area.

Although it was a long time coming, once the link had been made
between Church Lane and Sebbon Street the process of producing the new
flats was relatively straightforward. In March 1933 a visit to the
Ministry by the Joint Committee established that a government grant of
between £2.5.0 and £3.10.0 per person per annum for 40 years could be anticipated and that the Council would be expected to contribute £3.15.0 per flat per annum from the rates for 60 years. Gee, Walker and Slater Limited submitted the winning tender of £39,800 in October 1933, but when various fees were added along with removal expenses, the construction cost was £42,190, and with the site cost of £8,530, the total for the new flats was £50,720, rounded up to £50,800.

The payments by the Government and Islington were intended to subsidise the rents of the special needs flats so that they could be offered to the tenants displaced by the clearance area at rents lower than those usual for the Council's dwellings. In October 1934 a special meeting of the Housing Committee worked out the level of rents for the new flats in accordance with what they could expect from the grants. Annual expenses and interest payments for the estate were estimated at £4,646. It was estimated that the flats could house 467 persons and at £3.0.0 per person per annum the government's contribution would be £1,401, while the Council on the basis of £3.4.3 per flat would make an annual payment of £350 for the 109 flats. The sum of these figures, subtracted from the total annual expenses, gave £2,895 which was the estimated amount required as rent for one year. On the basis of this calculation the 31 four room flats were to be let for 11/10 and the 78 three room for 9/7 per week inclusive of rates. In the event, 80 flats were required for the occupants of Church Lane, leaving 29 available for families displaced by other actions taken under the 1930 Housing Act such as the closing of underground rooms by the Medical Officer of Health. No general needs tenants from the Council's housing list could be housed in the flats if the Council was
to continue to receive the Government's grant.

The Church Lane clearance area itself was not redeveloped by the Council who considered the site too small for them to build upon. Instead, the Islington and Finsbury Housing Association, which had already built a small block of flats in Barnsbury Road, undertook to erect and manage new flats once they had ascertained that they would qualify for grants by rehousing the Council's special need tenants.¹⁷ Public Utility Societies were not very active in Islington, unlike neighbouring St Pancras where the St Pancras House Improvement Society Ltd was responsible for a considerable area of redevelopment in Somers Town. The United Women's Homes Association was the most active, but the Marquess of Northampton's Compton Housing Association were engaged in some building on his Canonbury estate, and the Old Etonian Housing Association produced a small block of flats in Highbury. The Islington and Finsbury Housing Association was founded in 1933, and although they provided flats in the most overcrowded areas of the Borough, given the size of Islington's housing stock their contribution was slight.

Wakelin House, as the Council's new flats in Sebbon Street were called, was the only estate of special needs housing that Municipal Reform built before their defeat by the Labour Party in the local election of November 1934. As has been shown, concern for the housing problem was not the monopoly of one party, but Labour succeeded during the next five years in building 765 dwellings and to plan for 274 which were stopped only by the Second World War. The Labour majority had the advantage that in the spring elections of 1934, Labour won control of the LCC, and both Councils seemed to work quite closely
together in the period remaining before the War. As will be shown in chapter 7, the newly reconstituted Housing Committee at first undertook to reform the way the Council's houses were managed without initiating any new housing until late spring 1935. In April 1935 they considered Stanley Lodge at No 14 Warltersville Road as a possible site for new flats. The address will be familiar since Stanley Lodge was another of those large houses in the north of the Borough, like its neighbour Warltersville House and Heathfield Lodge across the road. The latter formed part of the Council's Warltersville Mansions scheme of 1919, while the former was the site of Leyden Mansions begun in 1929. The property for sale for £6,600 was an unrestricted freehold with vacant possession, and despite the fact that it was at the other end of the Borough from the clearance areas, it required no compensation payments or rehousing and was close to other Council dwellings.

During preparations for the Stanley Lodge scheme the cost of building began to rise, a problem that continued to erode the ability of the Council to provide flats at low rents. In April 1935 Monson had estimated that the average rent of the flats would be 11/6, but by July the estimated average rent stood at 12/-. Part of the increase was due to the inclusion of a playground in the scheme under pressure from the tenants of the Council's dwellings in the surrounding area. However, building costs were rising and, in the judgement of the quantity surveyor, had risen 8% in the past six months. The winning tender was that of J. Gerrard and Sons of Manchester at £60,531 which was considerably higher than the architect's original estimate of £52,500. Reductions of £3,700 were negotiated in December 1935, so
that the final contract price was £56,831, 8% over the estimated price rather than 15%.\textsuperscript{21} Rents at Blythe Mansions, the name of the new flats, were slightly higher than at Wakelin House with the three room flats let at 10/8 and the four room at 12/11.\textsuperscript{22} Although Blythe Mansions was designated rehousing for clearance areas, it was not linked to a specific area as Wakelin House had been, and therefore the Council had to take their time in allocating flats, to ensure that everyone rehoused had been displaced through a sanctioned clearance order or through closed basement rooms, and in the meantime flats remained vacant. By February 1937 it was determined that 75% of the flats would be occupied by families from clearance areas while the rest would go to those moved out of closed basement rooms.\textsuperscript{23}

Two more estates were designated rehousing for slum clearance areas under the 1930 Housing Act, Coleman Mansions and Hillrise. In the Housing Committee minutes of October 1935 it was noted that there was a suggested site in the 'North of the Borough', and a month later it was revealed that the property under consideration was the site forming the corner of Crouch Hill and Warltersville Road.\textsuperscript{24} Included were Nos 81, 83, and 85 Crouch Hill and the house and garden of Tower House, No 12 Warltersville Road, but what made this site unusual was that the Committee seems to have approached the owners rather than the other way around. The owner of No 81 Crouch Hill was quick to make a deal and by December 1935 the Council had an agreement to buy the house for £1,600.\textsuperscript{25} The greatest difficulty was Tower House which was owned by the Church of the Apostolic Faith and their asking price was higher than the value of the house. The Committee decided to buy only the garden, but the owners declared that this was used for religious
Map 14 - Upper Holloway. Hatched areas show sites of 'The Highlands', Leyden, Blythe, Coleman Mansions, and Hillrise.
purposes and the Committee feared that if they made a compulsory purchase order which went to arbitration, the cost would be too high. Tower House was dropped from the project and the scheme was reduced accordingly. No 83 Crouch Hill was purchased for £1,900, but by May 1936 no agreement had been reached for No 85 and it was decided to buy this house compulsorily. This was the first instance the Committee had used this power, and they seemed to be rather wary at this stage of its effects. By July 1936 they had gained the freehold of No 85 for £1,800.

When the tenders came in for the 40 flats in October 1936, the lowest were around 20% higher than the architect's estimate of four months before. Instead of taking the lowest, the Committee chose the tender of E.S. Moss Ltd of Hendon which at £24,600 was the next tender up. The lowest tender was that of Gee, Walker and Slater, the firm that had built 'The Highlands' and Wakelin House. When questioned by the LCC why they had refused the lowest tender, the Committee, which must have been under the tutelage of the architect, claimed that Gee, Walker and Slater were slow and their work unsatisfactory. The LCC would not accept this claim, and the lowest tender of £24,300 had to be accepted. This led the Committee to institute an approved list of contractors since tendering through public advertisements, in their opinion, brought in bids from inexperienced firms who put in the lowest tenders. When a preliminary list was drawn up by Monson, interestingly the Committee made a point of adding Gee, Walker and Slater to the list.

While the Housing Committee were negotiating for the Crouch Hill site in the spring of 1936, another site nearby was being considered
for dwellings to rehouse occupants of clearance areas. By this time there were built, building, or planned 316 of the Council's dwellings in Warltersville Road. Another 71 were just across Crouch Hill at 'The Highlands'. There was almost something inevitable for the Committee to go after the few remaining houses in the road. In April 1936 it was proposed that they purchase Nos 1 to 8 Warltersville Road, using compulsory purchase if necessary. Again this was not a case of the owners coming to the Council with offers of property for housing purposes as they had done so often under the 1919 and 1924 Housing Acts, but of the Housing Committee deciding on a site and pursuing it with the leverage of the compulsory purchase order. As with Tower House, compulsory purchase did not work in every case, but it could be an effective persuader if none of the owners were in a particularly strong position.

By October 1936 three of the owners at Nos 1, 3, and 7 had agreed to sell their houses to the Council, and the arbitrator was called in to deal with the rest. By January 1937 arrangements had been made to buy all eight houses as well as ten garages at the rear for £11,850, although, with extra fees to the valuer and the arbitrator and for compensation, the final purchase price was £12,453.18.10. The average amount received by each house owner was £1,368.15.0, and given that, as was shown in chapter 5, the area was of interest to private flat builders for redevelopment, this may have been low. However, the private market depended on so many variables having to do with location and status, that no one could be sure that their house would attract the private speculators. The only private flats in the immediate area, Lochbie, on the opposite corner to Coleman Mansions
and owned by the Matthews Estates Ltd, were not letting well in 1936. In a street almost entirely composed of Council property it was not likely that private development would take place when there were still so many areas elsewhere ripe for redevelopment.

When the tenders came in, Gee, Walker and Slater once again produced the lowest price at £61,148, or £65,290 when the various fees were added. Since the firm already had its plant down the road, working on Coleman Mansions, it might be expected that theirs would be the lowest tender. Eight months before in June 1936 the architect’s estimate for building was £53,550, and the 22% rise was attributed to the increased cost of building and labour, but whereas the Town Clerk had asked Monson to account for the discrepancy between his estimate and the construction costs for Blythe Mansions in 1935, it now seemed that a rise in price was accepted as inevitable.

Rents were set for Coleman Mansions and Hillrise in September 1937, and, although the rents for both the estates were calculated on the basis that they would receive the maximum exchequer grant, they were higher than those at Blythe Mansions, opened just eight months before. A three room flat let for 13/10 and the four room flat for 15/9. As will be shown in the next chapter, residents of Graham Street and City Garden Row, a clearance area in the south of the Borough, complained in June 1938 about the high rents they were expected to pay at Hillrise which many claimed were beyond their means. In defending their rents, the Housing Committee appealed to the rise in both the cost of land and of building during the previous two years, and pointed out the high level of amenities at Hillrise where electricity for light and power had been installed as well as
These reasons must have rung hollow to those who simply could not afford the rents.

The location of these three slum clearance estates in the north of the Borough pointed up the difficulties the Housing Committee had in finding appropriate sites for their dwellings. It was not just the cost of land which was the deciding factor, but the density of occupancy had to be considered as well. In July 1936 a housing scheme was proposed for an island site off Upper Holloway Road which included Hampden, Rupert and Cromwell Roads. This was an enclave of poor housing on the edge of Tufnell Park. The architect estimated that on the site an estate of 205 flats could be built, but there was a total of 346 families resident in the existing property, which meant that 141 families would lose their dwellings without the Council being in a position to rehouse them. On the other hand, the large houses in areas of low density were usually a long way from the grossly overcrowded areas, so that moving there caused great strain on the domestic economy of poor families who depended on local networks of work and credit to keep going. As we have seen, it was fortuitous that the Council acquired property in Warltersville Road in the first place, but once their presence was established with Warltersville and then Leyden Mansions, it was almost ensured that more property would come into their hands. Once owners knew that the neighbourhood had been identified with the Council's dwellings, it would be of little interest to the private developers, and the owners might as well sell to the Council.

While the Council was involved with their slum clearance housing, the Government introduced another piece of legislation, the 1935
Housing Act which sought to tackle overcrowding, generally agreed to be the cause of bad housing. As was shown in Chapter 5, the Act required local authorities first to survey the working-class houses in their area in order to ascertain the scope of the problem according to standards set down by the Ministry of Health as to the number and size of rooms. Second, local authorities were encouraged to build flats to rehouse those living in overcrowded conditions, and to this end the Government provided a grant for each flat in buildings of three or more storeys erected on sites exceeding £1,500 per acre, and graded upward according to the cost of the site. Whatever the exchequer subsidy, the local authorities were expected to contribute half again. There was a subtle difference between being moved out of a clearance area and out of overcrowded conditions. Subsidies were about 20% lower for overcrowding housing, and there seems to have been a belief that on the whole dwellings provided under the overcrowding legislation could be more expensive than those intended for slum clearance. This was just as well as land and building costs continued to increase while the Council prepared their two overcrowding estates, Hornsey Lane and Brecknock Road.

It will be remembered from Chapter 5 that the Council's plans for Hornsey Lane created consternation among the owners and occupiers of the neighbourhood. In the spring of 1936 the Housing Committee's attention was drawn to four properties in Hornsey Lane, one of which, No 120, was a former children's home. This was not the first time that property in Hornsey Lane had been brought to their attention. At the end of 1928 the freehold of No 110 Hornsey Lane, a large house called 'The Homestead', had been offered to the Council for £6,000.
It will be recalled that there was a drawback to this property in that restrictions included in the deed of 27 July 1881 put a lower limit on the value of houses which might subsequently be built in Hornsey Lane and Ashmount Road. As the owner's solicitors pointed out, the restrictions did not prevent private residential flats as long as they were of a value not less than £1,500.\textsuperscript{40} The Housing Committee pointed out that the Council could only provide 'working class' housing, and by that time £1,500 was certainly beyond the range of what could be considered under that designation. In November 1935 the freeholders of the same property applied to the Official Arbitrator under the Law of Property Act 1925 to remove the restrictions so that they could sell it as an unrestricted freehold.\textsuperscript{41} Hornsey Lane was by then part of the Town Planning scheme and local authority powers were thought to be enough to safeguard the amenities of the district.\textsuperscript{42}

The resolution by Hornsey District Council designating 798 acres as a Town Planning area was passed in December 1933 and, as was shown in the previous chapter, the purpose was to control redevelopment of what was proving a very attractive district for developers. As soon as Hornsey Borough Council became aware that Islington Council was contemplating buying Nos 114 to 120 Hornsey Lane for housing purposes, they registered their protest by letter:

While Hornsey Council fully appreciate the difficulties which confront Islington Council in regard to the problem of the housing of the working classes, they would point out that the part of Hornsey Lane which is within their Borough is town planned and it is anticipated the proposed housing scheme will materially affect the amenities of the district. Furthermore it is felt the proposal will undoubtedly affect greatly the rateable value of the properties in the neighbourhood.\textsuperscript{43}

When contemplating the scheme in the early stages, the Housing
Committee considered that, having regard to 'the amenities of the neighbourhood', dwellings intended for rehousing overcrowded families were more appropriate than slum clearance flats.\textsuperscript{44} That was the only concession they were willing to make and when the Honorary Secretary of the Hornsey Lane Preservation Society invited a representative of the Council to attend a meeting at Hornsey Town Hall to 'give reasons for the selection of the site for the purposes of a housing scheme', the Housing Committee declined.\textsuperscript{45} In order to determine the level of support they could expect, the Housing Committee referred their scheme to the LCC, who advised that given the sort of development in Hornsey Lane an enlarged site would be more appropriate, and encouraged them to take a 5 acre site including Nos 114 to 120 and 132 to 138 (even) Hornsey Lane and Nos 97 to 113 (odd) Hazelville Road.\textsuperscript{46} Initially Monson had suggested that 100 to 120 flats could be built on the original site, but as many as 285 flats could, he believed, be erected on the larger site. At an average of 4.5 persons per flat, the residents of Hornsey Lane could expect nearly 1,300 new neighbours.

By this time the residents of Hornsey were even more alarmed and Hornsey's Acting Town Clerk was moved to write to Islington at the end of May:

\textit{\ldots while his Council appreciated that Hornsey Lane had changed somewhat in character during the last few years, it was considered that the Lane still comprised some of the best parts of the respective boroughs; that the Hornsey Council felt and it was their considered opinion that to utilise the site in the manner proposed would be nothing short of desecration and that a scheme of this nature should only be embarked upon when a suitable site could not be acquired elsewhere. A request was accordingly made that the Islington Council should reconsider once again their scheme to see if it was absolutely necessary to acquire this site.}\textsuperscript{47}

Islington's Town Clerk replied by pointing out special steps had been
taken to ensure that the design of the new estate would not detract from the surrounding development. The buildings facing Hornsey Lane were to be confined to three storeys and their elevations were to 'receive special treatment from an architectural point of view'. This meant that the roofs of these flats were to be pitched rather than flat and tiles were to be used rather than slates. Good open spaces were to be left around the buildings and a children's playground included at the rear. He concluded by saying that Islington considered that the 'existing amenities of Hornsey Lane would in no way be affected by the Council's proposals', and therefore there was no reason to abandon them.

After working out the adjustments to his design in order to accommodate the wishes of the immediate neighbours of the estate, Monson found that only 209 flats could be fitted on the site. This reduction by 76 flats would also reduce the amount of subsidy, but it was still believed that the estate could be built with the amount that could be claimed. Given the cost of the site, an estimated £9 per flat could be expected from the Government, and under the 1935 Housing Act, Islington was expected to provide from the rates half this sum. However, the LCC could supplement the rate payment by contributing half Islington's share which they agreed to do in this instance.

As was shown in the previous chapter, an inquiry was held at Islington Town Hall at the end of November 1936. The Housing Committee then had to wait the decision of the Ministry of Health and the confirmation of the compulsory purchase order before they could go ahead with the acquisition of the site. When the Ministry finally confirmed the order on 9 March 1937, they requested that the design be
altered yet again by setting the buildings facing Hornsey Lane further back from the road, thus leaving an open space or 'tree garden' between the estate and Hornsey Lane. The architect was able to manage this by reducing the number of flats to 206, but the result of the changes was that the amount of space left for the buildings was greatly reduced, so that the flats behind the three storey blocks were five storeys and densely packed.

Table 6.1

**Amounts Paid for the Leasehold and Freehold of the Properties on the Site of the Hornsey Lane Estate**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Property</th>
<th>Leasehold</th>
<th>Freehold</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>£</td>
<td>£</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>97 Hazellville Road</td>
<td>1,050 L</td>
<td>435 F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>99 Hazellville Road</td>
<td>1,600 L &amp; F*</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101 Hazellville Road</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,700 F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>103 Hazellville Road</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,600 F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>105 Hazellville Road</td>
<td>1,700 L &amp; F*</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>107 Hazellville Road</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,575 F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>109 Hazellville Road</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,690 F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>111 Hazellville Road</td>
<td>950 L</td>
<td>465 F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>113 Hazellville Road</td>
<td>1,400 L</td>
<td>480 F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>113 Hazellville Road</td>
<td>350 L</td>
<td>75 F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>114 Hornsey Lane</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2,750 F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>116 Hornsey Lane</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2,250 F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>118 Hornsey Lane</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5,740 F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>120 Hornsey Lane</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6,000 F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>132 Hornsey Lane</td>
<td>1,965 L</td>
<td>570 F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>134 Hornsey Lane</td>
<td>1,325 L</td>
<td>550 F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>136 Hornsey Lane</td>
<td>550 F</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>138 Hornsey Lane</td>
<td>2,600 L</td>
<td>550 F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*These figures include the purchase price of both Leasehold and Freehold

Source: Islington Housing Committee Minutes

On the Hornsey Lane site the Housing Committee had to deal with the owners and occupiers of 17 different properties. In some cases
the freehold interest was separate from the leasehold, which meant that they had to make two payments for the same property. Some tenants also received compensation. Table 6.1 gives some idea of the amounts the Council were paying for the houses in this area. Most of the leasehold interests had been acquired by July 1937 when it was decided to invoke the compulsory purchase order in order to gain possession by 1 October. By then the interest in all but two of the properties had been purchased, and these last two went to arbitration. Outstanding were the freehold interest of No 118 Hornsey Lane and the leasehold of No 132, both of which were acquired by the Council for much more than the valuer had expected, the former for £4,000 more and the latter £1,300 more. This might suggest that the amounts paid for the rest of the properties were rather low.

In June 1936 the architect estimated that the estate of 209 flats would cost £111,500 to build, and by May 1937 the estimate had gone up to £139,000. It was believed that this increase, brought about by the rise in the cost of labour and materials, would result in the rents being at least 3/- higher than first thought and would make the flats 'too expensive for slum dwellers'. When the tenders came in at the end of August, the lowest tender at £133,174 was once again from Gee, Walker and Slater. With fees, their construction price was £140,902, or over 25% above the estimate made 15 months before. By the time the Hornsey Lane estate was coming to completion towards the end of 1938, the subsidy at £15 per flat was higher than had been estimated in 1936. This meant that rents need not be as high as had been feared as Table 6.2 shows. Rents will be dealt with more fully in the next chapter and the rents at Hornsey will be considered in the
context of the Council's rent policy of the time.

Table 6.2
Proposed Rents at Hornsey Lane

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size of Flat</th>
<th>June 1936</th>
<th>May 1937</th>
<th>January 1939</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 Room Flats</td>
<td>13/1</td>
<td>15/4</td>
<td>15/9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Room Flats</td>
<td>17/3</td>
<td>20/3</td>
<td>18/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Room Flats</td>
<td>21/8</td>
<td>25/4</td>
<td>20/4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Islington Housing Committee Minutes

Brecknock Road, the other estate built by Islington Council for the purpose of rehousing overcrowded families was first considered in June 1936. The site was, at 5.045 acres gross, slightly smaller than the Hornsey Lane estate, and it was on the west side of the Borough on the edge of Tufnell Park. This was an area where the Council had no other housing, but in March they had been informed that the LCC were planning the estate in Tufnell Park Road, less than half a mile away. Perhaps this opened the area up to the possibility of Council housing, but the properties involved were rather more mixed than those on the site under consideration by the LCC. There were 43 properties included in the 5 acre Brecknock Road site, bounded by Brecknock, Anson, Union and Carleton Roads. Of these 43, the 19 in Brecknock Road were due for demolition and presumably redevelopment when their leases fell in. It appears likely that the freehold for this property was in the hands of one owner, as the Council paid a lump sum of £8,850 for the freehold of the Brecknock Road property plus £3,200 for a 'building agreement'. The Council made separate payments to the individual leaseholders, and it seems that the houses must have been small properties since the average purchase price for the leaseholds was £127, with none being higher than £180. Most of the leases in Union Road were held by the Labouchere estate, but those
in Anson and Carleton Roads seemed to be owned by individuals. From the prices the Council paid for the leaseholds of the houses in Anson Road, it would appear that these houses were substantial with value still left in them. Nonetheless, the freehold for the 26 houses in Anson, Union and Carleton Roads was £8,950, only £100 above that for Brecknock Road and there seemed to be no payment for a building agreement. This points up the difference between the leasehold value which related to the house and the freehold which was linked to the site. Brecknock Road was a main thoroughfare, and although its houses were ripe for redevelopment, the site facing the main road had a value greater than the one behind, even though its houses were more substantial and probably better maintained.

On the Brecknock Road site the Council became involved with compensation for the tenants. Although weekly tenants were not eligible for any compensation, it was agreed that where there was hardship the Town Clerk should be authorised to make payments up to £5 out of a fund not to exceed £100. Tenants with longer agreements, and many seemed to have quarterly tenancies, were awarded amounts ranging from £10 to £60. Even tenants who sublet were given compensation for loss of rent when they gained vacant possession of their rooms for the Council. Since this was neither a clearance area nor overcrowded, the occupants could not be expected to be rehoused by the Council and had to find their own accommodation.

When the Brecknock Road estate was first considered in June 1936, the architect suggested 220 flats, which would make this the largest of the Council's estates. His estimate for building at this time was £117,250 including fees. By February 1937, it had been decided to
increase the size of the estate by five flats, and these extra flats together with the rise in building costs inflated the estimated cost of construction to £155,650, almost a third more than the original estimate. When the tenders were received in January 1938 the lowest price was £164,000 including fees. This was 40% higher than the original, but only 5% higher than the estimate of twelve months before based on the increased number of flats.61 By this time, it should come as no surprise that the winning tender was that of Gee, Walker and Slater. The Ministry of Health grant for this estate, because the site cost between £12,000 and £14,000 per acre, was £18 per flat for 40 years. This kept the rents at Brecknock Road comparable with Hornsey Lane.

Table 6.3
Rent of Flats at Brecknock Road, June 1939

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Room Flats</th>
<th>Rent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 Room</td>
<td>14/11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Room</td>
<td>17/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Room</td>
<td>19/3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Islington Housing Committee Minutes

These two estates, Hornsey Lane and Brecknock Road, were the only estates Islington Council built which were intended specifically for overcrowded families, but they were the largest estates the Council built at this time and together provided 431 of the Council's housing stock produced under the special needs legislation.

The only other building conducted by the Council under the 1930s legislation was an extension to Blythe Mansions. When they had built Blythe Mansions in 1936, the LCC was of the opinion that the flats were too close to the houses in Hillrise, formerly Upper Hornsey Rise. The plans had to be adjusted to leave more space between the flats and the houses, but at the time the LCC had been surprised that the
Council had not bought the houses and extended their estate. When the LCC sanctioned Blythe Mansions, they recommended that as soon as practicable Islington should acquire the houses and build an extension. In October 1937, ten months after the opening of Blythe Mansions, the Housing Committee announced that it would buy Nos 1 to 10 Hillrise and build in their place a 75 flat addition to the existing building. By April 1938 the Council had purchased all the houses for £13,600 which meant that they were able to claim a Government subsidy of £18 per flat for a site costing between £12,000 and £14,000 per acre. This was the same as the subsidy paid at Brecknock Road, but higher than at Hornsey Lane, where the site cost of between £8,000 and £10,000 per acre brought in a subsidy of £15 per flat. The tenders for the Blythe Mansions extension came back in late May, and this time Haymills (Contractors) Ltd had put in the lowest bid. At £50,915 plus fees, their tender compared well with the December 1937 estimate of £51,400 with fees, and suggests that the rise in costs during 1936 and 1937 was levelling off. The additional 75 flats made Blythe Mansions one of the Council's larger estates at this time, and brought the total of the Council's properties in Warltersville Road to 491 where formerly there had been only 14 houses.

This was not the end of the Housing Committees activities, however, since by the time the Second World War was declared, plans were well advanced on two other schemes, one modest and the other very ambitious. In June 1938 it was decided to buy four houses in Highbury Park, across Highbury Grange from Addington Mansions. This was part of a site that had been offered to the Council in 1919 by the
Griffiths Estate, but had had to be rejected because at approximately £5,700 per acre, the price was considered far too high. In 1938, the Council bought just under an acre of the site for £7,750. The purpose of these new flats was to house small households for which there was a growing need in the Borough, especially among the elderly. The LCC would not permit one room old peoples' flats above the first floor, and so the development came to be a mix of small dwellings including 28 one room, 6 two room, and 22 three room flats. A communal room overlooking a courtyard garden was also included in the scheme. Haymills' winning tender for £28,159 plus fees was accepted early in March 1939, when it was discovered that the total cost for the estate was just 3% over the estimate made the previous December. By the time war was declared, building had got as far as the foundations which were to prove useful as an air raid shelter, but 'The Chestnuts' as the flats were called, was not completed until after the war.

The other scheme seriously contemplated by the Housing Committee before the War was altogether more ambitious, and meant the acquisition of over 12 acres of the Marquess of Northampton's estate in the southern part of Canonbury. In April 1937 the Town Clerk intimated that he had been in communication with the Marquess of Northampton's agents about an island site formed by St Mary's, Compton and St Paul's Roads, and Canonbury Place. The site covered about 5 acres between St Paul's Road and the old Canonbury Tower, but the Marquess and his agents had other ideas for redeveloping the property and offered the Council some alternative sites. A valuer was engaged to advise on the seven alternative sites, and he produced his report
at the end of the month together with some rough estimates from the
architect. Although the property was old, and much of it ready for
redevelopment, the state of it was not such that it could be
considered a clearance area. Some 350 families would need to be
rehoused, and the Marquess insisted that the Council take
responsibility for this. However, if it could not be shown that the
people were displaced through action undertaken because of the various
housing acts, they could not be rehoused in the Council's special
needs housing. Therefore if the Council rehoused such people in their
proposed flats, the flats would not be eligible for Government grants.
Because the Council were not confident that they could make a
demolition order without successful appeals being brought, they
devised a scheme by which the Northampton Trust would forestall such
appeals by lodging one themselves with the County Court while
negotiations for purchase continued. The Trust would agree to the
adjournment of the appeal until an agreement had been reached, at
which time they would withdraw the appeal. The Council agreed to pay
any reasonable cost incurred by the Trust while this ploy was being
carried through. In return for their co-operation the Trust would
receive assurances from the Housing Committee that they would not
recommend any compulsory purchases of the Marquess' estate north of
the New River, but would leave the northern stretches of Canonbury to
the Trust.

Not surprisingly, the Ministry was unenthusiastic about this
proposal and put a stop to it. Another way had to be found which
depended on the 40 flats the Northampton Trust was planning to build
on an adjacent site being used to start the decanting process. If
those housed in these flats came from closed basement rooms in the surrounding streets, then the Trust could build with a Government grant. Approximately 340 families would be affected by the demolition, leaving 300 families to be rehoused by the Council. The LCC said that they would try to take 150 families on the condition that the Council paid £1.17.6 per dwelling for 40 years. The Housing Committee thought that 100 families in the area could be found in isolated basement rooms and overcrowded conditions so that they would warrant being rehoused in the Council's special needs flats. This left 50 households remaining, and it was thought that many of these were made up of single people, and that they would be able to find accommodation themselves.

This solution sounds somewhat mechanical after the complicated plot hatched over the closing appeals, but it was important for the Council to make their proposals plausible to the Government. Here was an opportunity for them to acquire, in proximity to three other of their estates, sites totalling 12.13 acres in the south of the Borough, which they could use to clear the most congested areas without removing people to the other end of Islington. By the spring of 1938, the scheme seems to have been more or less accepted by everyone except the Northampton Trust and the Marquess. When the seven sites comprising over 12 acres were offered to the Council, it was expected that the Council would chose the equivalent of the 5 acres they had given up in north Canonbury. It was never expected that they would take all seven sites. Since it was now unlikely that they would give up the scheme, the Marquess succeeded in getting the Housing Committee to agree that the Council would make no further
demands on the Northampton Estate for the next ten years. In fact nothing was built on the seven sites until after the Second World War, when the dwellings built there became an important addition to the housing stock in south Islington.

The housing legislation of the 1930s was a departure from previous housing initiatives in that it sought to limit government assistance to areas of obvious need. Housing reformers, such as Quigley and Goldie, were unhappy with the abolition of subsidies for general need housing in 1933, because they believed that exclusive reliance on slum clearance measures was not broadly based enough to alleviate the widespread housing need of the working classes.

However, the effects of both the 1930 Slum Clearance Act and the 1935 Overcrowding Act seem to have been of varying benefit depending on location. Robert Ryder has reported that the relatively generous subsidies under the Slum Clearance Act and low building costs led to high building activity in Durham during the 1930s. In Leeds, Robert Finnigan has noted that although a respectable 11,692 municipal dwellings were built from 1934 to 1940, the Conservatives' reluctance to become involved in compulsory purchase held back their rehousing programme. In Islington, the overcrowding legislation which came into force in 1935 fitted well the circumstances of the moment. The subsidies for expensive sites and for buildings over three storeys complemented the situation in the Borough where sites were costly and the Council of necessity had to build flats. That Labour was in power both at County Hall and at Upper Street also had some influence on the energy with which the Council approached the housing task. Patricia Garside has found that housing often proved a source of conflict.
between the metropolitan boroughs and the LCC, and it has been shown that at times this was the case in Islington. But for the five years between 1934 and 1939, the two authorities appear to have worked well together, with Islington Council benefitting from the moral and practical assistance of the LCC, so that by the Second World War Islington had nearly doubled its Council house stock under the legislation of the 1930s. What effect such a rapid increase in the number of dwellings had on the Council's tenants and on their housing management will be studied in the next two chapters.
Footnotes - Chapter Six

1. See Appendix 4 for dwellings Islington Council built under the 1930 and 1935 Housing Acts.

2. IHCM, 11 February 1924; Islington Metropolitan Borough Council Minutes, 16 April 1926, 18 November 1927.

3. Islington Metropolitan Borough Council Minutes, 19 September 1930.

4. Ibid., 19 December 1930.

5. Ibid., 27 February 1931.


7. IHCM, 2 March 1933.

8. Ibid., 5 January 1928.

9. Ibid., 4 April 1928.

10. Ibid., 6 November 1930.

11. Ibid., 2 July 1931, 4 February 1932.

12. Ibid., 1 December 1932, 5 January 1933.

13. Ibid., 6 April 1933.


15. Ibid., 17 October 1934.

16. Ibid., 29 November 1934.

17. Ibid., 6 June 1935.

18. Ibid., 4 April 1935.

19. Ibid., 18 July 1935.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid., 5 December 1935.

22. Ibid., 5 November 1936.

23. Ibid., 11 February 1937.

24. Ibid., 7 November 1935.

25. Ibid., 5 December 1935.
26. Ibid., 7 May 1936.
27. Ibid., 2 July 1936.
28. Ibid., 1 October 1936.
29. Ibid., 5 November 1936.
30. Ibid., 4 February 1937, 8 July 1937.
31. Ibid., 2 April 1936.
32. Ibid., 4 February 1937.
33. Ibid., 2 July 1936.
34. Ibid., 25 February 1937.
35. Ibid., 2 September 1937.
36. Ibid., 2 June 1938.
37. Ibid., 2 July 1936.
38. Islington Metropolitan Borough Council Minutes, 17 April 1936.
39. IHCM, 3 January 1929.
40. Ibid., 7 February 1929.
41. Islington Metropolitan Borough Council Minutes, 15 November 1935.
43. IHCM, 7 May 1936.
44. Islington Metropolitan Borough Council Minutes, 17 April 1936.
45. Ibid., 15 May 1936.
46. Ibid.
47. IHCM, 4 June 1936.
48. Ibid.
49. Ibid.
50. Ibid., 1 April 1937; Islington Metropolitan Borough Council Minutes, 16 April 1937.
51. IHCM, 3 February 1938.
55. *Ibid.*, 5 March 1936.
70. *Ibid.*, 1 April 1937.


Chapter Seven - Rents and Management of Islington Council's Housing 1919 - 1939

Every discussion about housing, whether private or public, must come to the question of rent. At the end of the chain in the private sector from ground landlord to sub-letting tenant, it is the amount of rent obtainable which determines on the one hand the value of the landlord's investment and on the other, the tenant's ability to occupy the dwelling. The Government intervened in the housing market after World War I because there was general agreement that the simple balance between investment and return, mediated through rents, had been lost. Whether that simple balance ever existed throughout the market is questionable, but what is without doubt is that rent continued to be a considerable problem in each of the housing initiatives undertaken by the various Governments between 1919 and the Second World War. This chapter considers the renting policies of Islington Council during the 1920s and 1930s, and the steps they took to manage their dwellings over the inter-war period.

When the 1919 housing legislation was being prepared, it was acknowledged that the problems inherent in the production of mass housing were having to be deferred until the immediate emergency was dealt with. In a 1917 Memorandum by the Advisory Housing Panel on the Emergency Problem it was stated that:

The attempt to create machinery for the permanent provision of an adequate supply of houses throughout the country, would raise questions of great complexity and far reaching importance, which could not be decided without much consideration both in Parliament and outside.'

The most intransigent problem was that of rents, which was itself part of a larger question of wage levels. In a debate in the House of
It is admitted on all hands that there will have to be some subsidies given to enable rents to be kept low. Still, my view would be, that while this may be necessary for the moment, that rents should be brought to an economic scale as soon as possible, and that it would be far better that wages should accrue to the labourers sufficient to meet their full obligations rather than that special classes of labourer should receive subsidies in respect of particular items of expenditure. It is much better that every workman should receive enough to enable him to live properly, to enable him to maintain his family in comfort, and to pay his rent and all other charges just like any other citizen.2

Straightforward scarcity caused by a lack of building during the war was one thing, but the inability of low-paid workers to pay even the most modest rents, proved a much more difficult problem to solve, especially after the economy had been firmly set on a deflationary course.

One of the reasons given for the decline in the property market before World War I was the low level of rents landlords were able to obtain for their working-class property while wages remained stagnant.3 The Board of Trade in the 1913 Report of their Enquiry into the Cost of Living of the Working Classes gave the rents prevailing in Islington in 1905 and 1912 as shown in Table 7.1. Rents in the southern half of the Borough were about 6d more than in the northern half, since the area south of the North London Railway line was closer to the valuable land at the centre of London. These rents included rates and water charges, which even before World War I made up a significant proportion of the whole rent, and pushed up the cost per room. Only those households enjoying a wage of between £3 and £4 a week could afford to take a six room house without sharing the house space with others, but, as we have seen, by 1914 living in rooms

-230-
rather than whole houses had become the accepted practice of most working-class people in the Borough.

Table 7.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No of Rooms</th>
<th>Rent 1905</th>
<th>Rent 1912</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 Rooms</td>
<td>5/- to 7/6</td>
<td>5/- to 7/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Rooms</td>
<td>6/6 to 9/-</td>
<td>6/6 to 8/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Rooms</td>
<td>8/6 to 12/-</td>
<td>8/6 to 11/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Rooms</td>
<td>10/- to 14/6</td>
<td>10/- to 14/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Rooms</td>
<td>12/- to 17/-</td>
<td>12/- to 16/-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Board of Trade, Cost of Living of the Working Classes, 1913

The Rent Restrictions Act of 1915 took those working class rents charged on 3 August 1914 as the 'standard rent', but by 1920 landlords had been able to raise their rents by 40%. According to the Board of Trade figures the average rent per room in 1912 was between 2/6 and 3/-, and if it is assumed that Islington landlords took advantage of the permitted increase, inclusive rents in 1920 would average between 3/4 and 4/6 per room. This would give the following range of rents for the various size dwellings:

Table 7.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No of Rooms</th>
<th>Rent 1920</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 Rooms</td>
<td>6/7 to 9/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Rooms</td>
<td>9/11 to 13/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Rooms</td>
<td>13/2 to 18/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Rooms</td>
<td>16/6 to 22/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Rooms</td>
<td>19/9 to 27/-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: derived from Board of Trade, Cost of Living of the Working Classes, 1913

The average post-War rent level in the Borough was to be important to the Council when they came to set their rents because one of the guidelines set by the Ministry in determining rents was to be 'the rental value of the immediate surrounding district'.

As has been seen, Islington was a borough in which there were
both working-class and middle-class areas. Depending on the area, there was an accepted manner of renting the houses. In the working-class houses it was usual for rent to be collected weekly, but where the rental value of the house was low, the rates could be collected from the owner who then included the rates in the rent. Where this was the case the owner could claim a percentage of the rate from the local authority, a practice which continued in Islington at least until the 1940s although the Council temporarily abandoned it in 1909 after fighting a case through appeal. Where a house was sublet the rent was collected from the head tenant who would then obtain the rent for the various rooms from his sub-tenants. Estate agents were often employed to act on behalf of the landlord to collect the rents and evict the tenants if necessary. In middle-class areas of Islington it seems usual that the letting agreement would be up to three years as it was for houses in Prospero Road in 1914, with the rent paid monthly in advance. These arrangements depended on a steady and regular income which enabled the tenant to make a commitment for relatively long periods, but it also gave him more security of tenure. The actual rent per room may not have been that different between the working-class houses and those occupied by middle-class households, but the middle class occupied the whole of their houses and they undertook long-term agreements, two conditions which made all the difference.

Well aware that rent levels determined access, both the local authorities and the Ministry of Health were concerned about the rents charged for dwellings provided under the 1919 legislation. As local authorities set their rents, however, conflict arose between them and
the Ministry over the level of their rents, and this conflict pointed up the confusion there was over the purpose for which the houses had been built. Were they intended to alleviate a simple shortage of housing experienced right across the housing market, or were they supposed radically to open access to good housing among the poor working classes? By February 1920 when a lettings sub-committee was established to set rents and to select tenants for the first of Islington’s conversions, Labour was in control of the Council. It seems that some of the Labour members, for example Addington the chairman of the Housing Committee, were in favour of low rents, but the renting agreement adopted suggests that the Council’s new houses were never intended for the very poor. This may have been a given from the start since the LCC had responsibility under Parts I and II of the Housing Act by which a local authority had the power to clear and rebuild in unhealthy areas. The very poorest would live in such areas, and they were thus the concern of the County Council. Although under Part III, all local authority housing was intended for the 'working class', no group within that class was specified.

As already noted, the Ministry in their rules determining the level of rents to be charged by local authorities required that 'rents obtaining in the locality for houses for the working classes' be taken into consideration. In Islington, the housing provided under the 1919 legislation was scattered around the Borough, in middle-class areas as well as in those considered working-class. The conversions and newly built flats in Crouch Hill and those in Highbury especially were located in middle class locations. 'Any superiority in the condition or amenity of the houses' was also to be considered, and
since most of the Council's properties provided kitchens equipped with cookers and coppers, gas fires, and separate bathrooms, self-contained within flats of various sizes, the level of amenity was high. Finally to be considered was 'the classes of tenant in the district for whom the houses are provided'. In June 1919, it will be remembered, the Housing Committee had to consider the suitability of Highbury Park for the erection of their flats given the sort of property in the locality, and they had decided that it was appropriate that they 'make provision for two sections of the community for each of which there is need for additional housing accommodation.' Halton Mansions would suit the lower end of the market, while their flats in Highbury would cater for those better off. In this way a convenient ambivalence was maintained about just who it was the Council was supposed to house.

One of the assumptions lying behind the Government's housing initiative was that 'economic' rents could not be asked for dwellings intended for the working classes, given the extraordinary state of the housing market. Besides the rules set down for determining rents the Ministry advised that rents be set so that 'the incline towards an economic rent would not be too steep', and they anticipated that by 1927 the rent obtainable would represent two thirds of an economic rent. This vague advice seemed to give local authorities a great deal of leeway in the rents they charged, but in practice this was not so. Whereas the Ministry had advised them to charge rents obtaining in their area, the Ministry itself, under pressure from the Treasury, seemed to be working on the amount of revenue in relation to the cost of the housing schemes. It also appears that this relation was worked out by rule of thumb, because if there was some formula, it was
not passed onto the local authorities. It was up to the individual housing committees to set and to administer the rents, but the Ministry required that the proposed rents be submitted to them for approval, and, as will be shown, almost every rent submitted by Islington was questioned by the Ministry.

When the letting sub-committee started its work in the spring of 1920, they had to deal first with the conversions, and they chose for the majority of these a letting agreement similar to those of middle-class houses in the Borough. The flats were held on a three years agreement and the rents were to be paid monthly in advance. The rents were independent of the municipal rates which were to be the responsibility of the tenant, a not inconsiderable expense for the Council's tenants. The 30% increase in controlled rents allowed in 1920 was intended in part to compensate landlords for the steep rise in rates where they paid the rates for their tenants. Municipal services had been curtailed during the War and a cessation of building meant that there had been no increase in assessable value, but increase in Council wages after the War and a burst of activity meant that local authorities needed more money. Assessable value in Islington actually decreased from 1913 to 1919 and only began to recover in 1922.

Table 7.3
Assessable Value in Islington

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1913 - 1914</td>
<td>£1,909,848</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1919 - 1920</td>
<td>1,830,674</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922 - 1923</td>
<td>1,885,964</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ministry of Health, Statement Showing... Amount of the Local Rates, 1921

The rates rose in the Borough to compensate for all these factors and
the Labour commitment to public services meant that by 1921 - 22 the rate had reached 18/8, so that in 1921 the amount received by the Council had started to rise sharply despite a sluggish rateable value.

Table 7.4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Amount Received from the Rate in Islington (£)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1919 - 1920</td>
<td>905,832</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920 - 1921</td>
<td>1,571,451</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921 - 1922</td>
<td>1,748,193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922 - 1923</td>
<td>1,211,362</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Islington Metropolitan Borough Council Minutes, 1920 - 1923

In 1921 and 1922 Islington headed all the metropolitan boroughs after Westminster in the amount the Council actually collected in rates, and by 1921 it had greatly increased its spending on roads, poor relief, and general services.15

The relatively high rate in Islington during the early years of the housing programme should be borne in mind when the Council's rents are considered. If in 1920 a tenant took one of the Council's two bedroom flats for a moderate rent of 13/6 rent per week with a rateable value of £23, for the first year he would pay an additional 4/5 per week in rates; the next year 7/7 per week; and in 1921 - 22, 8/2 per week. At the same time as this expense was rising, wages were dropping and unemployment was becoming a serious problem. The Municipal Reform party was elected in November 1922, and for the next twelve years they remained in power by reducing the rates and threatening greatly increased rates if Labour should once more gain control of the Council.

There was some acknowledgement that the Council was catering for 'two sections of the community' when they arranged that weekly rents with rates included could be paid by some of their tenants. This arrangement was made for the 87 tenancies at City and Queens Mansions.
and for a few in some of the converted houses. 16 Although City and
Queens Mansions had not by any means been the cheapest flats to
provide, the rents were considered lower than average, although on
inspection they turned out to be only slightly lower than those for
the purpose built flats at Halton Mansions. The weekly payment of
rent and rates together was considered easier for weekly wage earners
to cope with, but it could also work against them if the rates were
lowered as they were in 1924. When the residents complained in May
1924 that the rents ought to be reduced to correspond with the
reductions in the rates, the Committee refused to lower rents 'having
regard to the fact that the flats at City and Queens Mansions are let
at rents considerably below their economic value. . . .' 17 It was not
until the 1930s that this practice was recognised as unfair and
changed.

During the first year of their activity the letting sub-committee
set the rents of 55 dwellings in the converted houses, and for most of
these the Ministry insisted that they be revised upward. The
arrangement for the subsidy under the 1919 Housing Act was that the
Government agreed to pay the deficit incurred by the local authorities
over a penny rate in the pound. The actual expenditure on the 1919
dwellings including conversions and newly built flats is shown in
Table 7.5. In 1923, after Municipal Reform was back in control and
the rate had returned to a less inflated figure, a penny rate in
Islington came to £5,047. When all the 1919 flats were completed the
annual rent amounted to £20,820, which meant that barring rent arrears
the Council's contribution to the deficit was about £26,000 per year.
Despite this, a glance at the expenditure figures will show that the
Government had to make a substantial contribution every year. As the programme progressed and it became evident that spiralling costs would commit the Treasury to a considerable annual expense, they put pressure on the Ministry of Health to extract higher rents. In January 1921, Addison, while he was still Minister of Health, urged the local authorities to accept the Ministry's suggested rents because low rents could threaten the continuation of the programme.  

Table 7.5
Annual Expenditure on Islington's 1919 Housing Scheme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>£</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| March 1922 - March 1923 | 20,941
| 1923               | 43,694
| 1924               | 43,419
| 1925               | 43,074
| 1926               | 41,708
| 1927               | 41,545
| 1928               | 44,088
| 1929               | 44,611
| 1930               | 44,924
| 1931               | 46,558
| 1932               | 49,780
| 1933               | 49,291
| 1934               | 48,688

Source: Islington Housing Committee Minutes

In November 1920 the Housing Committee took pains to explain to the Council their part in the setting of rents for the converted flats, then being let. The Chairman said that members of the Committee had visited the flats and had carefully considered the rents, taking into account the accommodation, amenities provided, and the locality of the flats. As they were required, they then sought approval of the Ministry, 'but in this, as in other matters, the Ministry were not prompt in giving their decision.' Impatient to let the flats when there was such a need in the Borough the Committee went ahead without the Ministry's approval. When they finally responded,
the Ministry found the Committee's rents too low and requested that they put them up. This pattern of events was repeated with most of the other converted flats, so that there was a discernible difference in the average rents proposed by the Committee and those requested by the Ministry.

Table 7.6
Average Exclusive Rents of Council's Converted Flats in Islington

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No of Rooms</th>
<th>Letting-Committee</th>
<th>Ministry of Health</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 Rooms</td>
<td>13/2</td>
<td>14/8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Rooms</td>
<td>16/3</td>
<td>17/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Rooms</td>
<td>21/9</td>
<td>22/11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Islington Housing Committee Minutes

The difference does not appear great, but in the instance of 3 room dwellings the average increase in rent would have been £3.18.0 per year per dwelling, while for the 4 room dwellings it would have been £2.3.0, and for the 5 room dwellings, £3.0.0.

Interference from the Ministry undermined confidence in the Housing Committee's ability to judge local conditions, but they did not give up easily, especially where they had been persuaded to take property against their better judgment. No 422 Hornsey Road was one of these houses and when the Ministry required that the Council charge 17/6 for a three bedroom flat on the first floor which shared a WC with the flat on the next floor, the committee protested to the London Housing Board:

... although the housing schemes of the Council are intended to provide accommodation for the working classes, the people who are mostly in need of accommodation cannot afford to pay the rents which by reason of the abnormal demand the flats will command; and stating that if the Board do not see their way to agree to the inclusive rent of 16/- per week suggested the Committee desire that the matter may be submitted to the Appeal Tribunal for decision.20

The Appeal Tribunal was set up by the Ministry in 1921 to arbitrate
between them and the local authorities about disputed rents. Although none of the Islington rents got as far as the Tribunal, Poplar, Battersea, Bethnal Green and Hammersmith all appealed to them for their services. In October 1921 the Committee called on the District Valuer to report on rents in dispute between the Ministry and the Committee with the prospect of going to the Appeal Tribunal, but in the end the rents were set without arbitration. In 1924 a Minute to the Minister of Health described the Tribunal as 'a most useful safety valve for the last 2 years', and it is likely that from its inception the Tribunal was a means of smoothing conflict between the Ministry and the local authorities.

Despite their concern about the ability of their tenants to pay the rents of the Council's dwellings, the letting sub-committee were vague about what criteria should be applied in the selection of their tenants. In February 1920 it was resolved that 'preference be given to any necessitous cases of ex-service men living in the Borough and that they be written to with others enquiring which particular flat they wish to rent.' As soon as it was known that the Council was providing dwellings, applications were made from the public so that by the time the lettings sub-committee were ready to start their selection they had already received 800 applications, 'many of the most urgent character'. In 1923 the number of applicants was still high, with 800 applying for 40 flats at Halton Mansions. The Housing Committee reported to the Council that:

We have let the flats to the persons who, in our judgment, were in most urgent need of accommodation, subject to references and inquiries proving satisfactory.

They were especially at pains to point out that applications were
considered in an impartial way, but it is apparent that allocation at this time depended on the personal approval of the members of the lettings sub-committee.

When Labour held the majority in the Council local political groups made representation to the Housing Committee about what they regarded as the excessively high rents charged for the Council's dwellings. In April 1920 the South West Islington Branch of the British Socialists' Party sent the following resolution:

That the Islington Borough Council be urged strongly to give immediate preference to the most urgent cases in allocating houses or flats that come under their control for letting. Inability of the applicant to pay the full rent fixed should not be a bar to applicants being granted accommodation. . . . 27

The Housing Committee responded by saying that as far as possible preference was given to urgent cases but that the decision about the rents charged rested with the Ministry of Health. Then in June the same year the Islington Labour Party protested that the rents being charged for Council accommodation were exorbitant and not within the means of the average member of the working classes. 28

It seems that many Councils found that the rents demanded by the Ministry were unrealistically high if their dwellings were to be let to the members of the working class most in need. Birmingham Council began with a letting policy which favoured ex-servicemen with large families, but the relatively high rents of their dwellings forced them soon to change this policy as rent arrears became a serious problem. 29 Families with the greatest number of children usually depended on unskilled labour, that section of the workforce first to be affected adversely by the unemployment of 1921. And while Birmingham Council tried to bring rents down from their average of 15/- per dwelling, the
Ministry was equally intent on keeping rents up, commensurate with the high standard of the housing provided.

The protests addressed to Islington's Housing Committee would have been aimed at the rents of the converted flats, but when the new flats were built, the Ministry insisted that they too be let at relatively high rents. Again rents were to be paid monthly in advance and they were exclusive of rates and water charges.

Tables 7.7

Average Rents at Addington, Halton, and Manchester Mansions, 1921 - 1922

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No of Rooms</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 Rooms</td>
<td>10/6</td>
<td>10/3 to 10/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Rooms</td>
<td>13/2</td>
<td>12/6 to 14/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Rooms</td>
<td>16/10</td>
<td>15/- to 18/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Rooms</td>
<td>19/-</td>
<td>18/- to 20/4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Islington Housing Committee Minutes

The purpose-built flats provided a more homogeneous accommodation than that of the flats in the conversions, but the number of rooms per flat set one estate off from another. At Addington Mansions there were 27 four room and 78 five room flats, and only 2 with three rooms. At Halton Mansions on the other hand, 105 flats were three room, and 63, four room. Rents were 3/6 more for a four room flat at Addington Mansions than at Halton Mansions, but just the fact that the majority of the flats were of the larger type at the former estate meant that the households moving to Addington Mansions had to be relatively well off with the ability to take on a substantial commitment.

Under these circumstances who could afford the Council's flats? It would seem that at this time the tenants were drawn from the middle classes and the skilled working classes, especially as the type of property being offered was at the top end of the Islington market,
although the rents themselves may not have been the highest in the Borough. In the end it seems tenants were selected on their ability to pay the rent, as references were taken up before lettings were made. It is not known exactly who the Council's first tenants were, but some individuals appear in the Housing Committee Minutes so that we do know that among the tenants were a clergyman, an alderman, and a bank clerk, as well as a civil servant, an employee of the Anglo-American Oil Company, and employees of the Council and the Board of Guardians. Some of the tenants were particularly demanding, especially those in conversions where some of them asked for additional amenities. When he moved in, one tenant at 29 Aberdeen Park asked for a wash basin in the bathroom, a wardrobe in one of the bedrooms, and shelves in a large cupboard in the passage.  

Prospective tenants, especially of flats slow to let, sometimes tried to drive a bargain with the Housing Committee. One man of 45 Canonbury Square offered 15/- per week for a flat in 93 Highbury Quadrant which the Ministry had decided should be let for 22/6.  

When it came to seeking compensation for damage to personal possessions due to damp, tenants were not adverse to threatening the Council with legal action. Behaviour such as this suggests tenants were used to making choices in the private sector, and that they regarded the Council as they would any other landlord.

In the summer of 1922 the Council looked forward to having 502 dwellings under their care, and the burden of managing their property was beginning to be felt. Very few of the local authorities involved in the 1919 housing initiative had any bureaucracy with which to manage their housing stock, and the Metropolitan Boroughs tended to
use the services of their Borough Treasurer's departments to manage their dwellings. Islington was one of these boroughs where the Treasurer's department collected the rents and channelled complaints and other matters to the Housing Committee. Also involved were the Town Clerk's office and the Borough Solicitor when it came to action being taken on arrears. At first the Ministry of Health had allowed 5% of gross estimated rent for management and supervision, but realising that in some circumstances this would be inadequate, the Ministry decided that they would investigate any local authority spending more than the recommended amount on management, and judge its need on merit. Already the LCC had pointed out the excessive amount Islington Council had claimed for management expenses, and the Town Clerk in July 1922, noting that salaries alone accounted for more than 5% of the gross estimated rent, suggested that a housing manager be appointed to consolidate in one position the responsibility for managing the Council's housing.

It is obvious that the present over-lapping system must be ended without delay. Unless this is done it is more than probable that the Ministry of Health and the LCC will decline to meet the expenditure of the Borough Council on this service in excess of 5% of the gross estimated rent, and the balance will then fall upon the general rate of the borough.

The housing manager appointed in September 1922 had had 12 years experience with estate agents in London and Shrewsbury, and had managed about 3,000 houses. It was claimed that he was thoroughly conversant with the Acts of Parliament relating to property, but he did not seem to have had any experience with public or semi-public bodies such as housing associations.

The duties of the housing manager were to include the letting of
flats, the arrangements for repairs, the collection of rents, and the supervision of the superintendents. Dealing with rent arrears became an important part of the housing manager's remit, and it was during the spring and summer of 1922 immediately before it was decided to take on a manager that arrears became a problem for the Housing Committee. During 1922 the rent level of the Council's dwellings was presenting difficulties for some of the tenants, such as one of the tenants at Halton Mansions whose salary had been reduced to such an extent that he found it impossible to pay the rent and rates. Another tenant at Halton Mansions found in the summer that he could not pay his rates 'as expenses of the flat are quite beyond his income owing to reduced circumstances.' These two tenants were casualties of the depression, but the Housing Committee also had difficulties with tenants temporarily accommodated at Halton Mansions at reduced rents when their dwellings were taken to build the new flats. In April when the Committee asked that they either pay the full rent or vacate, many of them simply refused to pay their rent. This was obviously a situation where management was needed, and the Committee had to consider what constituted 'rent arrears'. In September 1922 it was decided that in the case of weekly lettings two to three weeks' overdue rent would constitute arrears, while for monthly lettings, more than one month's rent owing would put the tenant in arrears.

The authority to act against tenants in arrears lay with the Council's Solicitor, and there was a difference of opinion over what action should be taken. The Solicitor advised proceedings in the County Court to recover arrears and the possession of the dwelling. The Committee, on the other hand, preferred obtaining a distraining
order, by which the County Court could, under the Rent Restrictions Act, make an alternative order for payment by instalments with the option to distrain if the tenant failed to pay. According to the Solicitor's experience this method of dealing with arrears led the tenant to pay only what was due under the Court order to the neglect of current rent. The Committee at this time left to the discretion of the Solicitor the course to be followed.

Some of the most intractable arrears came from a group of tenants, who held monthly tenancy agreements, but insisted that they need not pay their monthly rent in advance. It seems that they worked for the Islington Board of Guardians like the tenant of 14 Halton Mansions:

This defendant is another employee of the Islington Guardians and is very troublesome, absolutely refusing to pay the rent in advance in accordance with his tenancy agreement. I have informed him that the Council in justice to their other tenants must take exception to what appears to me to be an organised resistance by the employees of the Islington Guardians. I believe there are similar cases beyond the last two.

Later in the slum clearance flats the tenants would pay irregularly by missing one week and then paying two, but these tenants were refusing to abide by the Committee's regulations as a matter of principle, rather than out of necessity.

Rent arrears remained a preoccupation of the Housing Committee and their manager. Perhaps because of their vigilance, the proportion of arrears remained very low, as Table 7.8 demonstrates. The average proportion of tenants in arrears was 10.5%, while the average amount of arrears was 1.1% of the annual rent roll, and the Committee seem to have maintained these low levels of arrears by strict management. In 1924 the housing manager began the practice of reporting the arrears
at 31 March each year, and from the remarks accompanying his list the main causes for failing to pay the rent were 'temporary financial embarrassment', illness, unemployment, and what was described as 'bad payer'.

Table 7.8
Rent Arrears in Islington Council's Dwellings 1924 to 1935

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>No of tenants in arrears</th>
<th>Amount of arrears % of total</th>
<th>Average amount of rent in arrears per tenant £ s d</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>31.3.24</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>4.6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.3.25</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>3.10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.3.26</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>4.8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.3.27</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>4.8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.3.28</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>3.12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.3.29</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>4.12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.3.30</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>5.8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.3.31</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>6.14.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.3.32</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>5.12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.3.33</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>4.16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.3.34</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>4.2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.2.35</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>4.0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.11.35</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>5.6.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Islington Housing Committee Minutes

Whereas some local authorities, such as those described by Robert Ryder in County Durham, appeared to be more lenient than private landlords, from the very low rate in Islington, it would seem that a tight grip was maintained on arrears. During the depression years of 1930 and 1931 there was a drop in the proportion of tenants in arrears, and this may have been the result of tenants who could not pay their rent dropping out of the public sector. At the same time the average amount owed rose, suggesting that those still in the Council's dwellings and in arrears were more heavily in debt. The practice of producing an annual list of tenants in arrears was abandoned after 1935, and this reflected a recognition of a change in the Council's tenants and, as will be shown, a corresponding change in
the style of management. There were suggestions as early as 1931 that the rents should be collected weekly in all the Council's flats, but it was not until after Labour regained power in 1934 that a reorganisation of the whole tenancy agreement took place.

Another of the housing manager's responsibilities was the supervision of the caretakers at the various estates. The Housing Committee took the role of the caretakers seriously and they set about hiring one in October 1920 as soon as they were ready to let the flats at City Mansions, the first of their estates which concentrated tenants in one building.45 The caretakers were paid £4.10.0 a week, but this assumed that the caretakers' wives would work along with their husbands. In addition to their wages they were to receive free living accommodation, light and fuel, and a uniform. The services of a conscientious caretaker could make a great deal of difference in the running of an estate, especially in those of the better type. At Addington Mansions, when after 15 years their caretaker was moved to another estate, the tenants presented the Housing Committee with a petition protesting at his removal and referring to 'the discretion and tact of Mr Dessent, whereby the status of the property was preserved in the interests of the council'.46

The role of the caretakers in maintaining the value of the Council's property was very much in the minds of the Housing Committee, and lay behind their battle with the Ministry of Health over the amount they spent on management. In December 1924 the Ministry took exception to the amount the Council paid their caretakers, but the Committee successfully defended the wage of the equivalent of £6 a week.47 When the LCC in August 1929 baulked at
paying a contribution of £2.2.0 per flat at Laycock Mansions under the 1924 Act, they particularly took issue with what they considered an extravagant amount spent on the caretaker. The LCC paid their caretakers £1.1.3 per week plus three rooms rent free. It was then expected that the caretakers would make up their wages to about £5 a week through decoration and repair work, paid for at union rates. Islington's caretakers started out with a wage of £4.10.0 plus free accommodation and other benefits.

Islington Council were always aware that they were providing dwellings for the general population, and not flats for special need groups which they saw as the province of the LCC. This attitude was revealed in the Housing Committee's disagreement with the Ministry over the amount they charged to the Assisted Housing Schemes for the upkeep of the gardens at their various estates and houses. It is worth quoting at length the Town Clerk's response to the Ministry:

... [he] pointed out that the gardens, lawns etc. form part of the amenities of the Council's housing schemes which the Ministry had emphasised as being desirable to retain in each locality as far as possible and were approved as such when the plans were submitted to the Ministry, that the preservation of these amenities is necessary in order to maintain the attractiveness and the letting value of the several properties affected which amenities were taken into consideration in fixing the rents of the flats, that the tenants might have some claim that the gardens, etc. shall be kept in such a manner as will enable them to make full use and enjoyment of the privileges for which they pay by way of rent, that if the gardens, etc. are neglected the tenants may make demands for reduced rents, and that - on the other hand - if the council undertake the maintenance of the gardens, etc. it is not equitable that the general body of ratepayers should be called upon to pay the cost of work which strictly appertains to a State-aided scheme.

This response pointed up the contradictions in the Government's housing initiatives, especially that of 1919, which was conceived as an intervention in the private market, but which, as time went on,
became seen by the Government as a very expensive means of reviving
the housing market without providing accommodation for those who most
needed cheap housing. Islington's insistence on spending Treasury
money on gardens must have seemed perverse to the Ministry when it had
closed down the 1919 housing scheme because of its expense, but it was
evident that the Council were not prepared to reduce the amenities of
their estates to the level of cheap special need housing.

For the rest of the 1920s the Housing Committee were occupied
with acquiring sites and building estates under the 1924 Housing Act,
and the management continued apparently without serious problems.
Under the 1924 legislation the Housing Committee could set rents
without approval from the Ministry of Health as long as the deficiency
on the dwellings was approved by the LCC. Rents for the new housing
were on the whole slightly lower than those for the flats produced
under the 1919 Act.

Table 7.9
Average Exclusive Rents of Islington Council's Flats Built under 1924
Housing Act

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Estate</th>
<th>2 Rooms</th>
<th>3 Rooms</th>
<th>4 Rooms</th>
<th>5 Rooms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tyndale Mansions</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>12/6</td>
<td>16/6</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laycock Mansions</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>11/10</td>
<td>15/-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avenell Mansions</td>
<td>10/-</td>
<td>14/-</td>
<td>18/-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leyden Mansions</td>
<td>10/6</td>
<td>13/9</td>
<td>16/-</td>
<td>17/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Highlands</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>12/-</td>
<td>15/6</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total average</td>
<td>10/3</td>
<td>12/10</td>
<td>16/2</td>
<td>17/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per room</td>
<td>5/-</td>
<td>4/2</td>
<td>4/-</td>
<td>3/5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Islington Housing Committee Minutes

Expenditure on these schemes was much less than it was on the 1919
dwellings. They were built over a much longer period of time and
although by 1934 there were nearly the same number of dwellings under
the 1924 legislation, their annual costs were about half the 1919
flats. (See Table 7.10) Differentials in the rents of the various
estates were caused by the changes in the amount of subsidy which was reduced in 1927 from £9 to £7.10. 'The Highlands' was of course built without subsidy at the very trough of prices for labour and materials. Eventually the discrepancy between rents for the same accommodation became an issue for the Council's tenants, and this will be considered in Chapter Eight.

Table 7.10
Annual Expenditure on Islington Council's Dwellings Built under the 1924 Housing Act

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>March 1924</th>
<th>March 1925</th>
<th>March 1926</th>
<th>March 1927</th>
<th>March 1928</th>
<th>March 1929</th>
<th>March 1930</th>
<th>March 1931</th>
<th>March 1932</th>
<th>March 1933</th>
<th>March 1934</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1924</td>
<td>528</td>
<td>2,601</td>
<td>9,731</td>
<td>12,186</td>
<td>13,253</td>
<td>14,053</td>
<td>18,030</td>
<td>23,140</td>
<td>24,198</td>
<td>24,198</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td>528</td>
<td>2,601</td>
<td>9,731</td>
<td>12,186</td>
<td>13,253</td>
<td>14,053</td>
<td>18,030</td>
<td>23,140</td>
<td>24,198</td>
<td>24,198</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Islington Housing Committee Minutes

In 1933 the work of the Housing Committee was disrupted when it came to light that the housing manager had been holding back flats from letting if he did not regard anyone on the waiting list suitable. In other words the responsibility for letting had passed from the elected members to an officer of the Council. The manager may have been acting in good faith, as increasingly the type of people applying for the Council's dwellings were less able to pay the rents. He resigned immediately, and the Committee replaced him by someone who had worked in both the public and private sector. The new manager had had experience with the Councils of West Ham and Wallasey as well as 8 years as an estate manager with a firm of surveyors. With the arrival of the new housing manager, the Committee began a review of their housing procedures which took into consideration the changes
that had taken place in the type of occupiers of the Council's dwellings, and perhaps just as much, the shift in the character of Islington itself.

In Chapter 5 it was suggested that 'filtering up' had not occurred in Islington even though the housing shortage was being eased by suburban building, and despite vacant house property in the Borough, there was still serious overcrowding. Overcrowding, seen by many as the root of all housing evils, came about when sub-letting became the accepted practice in a house. After the Council undertook responsibility for inspecting property for overcrowding and the illegal use of underground rooms, some shocking conditions came to light. In September 1931 the Medical Officer of Health reported on No 15 Douglas Road in Canonbury. The ground landlord of the house was the Marquess of Northampton who owned most of the land in the area, and the house was leased to a Miss Schaefer who had let the house to a tenant. The tenant in turn had sub-let two rooms in the basement of the house for 15/- a week to a man with a wife and six daughters, the eldest of whom was 21. The family had been living in these two rooms for about 8 years, but to describe their living space as two rooms was an exaggeration since one of the rooms was under the stairs and measured 7 feet long x 6 feet 3 inches wide x 6 feet 3 inches high. There was no window or fireplace for ventilation and only a ventilator in one of the stair risers provided any air. In this room slept the three eldest girls. The man had been employed as a grocer's warehouseman by Messrs Jones Bros in Holloway Road, but was now unemployed and received 10/- old age pension. Five of the girls worked but they earned only an average of about 18/- a week between
them. The family had applied to the Church Army for better accommodation without success; nonetheless a closing order was made on the small basement room and the sub-tenant was told that he must find somewhere else to live.

Where rooms were closed the tenants very often had to vacate the property and then it became apparent that it was difficult for them to find alternative accommodation. Moving out of their neighbourhood could be disastrous for the poor working class since the informal connections they established locally enabled them to exist on little money. Family networks, casual work, credit in shops, and proximity to open markets and pawnbrokers formed the sort of social relations which replaced cash as the currency of daily life. Those who were able to escape into the money economy could move physically beyond the claustrophobic world of poverty to the northern reaches of the Borough and even to the outer suburbs. When in the late 1930s the Housing Committee were trying to fill their new special needs estates in the north of the Borough, they had difficulty finding enough tenants in the north and they decided to let to tenants from other parts of Islington. However, it was difficult for tenants in the southern wards to move so far away from their neighbourhoods. In 1938 a closing order was made on 100 York Way near Kings Cross station and the occupier offered a flat in Coleman Mansions at the northern end of the Borough in Crouch Hill. The man refused the flat because he worked at Covent Garden market and since he had to leave for work before public transport began in the morning he needed to be within walking distance of the market.

Those moved from the clearance areas declared by the Council
often found alternative accommodation only at a rent higher than they were paying in their condemned houses. If they could not get a flat from the LCC, whose rents were generally lower than those of Islington Council, then they moved to streets which seemed not much better than those they were leaving. In 1937 the occupier of York Cottages, Upper Street, who paid 14/6 for his accommodation, moved when the cottages were declared a clearance area to 47 Mayton Street, where he had to pay £1.15.0. The occupier of 67 Randells Road found that his rent of 6/9 went up to 12/6 when he was forced to move out of his house in a clearance area to 40 Brooksby Street. These people were recorded because their difficulties led them to ask the Housing Committee to contribute to their removing expenses, but it does seem that people living in the overcrowded areas of the Borough were constrained in their choice of accommodation. When by closing orders and clearance areas they were forced to move, they were not able to choose the larger houses in the better areas of Islington, but were condemned to find property similar to what they had lived in before, only at a higher rent. Nonetheless, by the mid 1930s the better neighbourhoods had become vulnerable to a change in class, especially since by this time they had lost many of their middle-class inhabitants to the suburbs.

Whatever change or continuity there was in Islington's housing market, the Council had to adjust to imperatives from central Government. Both the 1930 and 1935 Housing Acts were intended to address the perceived problems of inadequate housing particularly in the cities. In 1933 house building under the 1924 Act came to an end, and the emphasis shifted from simply providing more houses for the
working class to building in connection with specific slum clearance projects and later for rehousing those from declared overcrowded conditions. The flats built under this legislation, using the appropriate subsidies, could not be used for any tenants who were not in need because of the action by the local authorities. This meant that there was an element of coercion on both sides, since the occupiers of slum clearance areas and overcrowded rooms had no choice about leaving their previous dwellings, and the local authorities had to accept them as tenants as long as they had the ability to pay. This last proviso succeeded in pointing up the contradictions inherent in the drive against the slums. Those who lived in inadequate housing were often the least able to take on the commitment of a flat at the rents set.57

As noted above, one of the attractions of the 1924 Housing Act was that the Government paid a flat rate subsidy for each dwelling and left the local authorities to set their own rents. However the rents of the 1919 dwellings and those constructed under the 1923 and 1924 Acts were to be kept under separate accounts, so that anomalies gradually emerged as more housing was built under the later subsidies.58 One further problem for Islington was the deterioration of the conversions. By the early 1930s some of the flats were in such a poor state with inadequate amenities, that the relatively high rents required by the Ministry under the 1919 Act resulted in the flats remaining vacant for long periods.

Difficulties in letting the conversions emerged quite early on, and despite the housing shortage, the size of the flats and their expensive conversion led to the rents being beyond the average of
working-class means. In May 1924 it was noted that No 2 Park House at an inclusive rent of £2 per week had been empty six months, and it was remarked that 'a place must be bad in the eyes of proposing occupants to stand empty at the present time.' As time went on and more middle-class housing became available, the sort of people who could afford the rents were less likely to be willing to want the conversions, especially those carried out by the Office of Works which were still without electricity, even for lighting. Eventually the Ministry allowed the Council to install electricity at the expense of the capital account for the 1919 schemes. Hard-to-let flats were put in the hands of an estate agent, but in June 1935 the Housing Committee decided to seek permission from the Ministry to sell the eight houses they held on leasehold. They were given permission to sell in January 1936, but there then followed a long-running disagreement over the minimum selling price, with the Ministry asking for more than the market would yield. The last mention of the leasehold properties was the Ministry still insisting that the Council ask £600 for 82 Aubert Park, when the closest offer received was £500. Those conversions the Council held freehold were not trouble-free either, since among these were basement rooms declared unfit for human habitation by the Medical Officer of Health. Thus it might be said that from beginning to end the conversion programme in Islington, at any rate, was less than a success.

Another problem was the monthly rent which continued to be the method of paying at all the Council's dwellings except City and Queens Mansions and a few of the other conversions. In October 1931 Councillor Mrs Summers suggested that rents should be paid weekly
instead of monthly, 'as many tenants receive their wages weekly'. Mrs Summers' proposal suggests that either the clientele of the Council's flats had changed since the early 1920s or that the tenants had always had difficulty making monthly payments, but that members of the Housing Committee had only just realised that this was a problem. When a vote was held in December to decide whether to collect rents weekly at Laycock and Halton Mansions, the two estates in the more populous areas of the Borough, the proposal was narrowly defeated 6 to 5.

Wakelin House, opened in October 1934, was the first of the Council's special needs estates. The Council had not been quick to adopt the Government's scheme for eliminating slum areas and rehousing the displaced families. In a circular sent out in January 1932 the Ministry urged that local authorities should concentrate their efforts on 'the provision of a type of house which can be built at a low cost and can be let at a rent within the means of the more poorly paid workers, say at 10/- a week. . . .' The circular was dismissed by the Town Clerk as not being intended for the London local authorities who depended on the LCC to deal with the poorest tenants. However since January 1931 the Housing and the Public Health Committees had been considering what action should be taken under the 1930 Slum Clearance Act, and various sites had been considered. It was not until March 1933 that one of the sites, the Church Lane area between Upper Street and Essex Road near St Mary's church, was linked to a proposed housing scheme in nearby Sebbon Street. In Chapter Six was seen how negotiations with the Marquess of Northampton for the Sebbon Street site had gone on for years and beyond the lifetime of the 1924
legislation, but if the new estate was linked to the clearance area it would qualify for the 1930 subsidy paid on the basis of each person rehoused. This was the first real involvement by the Council in the provision of special need housing.

The inclusive rents at Wakelin House at 9/7 for three rooms and 11/10 for four rooms were especially low, and they were to be paid weekly. When allocating flats to the inhabitants of Church Lane the Housing Committee took into consideration families with young children and old people, and endeavoured to house them on the lower floors. It was hoped that two elderly women who lived in separate single rooms in the same house might be persuaded to share a flat in the new buildings. One big difference in letting the Wakelin House flats from the others provided by the Council was that all the prospective tenants from the Church Lane area were to have their belongings disinfected in one operation before they moved in. Almost as soon as the tenants moved in the complaints began about their behaviour, in this instance the children running along the balconies. Whether the behaviour of the Wakelin House tenants was any different from that of the Council's other tenants is difficult to know, but they were perceived as needing more supervision than the others, to the extent that their caretaker asked for an additional 10/- per week for the extra work involved.

Although Wakelin House was initiated under the Municipal Reform Party when they were in power, the management of the estate was organized under Labour after they won the election of November 1934. Indeed the new Housing Committee began a review of all their procedures which resulted in substantial changes in the way their
housing stock was managed. Already under Municipal Reform some adjustment had been made to the administration of the tenancies. In May 1933 the old form of tenancy which meant that it could be determined only by six months' notice expiring on the day on which the tenancy commenced was changed so that the tenancy could be determined on one month's notice. This gave the Council more leverage over tenants who did not pay their rent promptly but who were never in arrears long enough for their tenancy agreement to be determined. This change was inspired by concern over the rate of arrears, but the Housing Committee formed after November 1934 seemed to have a thoroughly different approach to the Council's housing which was at once more responsible and more paternalistic. They began by setting up a sub-committee at their first meeting to consider a comprehensive review of the conditions of tenancy.

The tenancy sub-committee reported in February 1935 and they made several recommendations. All rents should be paid on a weekly basis and should include rates, as there was evidence that 'many of those in poorer circumstances find it a hardship to pay a month's rent and rates for the quarter both in advance.' At that time 50% of rents were paid at the Town Hall while the others were collected at the various estates or by personal call at some of the individual properties. (See Table 7.11) Henceforth rents were to be collected from the caretakers' offices on the individual estates. Reletting of flats depended on the meetings of the letting sub-committee and this it was thought caused unnecessary delay. To overcome this problem it was resolved that 20 or 30 applicants would be approved by the sub-committee and authority given for their applications to be granted
when vacancies occurred. Besides these resolutions, the sub-committee codified practice by producing an extended tenancy agreement which will be considered in Chapter Eight.

Table 7.11
Method of Collecting Islington Council's Rents Prior to February 1935

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Estate</th>
<th>Day for Collection</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>City and Queens Mansions</td>
<td>Each Monday</td>
<td>Caretaker's Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33 Odd Weekly Properties</td>
<td>Each Monday</td>
<td>Personal Call</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Halton Mansions</td>
<td>First Tuesday of Month</td>
<td>Caretaker's Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addington Mansions</td>
<td>First Wednesday of Month</td>
<td>Caretaker's Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avenell Mansions</td>
<td>First Wednesday of Month</td>
<td>Addington Mansions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four Converted Properties</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manchester Mansions</td>
<td>First Thursday of Month</td>
<td>Caretaker's Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leyden Mansions</td>
<td>First Friday of Month</td>
<td>Caretaker's Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warlertsville Mansions</td>
<td>First Friday of Month</td>
<td>Caretaker's Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Highlands Park House</td>
<td>First Friday of Month</td>
<td>The Highlands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tyndale Mansions</td>
<td>First Day of Month</td>
<td>Town Hall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laycock Mansions</td>
<td>First Day of Month</td>
<td>Town Hall</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Islington Housing Committee Minutes

It was difficult to streamline the reletting procedure because the variety of flat types meant that the tenant had to be selected by suitability for the flat available. The Council was still receiving 100 applications per month for accommodation, and in order to obtain the services of more clerical help the Housing Committee laid out in detail the procedure which was followed in reletting their dwellings. Since the Housing Committee's purpose was to extract from the Council more money for assistance in the Housing Department, they were perhaps making the procedure sound more onerous than it was:

On receipt of service of notice to quit an appropriate record is made in the Lettings Book. A search is made in that category of applications which are
concerned, i.e., according to whether the vacant flat contains one, two, three or four bedrooms. This is often a long process and, for anything over £1 per week, hundreds of forms may have to be examined before anyone likely to be suitable is found. The next suitable applicants are sent particulars (the number advised varying with the type of flat and the facility with which it lets) and the process is repeated, if necessary, until a suitable acceptance is received. The approval of the Chairman of the Housing Committee or of the Lettings Sub-committee is then sought. References are taken up and an inspection made of the approved applicant's existing accommodation. If everything is in order, the applicant is informed as to date of commencement of tenancy, a rent book is prepared and electric light form completed. 74

The applicants' names were on a register, and the Housing Committee favoured vacant flats being offered to applicants in order of the date of application except in cases where preferential treatment was appropriate. 75 The diversity of the housing stock made this approach impractical and the above procedure was being followed in November. Although cumbersome, the selection process provided a check on the prospective tenant's ability to pay as well as his respectability, while at the same time giving him an element of choice. The ultimate approval still rested with the elected Committee members and was not the sole responsibility of the Council's officers.

Although ability to pay was still an important criterion in the selection of tenants, by necessity the definition of the ability to pay became muddied when the Committee began letting to the special need tenants. After four months 42 tenants at Wakelin House owed rent at 30 May 1935, and the housing manager noted that some of them had adopted the practice of missing a week's rent and then paying two weeks' rent at one time. 76 This would have been common practice in the private sector in the sort of housing from which they had come. Although they considered it for Wakelin House, the Housing Committee
did not implement the contentious rent rebate scheme, unlike neighbouring Finsbury which did. It was decided rather to adopt 'firm measures' and that in addition to their current rent, tenants in arrears were to pay another 25% of their rent off the arrears. Indeed, the problem with the rents was only part of a larger management problem at Wakelin house where physical damage and graffiti soon made their appearance and where there were complaints from the caretaker of the dirty state of individual flats. In December 1935 the Medical Officer of Health suggested that the Housing Committee might consider 'the desirability of regulations to secure a more effective control over the conditions of the flats'. Out of this suggestion arose the question of adopting the 'Octavia Hill system of estate management' and the seed was sown for the employment of women housing managers.

After visiting various housing association estates where women housing managers were employed, the Housing Committee decided that it was worth taking on a woman to be responsible especially for Wakelin House, and the new special needs flats of Blythe and Coleman Mansions and Hillrise in the north of the Borough. The woman who took up her duties in January 1937 had previously worked for the Kensington Housing Trust, and she seems to have had ample work in Islington since one year later it was decided to create the position of assistant woman housing manager. One of their most pressing tasks was to visit prospective tenants for the flats intended for those forced to move through closing orders or designated overcrowded and to determine who was suitable for the new flats.

As time went on the rehousing programme became more problematic.
Although Wakelin House had been nearby its clearance area, there was not the same fit between the new flats and the dwellings to be vacated. As has been noted, all the sites for the new flats were in the north of the Borough where the large houses and gardens meant that sites were available for building, but where housing need was not greatest. As it happened, Hillrise in Warltersville Road was ready at the same time as City Garden Row and Graham Street, just off the City Road, were declared a clearance area, and the occupants of these streets were offered flats at Hillrise. The situation took to absurd lengths the disparity between the old neighbourhood and the new. City Road was on the borders with the boroughs of Shoreditch and Finsbury, both overcrowded and poor working-class areas, and the two streets in question shared these traits. Hillrise, although situated in Warltersville Road which by this time had become an enclave of Council dwellings, was a long bus ride away in a part of the Borough where there was little work close to hand.

By June 1938, as was shown in Chapter Six, costs in land and building had been rising for two years and it was not possible to let the new flats at the low rents of Wakelin House. Out of the 47 households resident in Graham Street and City Garden Row it was found that only 19 families could afford the rents at Hillrise, unemployment and low wages put the rent beyond the others. The Government subsidies for special needs dwellings were meant particularly to keep rents low, and the Council's special needs flats were indeed cheaper than those intended for general need. (See Table 7.12) These rents were about 6/- lower than the inclusive standard rents set in May 1937 to eliminate the anomalies between the different general needs.
estates. The Housing Committee tried to tell the residents of Graham Street and City Garden Row that the amenities of the new flats would compensate for the rents, but that was little consolation to those without the money. Hillrise had been one of the estates where there had been discussion about the type of household energy to be installed, 'all electric' or a combination of gas and electricity. To many people in the City Road that discussion was totally inappropriate to their circumstances when they did not even have the money for the basic rent let alone the gas and electricity charges.

Table 7.12
Average Inclusive Rents of Islington Council's Special Needs Flats 1934 - 1939 and Average Inclusive Standard Rents 1937

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No of Rooms</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Average Standard Rents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 Rooms</td>
<td>12/11</td>
<td>9/7 to 15/9</td>
<td>18/9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Rooms</td>
<td>15/1</td>
<td>11/10 to 18/-</td>
<td>21/11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Rooms</td>
<td>19/2</td>
<td>18/- to 20/4</td>
<td>24/10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Islington Housing Committee Minutes

Perhaps mindful of their experience at Hillrise, the Housing Committee decided that the flats at Hornsey Lane which were opened in March 1939 were to rehouse families from the north of the Borough, including Upper Holloway, Tollington, and parts of Tufnell and Highbury. However, it proved more difficult to find prospective tenants who were willing to take the flats and who could pay the rent, and in December 1938 it was thought that up to a quarter of flats might have to be let to residents from other parts of the Borough. Hornsey Lane was a large estate with 206 flats, but after visiting 600 families only 85 tenants had been secured in February 1939. With the prospect of visiting many more families, the woman housing manager found herself debilitated and asked for one month's leave.

The provision and management of dwellings was only part of the
Council's task under the 1930 and 1935 Acts. Increasingly they became involved in the management of private rented housing as well as in that of their own. From the summer of 1934 the Medical Officer of Health searched out unfit basement rooms, which were nonetheless inhabited, and he made closing orders on those which could not be made fit. As shown in Chapter Five, the 1935 legislation required the local authorities to inspect houses in order to determine the maximum number of people permitted in each dwelling under the overcrowding regulations. A small army of temporary staff were hired to carry out this inspection and the Council found itself penetrating into the most intimate workings of the Borough's private rented housing. This was very far from the first tentative interventions into Islington's housing market in 1919 under the provisions of the Addison Act. By being diverted from building for general need, local authorities had had some of their influence diminished, but by being given powers to enforce regulations in the private sector beyond what was usually considered a public nuisance, they may have been more effective as agents for change.

From the perspective of 1939, Islington Council's involvement in housing was very different from what it was twenty years before when they made their first intervention in the local housing market under the 1919 Housing Act. In those early days before a Council house sub-culture had grown up in the Borough, there was neither a housing bureaucracy nor a stereotypical Council house tenant. Coming in relatively high up in the market with rents and tenancy agreements which required fairly substantial resources on the part of their tenants, the Council gave them the sort of regard any landlord in the
private sector would give to his. The tenants displayed a lack of deference and an inclination to challenge the Council which showed that they expected as much from the Council as they would from the private sector and perhaps more. That the rents of the different estates differed depending upon which subsidy they were built under, meant that some estates were more expensive than others and attracted the relatively well off among the working class and lower middle class. These were just the sort of people who might be expected to move to the suburbs in the 1930s when mortgages became available to a wider public. After 1936 local authorities could amalgamate the housing accounts of dwellings built under the 1919 and 1924 Acts and charge the same rents for similar accommodation. Islington adopted 'standard rents' in June 1937 and the anomalies between their different general needs estates disappeared. This meant that the status of their general needs dwellings became more homogeneous, perhaps reflecting a change which had already taken place among the residents.

Until the Islington Council became involved in building for slum clearance areas and overcrowded families, there was little difference between the Council and landlords in the private sector. With the start of their special needs housing programme a more vigorous approach to management was initiated. The introduction of special needs dwellings into the Council's housing stock coincided with the election of a Labour majority, which may have resulted in a greater enthusiasm for an interventionist style of management among the members of the Housing Committee. The resulting relationship between the Council and its tenants began to define the public as distinct
from the private rented sector. The next chapter explores further the developing relationship between the Council and its tenants.
Footnotes - Chapter Seven

1. Advisory Housing Panel on the Emergency Problem, Memorandum, 1918.


4. 5 & 6 Geo 5, Ch 97.

5. Islington Housing Committee Minutes (IHCM), 26 February 1920.

6. Representation of the People, 1867, 30 & 31 Vict c 102.


8. The Estates Gazette, 17 January 1914.

9. IHCM, 26 February 1920.


11. IHCM, 13 June 1919.

12. Ibid., 26 February 1920.

13. PRO HLG 68/29.


15. Ibid.

16. IHCM, 2 and 13 October 1920.

17. Ibid., 8 May 1924.

18. PRO HLG 68/29.


20. IHCM, 14 April 1921.

21. PRO HLG 49/883.

22. IHCM, 4 October 1921.

23. PRO HLG 49/883

24. IHCM, 16 February 1920.

25. Ibid., 12 February 1920.

27. IHCM, 22 April 1920.

28. Ibid., 24 June 1920.


30. IHCM, 27 May 1920.

31. Ibid., 31 August 1922.

32. Ibid., 13 July 1922.

33. PRO HLG 49/885.

34. IHCM, 13 July 1922.

35. Ibid., 30 November 1922.

36. Ibid., 13 July 1922.

37. Ibid., 11 May 1922.

38. Ibid., 13 July 1922.

39. Ibid., 11 May 1922.

40. Ibid., 21 September 1922.

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid., 8 March 1923.

43. Ibid., 13 December 1923.


45. IHCM, 20 October 1920.

46. Ibid., 2 January 1936.

47. Ibid., 12 January and 2 April 1925.

48. Ibid., 15 August 1929.

49. Ibid.

50. Ibid., 12 April 1923.

51. Ibid., 7 September 1933.
52. Ibid., 2 November 1933.

53. Ibid., 1 October 1931.

54. Ibid., 1 December 1938.

55. Ibid., 7 April 1938.

56. Ibid., 8 July 1937.


58. See Appendix 5.

59. IHCM, 8 May 1924.

60. Ibid., 3 October 1935.

61. Ibid., 6 June 1935.

62. Ibid., 1 April 1937.

63. Ibid., 4 June 1936.

64. Ibid., 1 October 1931.

65. Ibid., 2 December 1931.

66. Ibid., 4 February 1932.

67. Ibid., 8 January and 4 June 1931.

68. Ibid., 2 March 1933.

69. Ibid., 17 October 1934.

70. Ibid., 7 March 1935.

71. Ibid., 4 February 1935.

72. Ibid.

73. Ibid.

74. Ibid., 7 November 1935.

75. Ibid., 14 March 1935.

76. Ibid., 6 June 1935.

77. Ibid., 17 October 1934; see also Stephen Merrett, State Housing in Britain, 1979, p. 58, and Robert Finnigan 'Council Housing in

78. IHCM, 6 June 1935.
79. Ibid., 5 December 1935.
80. Ibid., 2 July 1936.
81. Ibid., 3 February 1938.
82. Ibid., 5 May 1938.
83. Ibid., 2 June 1938.
84. Ibid., 12 October 1938.
85. Ibid., 2 February 1939.
Chapter Eight - Islington Council's Dwellings and Tenants 1919 - 1939

In the end housing is for people, although this fact sometimes seems to get lost in discussions about Government policy and local authorities' response. This last chapter considers four aspects of Islington Council's housing production which had direct influence on the lives of their tenants. First, it discusses the physical stock of buildings they erected, second it looks more closely at the day to day management of their properties, third it considers the relations between the tenants and the Council, and fourth it examines the amenities of the Council's dwellings and evaluates the changes which occurred in the twenty years from 1919 to 1939.

It was fortuitous that the post-War housing programme began at a time when the Garden City movement and the concept of the working-class suburb had achieved a considerable level of acceptance. The Chamberlain Report would propose a strategic plan to include suburban housing, transport, and industry, but even the Tudor Walters Report of 1918, written largely under the influence of Raymond Unwin, assumed that the suburban cottage would be the form municipal housing would take after the War. ¹ As was remarked in the Report:

For large blocks of tenements four or five storeys high, such as have been erected in our great towns and have been commonly adopted in certain Scottish cities no advocate appeared. . . . ²

The flat had never really caught on in England at least, possibly because of the distribution of wealth and investment in so many hands, and the only examples of any significance were the large barrack-like blocks built by the philanthropic societies. Nikolaus Pevsner, with his continental perspective, gave this as the reason for working-class antipathy to the flat during the nineteenth century:
... the grim and grimy barracks of the poor which between the sixties and the eighties succeeded in destroying any chance for the block of flats to become popular in England with the class for which they could be such a blessing. 3

It was when the LCC in their inner city estates at Boundary Street and Millbank introduced the Queen Anne and Old English styles, already accepted by the middle classes, that municipal flats in London acquired a measure of approval. 4

Despite the antipathy to flats, there was general, but reluctant, agreement that in over-crowded city areas, flats were needed until there were enough suburban cottage estates. Although the Tudor Walters Report did not deal with flats, the members considered that their recommendations for cottages 'would apply equally well to these buildings'. And it was as a conglomeration of cottages that the post-War flats were described. 5

The Ministry of Health encouraged the local authorities to seek out the services of a professional to aid them in their housing work. Islington Council was fortunate to find an architect who actually had experience with large-scale housing schemes. E.C.P. Monson became involved with the recently formed Sutton Trust when he married one of the daughters of the family. 6 For the Trust he designed before World War I three estates in London at Old Street, Chelsea, and Rotherhithe. 7 The flats on these estates tended to be rather small with a preponderance of one and two room dwellings, but the resulting density was very high, for example on the Chelsea site there were 193 tenements per acre. In the inter-War period the LCC reckoned on 50 to 60 flats per acre.

For the Sutton Trust, Monson also designed a cottage estate in
Birmingham, erected during the War at Alum Rock. He had been involved in designing some cottages for the South Wales Cottage Exhibition in Swansea in 1910 and the same year he and a fellow member of the Society of Architects, E.J. Sadgrove, had acted as competition judges for the Daily Mail Ideal Home Exhibition. Monson seems to have been a great joiner, and it was as a representative of the Surveyors' Institute that he gave evidence to the Tudor Walters Committee while his friend, Edwin Sadgrove, spoke for the Society of Architects.

In 1912 Monson delivered a lecture on 'Housing of the Working Classes' in which he gave this advice:

... I consider the best way to build cheaply is for the client to employ a thoroughly practical and responsible architect, not a faddist or dreamer after the impossible, but one who understands his subject and can give the best results for the least money, due care being had to all the conditions obtainable.

Such common sense sentiments would have been music to the ears of a Housing Committee such as Islington's in 1919, and in August of that year they accepted Monson's services and began an association with the firm of E.C.P. Monson which lasted until the mid-1960s.

In his 1912 lecture Monson had said:

Although I am designing many block dwellings I am not greatly in love with them, and if I were able I would build cottages of the type which I consider as a healthy desire of great social value.

Whether he was expressing the current orthodoxy, or a true preference, once in the employ of Islington Monson was committed to designing flats. It can be assumed, however, that since Islington Council were entirely innocent of experience of building flats, they would defer to Monson's opinions. For example, in his lecture he expressed distaste...
for balcony access, but a strong preference for parlours:

Personally, I am a strong advocate of the parlour or best room. I regard the quiet but strong desire of the workman's wife to have one good room for pleasure as a healthy desire of great social value. ¹³

In his designs for the purpose-built flats under the 1919 Housing Act, Monson provided staircase access and at Addington and Manchester Mansions, some flats had a room which could be considered a bedroom, but which on the plans was designated 'parlour'. The 'parlour' was soon dropped from the housing schemes, but as we have seen the Housing Committee fought off the pressure put upon them to implement balcony access in their Tyndale Mansions estate, because of its association with the cheapest slum clearance schemes. ¹⁴

The style Monson had adopted for his Sutton Trust flats was, despite the five storey height at Old Street and Chelsea, a rather severe Queen Anne on the former estate and a more relaxed neo-Georgian on the latter. Varigated coloured bricks, pediments, and mansard roofs went some way to relieve the oppressive density of the estates where the sheer weight of building in relation to the site was overpowering. In Islington there was not the pressure to produce estates of such high density, but nonetheless it was up to the architect to produce a scheme which would satisfy the Ministry of Health that the deficiency would not be unreasonable. It was in the layout of the estates where Monson's schemes appear most undistinguished, and while many of his blocks would be perfectly acceptable if they had more space around them or were shorter or more symmetrical, the exigencies of planning for a local authority forced him into compositions which are lumpy and awkward. The worst layout
Illus 9 - Leyden Mansions, 1929.
of his 1919 estates was that of Halton Mansions where the Council had been instructed by the Ministry of Health to build in the back gardens of the houses to be demolished, and this stricture resulted in a layout of uniform blocks parallel to each other on a long narrow site. Although these blocks were built with attractive red facing bricks, had mansard roofs and Monson's distinctive detail of negative quoining, their layout gave them a penitential aspect which intensified with time.

Under the 1919 legislation, the Ministry of Health actively involved itself with attempts to control expenditure on the housing programme by requesting reductions in the standards and amenities of the dwellings built by local authorities. It has already been noted that Monson made reductions totalling £51,141 at Halton Mansions on the insistence of the London Housing Board. Under subsequent legislation, although the Ministry laid down a minimum size of dwelling, the fixed subsidies meant that the local authorities themselves took responsibility for reducing expense. A minimum of amenity was ensured so that every flat must contain a WC and a fixed bath, although the latter might be found in the scullery. Where savings could be made was in the finishing details and in the size of the circulation and the sculleries.

The Housing Committee with the help of Monson made savings of about £10,000 at Laycock Mansions when the LCC complained about the deficit on Tyndale Mansions because of its expensive site. One method of reducing the cost was by introducing balcony access, and another was by reducing the size of the scullery. As will be shown, the scullery changed its function during the period under study, but
nevertheless, when economies needed to be made, the area of the
scullery was reduced. From the information available, the generosity
of the subsidies can be traced.

Table 8.1
Area of Sculleries in Islington Council's 3 Bedroom Dwellings 1920 -
1937

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Estate</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Area of Flat Square Feet</th>
<th>Area of Scullery Square Feet</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Manchester Mansions</td>
<td>1920</td>
<td>682</td>
<td>76.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leyden Mansions</td>
<td>1929</td>
<td>702</td>
<td>52.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'The Highlands'</td>
<td>1933</td>
<td>673</td>
<td>45.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blythe Mansions</td>
<td>1935</td>
<td>735</td>
<td>57.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hornsey Lane</td>
<td>1937</td>
<td>747</td>
<td>56.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Derived from the architect's drawings of the various schemes

What is striking about the above figures is that the area of the
scullery at Manchester Mansions built under the 1919 Act and the most
generous subsidy was relatively large in comparison to the others,
while the scullery at 'The Highlands', built without subsidy was much
smaller. These differences point up the consequences of the financial
constraints under which Monson was required to produce the Council's
dwellings.

The 1930s saw the rehabilitation of the flat as an acceptable
form of working-class housing. The failure of suburban building to
solve the slum problem turned attention back to the inner city flat,
and technical advances as well as continental examples inspired new
enthusiasm for flat living. The Council for Research on Housing
Construction called for a new approach to flat design which would
accept the full potential of the type instead of regarding flats as
second best:

Where tenement blocks have been erected, they have not
infrequently been thought of as groups of cottages piled together

-280-
Illus 11 - Leyden Mansions, Plan, 1929.
Illus 12 - Hornsey Lane estate, 1936 - 38.
rather than as unit buildings appropriately subdivided. When Islington Council, freshly returned to Labour control, came to build Blythe Mansions in 1935, Monson produced for them a design which was described as in the 'modern style'.

The external elevations are of modern style. . . . The buildings have flat, concrete roofs, which are an innovation so far as the Council's housing estates are concerned. An imposing feature of the scheme is the central archway, rendered in white cement, which forms the main entrance to the buildings in Highcroft-road.

The archway had become the symbol of modern flat design after the most famous example at the Karl Marxhof in Vienna. The revolutionary connotations of this device were, however, muted in the case of Blythe Mansions by the following adjustment:

The portion of the buildings in which this archway is situated is set back from the general line, thereby avoiding any suggestion of undue severity in the design.

Blythe Mansions was the most extreme example of the Council's turn to modernistic design in flat building and the subsequent estates were much more subdued. It will be remembered that this was the time when the Council was troubled with rapidly rising prices between proposing their schemes and receiving the tenders. Perhaps as a means of offsetting this price increase, Monson developed a much more standardized brick box decorated only by the inset private balconies and having balcony access and either a flat or a very shallow pitched roof.

An exception was the range of blocks along the Hornsey Lane side of that estate. Here the Ministry had requested that a substantial part of the 5 acre site be given over to open space and that the mature trees along Hornsey Lane be retained. In addition the Council undertook to build the flats fronting Hornsey Lane with
Illus 13 - Coleman Mansions, 1936.
'special treatment from an architectural point of view'. In practice this meant that a picturesque aspect was chosen to satisfy the Hornsey Town Council and the preservation groups. The Hornsey Lane blocks were three storeys only and the steeply pitched roofs were hipped and covered by tiles. From the road these details gave the estate a suburban character, but this was achieved at the expense of the other blocks which had to be five storeys and squeezed onto a very much more constricted site than would otherwise have been the case.

Monson also produced designs for estates built under the special needs legislation for Stepney, Bethnal Green, and Finsbury Councils. His clients were, of course, the Councils and not the tenants themselves, and it is time to turn attention to Islington Council's tenants, the people who actually inhabited the dwellings. A certain amount of controversy surrounds the various aspects of the tenant-council relationship, as exemplified by Anne Power's polemical Property before People. In this study the author seems to be visiting the sins of the children on the heads of the parents by claiming that all local authorities got the management of their properties wrong from the very beginning and that this fault has continued to the present. This conclusion ignores the great variation in the experience of the councils and the constraints placed upon them by previously existing circumstances and conditions laid down by Government. Power takes the LCC as her example, which by the size and complexity of its stock, was really a special case during the inter-war period. Most local authorities confined themselves to building suburban cottage estates, with a few exceptions such as Liverpool and London's inner boroughs which erected flats.
Illus 14 - Hornsey Lane estate, three storey Hornsey Lane frontage, 1936.
Illus 15 - Hornsey Lane estate, five storey block, 1936.
The management of the various housing stocks depended on local circumstances, which had as much to do with the fortunes of the tenants and the local housing market as they had to do with the composition of the Councils. Both Bristol and Birmingham had difficulty filling their cottage estates built under the Addison Act. The working people eligible to live in the new estates in those towns simply did not earn enough to move to new houses in remote suburban locations. In Islington, despite the controversy over the level of rent and the Council's threat to go to the Rent Tribunal over the high rents demanded by the Ministry, there were enough well paid working people to fill the flats many times over. As has been noted there were over 800 applicants for 40 flats at Halton Mansions in 1923. The only real difficulty the Council had at this time was with the letting of certain of the converted flats. The type of tenants Islington Council were able to draw upon to occupy their flats, that is those with the ability to pay relatively high rents, determined the style of management they evolved during the 1920s.

The Housing Committee rejected the possibility of adopting the Octavia Hill system of management in connection with any of the Council's dwellings, because the type of tenants for whom this kind of management was considered appropriate was not their concern. Such an attitude illustrates the fact that women housing managers were considered as social workers first and managers only incidentally. Even when it was suggested in February 1921 that a housing manager was needed, the Town Clerk advised against employing one at this time. The extent to which the Housing Committee in collaboration with the Town Clerk took responsibility for the day to day running of the
Council's housing property should not be underestimated, and there appears to have been some reluctance at this stage to hand over powers to an autonomous housing bureaucracy. There were a number of styles of management the Housing Committee could follow. One was the Octavia Hill system and another was the philanthropic societies' authoritarian and yet effective method of control. Or there was the style adopted by the private estates dependent on a community of interest, and for the most part this was the style Islington applied to their flats built under the Addison Act.30

The most important Council representative as far as the tenants were concerned was the caretaker and as has been shown Islington paid their caretakers generously in comparison to other metropolitan borough councils.30 In December 1920 the Housing Committee drew up the duties of the caretakers which gave them a great deal of responsibility, even requiring them to collect rents which had not been paid in the normal way.31 Perhaps the first duty 'To keep order throughout the buildings under his control' was more reminiscent of the caretakers' role in 'model dwellings', but otherwise the duties had to do with the physical upkeep of the estate and the well-being of the tenants.

Oddly enough, there seems to have been little discussion about the tenancy agreement. From the Housing Committee Minutes we learn about the letting arrangements described in Chapter Seven, but only incidentally do other regulations appear, such as the prohibition against keeping pets. When a protracted case involving the keeping of a dog finally came up in the County Court, the Master expressed surprise that the tenant did not possess a copy of the tenancy agreement.
agreement. The Housing Committee then decided that copies of the agreement should be supplied to tenants on payment of 5/-.

This reluctance to make the tenancy agreement generally available appears strange. However, it fits in with the Housing Committee's tendency to deal not with generalities or groups, but with individual cases, thus isolating tenants and as will be shown, discouraging concerted tenant pressure.

In November 1934 a sub-committee was set up to report on the conditions of tenancy. This was part of the overhaul of the Council's housing management undertaken after Labour gained the majority on the Council. The agreement they drew up was extremely detailed and embraced such accepted working-class activities as selling goods and services from the flat and sub-letting. The latter practice was allowed with written consent from the Council, but in fact permission was hardly ever given. It was at this time that weekly rents were introduced for most of the Council's tenants and emphasis was placed in the agreement on rents being paid promptly to the collector at the caretakers' flats. It is interesting to observe that although the Housing Committee were taking a more realistic view of the tenants' circumstances, they were also reducing the tenants' rights, since if the rent was in arrears 'at any time', the Council had the authority to give the tenant notice to quit. This contrasted with the old dispensation when weekly lettings were considered overdue if two or three weeks were owing, while more than one month's rent constituted arrears for the monthly tenant.

In 1935 the duties of the caretakers were also reviewed, and these were made much more specific while at the same time the overall
responsibility of the caretakers was reduced. For instance, they were no longer authorized to collect rents nor to act as the Council's agents. The physical maintenance of the estates was their only concern, and anything which had to do with the welfare of the tenants was outside their jurisdiction. Whereas previously the caretakers seemed to have organized their own time, a schedule was now laid down for their duties.

Table 8.2
Schedule of Islington's Caretakers' Duties, 1935

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8am</td>
<td>Tour estate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:30 - 9 am</td>
<td>Breakfast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 am - 1 pm</td>
<td>Routine Duties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 - 4 pm</td>
<td>Off duty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 - 5 pm</td>
<td>Routine Duties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 - 11:30 pm</td>
<td>Patrol of Grounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:30 pm</td>
<td>'Lights Out'</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Islington Housing Committee Minutes

The responsibility for turning the lights out on the various estates had always been one of the duties of the caretakers, but that it was felt necessary that they patrol the grounds may indicate a perceived change in the standard of public behavior on the estates and in Islington at large.

Another means by which the relationship between the Council and their tenants can be judged is through the requests and complaints that appeared in the Housing Committee Minutes. The requests made by the tenants were on the whole for amenities which might be considered appropriate to the middle class of the time, and they say as much about the tenants as they do about the amenities of the flats. Wash basins in the bathrooms and more cupboard space were among the first requests and then over the early years there were applications for permission to install electricity for heating and for additional
lighting. Another tenant at Addington Mansions wanted to have his 'sitting room fireplace either tiled or covered with a copper repouse plate'. Most of these requests were agreed to as long as the tenant paid for the work and undertook to make good the alterations when he moved out. One request not granted was that of the occupant of 11 Addington Mansions who asked to make structural alterations which would form a new entrance to the kitchen by doing away with the cupboards in the bathroom so that it would no longer be necessary to pass through the 'lounge from the dining room'. This proposal and the one for the 'sitting room fireplace' suggest that some tenants were not satisfied with the flat arrangement which assumed that the living room, in accepted working-class style, would be the space used for much of the food preparation and cooking, while the scullery provided running water and food storage. That the sculleries were fitted with gas cookers implies that the Housing Committee were also ambivalent about the use of the rooms. Other requests for the installation of telephones, wireless sets, and in one instance for the erection of a garage reflect the gradual spread of modern amenities throughout the population.

The complaints of the tenants were just as telling as their requests. The main dissatisfactions were with the dampness in the converted flats, with the ranges provided, and the gas water heaters. Freedom from dampness is more of a necessity than an amenity, but it soon became obvious that it was going to be a problem in the basement rooms of many of the conversions. The basements of the larger converted houses had mostly been the household offices when the houses were in single occupancy. Storage rooms, wine cellars, sculleries,
and wash houses, never intended for human habitation, had to be brought into use as habitable space. After about a year of occupancy, complaints about dampness and demands for compensation began to pour into the Housing Committee, some of them backed up with the threat of legal action.

Complaints about the actual amenities in the Council's flats were largely concentrated on the main method of heating and the arrangements for heating water. From as early as November 1920 there were complaints about the 'Compax' ranges, installed as the primary means of heating. The architect reported at this time that the range had a small flue which could cause it to smoke if not cleaned frequently. Complaints of smoking flues were usually dismissed, but one tenant at Manchester Mansions claimed he was making arrangements for a sweep to clean his flues weekly, and that he was taking legal advice about seeking redress from the Council. Another tenant at 13 Highbury New Park complained in December 1925 about his 'Compax' stove which filled the room with smoke whenever it was lit. This condition had been going on for the past five years and in this instance the Housing Manager was instructed to install a gas register.

In the case of Queens Mansions, however, smoking flues were blamed on the habits of the inhabitants as the architect reported in March 1922:

The tenants mostly appear to have occupied houses which did not possess a stove or range with special flues which require cleaning regularly in order to obtain proper efficiency and they cannot seem to bring themselves to feel the necessity of doing this.

Eventually, as the problem persisted in the Council's dwellings, even in some of those built later, it was suggested that the height of the
buildings might be the cause. It is also possible that some of the requests for open grates were not just because they smoked less than the ranges, but because the tenants preferred open fires in their living rooms. By 1935 it appears that tenants were having the open grate fitted in place of their range without asking permission, and that this change was causing some of the problem with down-draught. In November 1935 the Housing Committee acknowledged that there was general dissatisfaction with the 'Compax' ranges and they agreed that if tenants at Addington and Halton Mansions purchased an approved type of stove, the Council would pay for the cost of fixing.  

Methods of hot water heating also caused a number of complaints, especially in the 1930s when Ascots became available, and this will be considered more fully below. Complaints first came from tenants at Warltersville Mansions, but it was at Addington Mansions that in November 1927 one of the tenants died in the bath, of carbon monoxide poisoning caused by the malfunction of the water heater. There were three suggestions made in order to prevent further mishaps: to remove the gas water heaters into the scullery; to make a vent through each bathroom wall; or to fix an enamelled plate with a 'few simple instructions' to the wall in each bathroom. The Gas Light and Coke Company quoted a cost of £500 for the first course of action and £300 for the second. Not surprisingly the Housing Committee chose the third, and had the enamel plates put up in the bathrooms of the flats.  

What has just gone before, suggests that the population of the Council's dwellings at least from 1919 to 1926 was heterogeneous, representing a cross-section of classes, probably from lower middle
class to respectable working class. It is difficult to provide conclusive proof that this was so, but the sort of requests and complaints made by the tenants and the way some of them sought legal assistance to achieve what they wanted, indicated a vocal minority of tenants who were obviously uncowed by a Council who had not yet adopted any fixed style in their relations with the tenants.

Besides individual tenants, groups of tenants also presented requests to the Housing Committee. Most issues uniting tenants had to do with amenities, although some were related to management decisions. The Housing Committee, as already noted, disliked organised tenants' groups and discouraged their development. When in July 1922 a tenants' committee was organised at City Mansions with the purpose of negotiating with the Council over any issue affecting the tenants, the Housing Committee stated that they refused recognition of such a committee, but that they were always willing to consider complaints by individual tenants. After this attempt to establish a general negotiating body, all tenants' action focused upon specific, short-lived issues until 1936 when the Leyden Tenants' Committee again and with more success set up a pressure group.

Tenants' Committees had a political dimension of which the Housing Committee would have been aware. It had, after all, been the Glasgow rent strike of 1915 which had propelled the Government into adopting their various post-War housing policies. One characteristic of the tenants' movement in the private sector, noted by Steve Schifferes, was that the groups were shortlived and once their objectives were met they disbanded. This was also true for Islington's Council tenants, since whether the tenants were asking for
improved staircase lighting or for the paving of communal space, once
the matter had been dealt with either to the tenants' satisfaction or
not, the collective group ceased to exist. The Leyden Tenants'
Committee was different. They had four grievances: lack of playground
space for the children; high rents; inadequate staircase lighting; and
unsatisfactory hot water heaters. They refused to take 'no' for an
answer. The group had an active organising secretary and they did not
allow themselves to be intimidated by the Housing Committee, even when
the police were called. They also did not rely solely on the Council
for information, but made contact directly with the Gas Light and Coke
Company in their efforts to get better water heaters.

The Leyden Tenants' Committee emerged from a kind of 'popular
front' of Council tenants and private residents in the Warltersville
Road area when the Council first proposed buying Stanley Lodge for the
site of Blythe Mansions. Residents in Heathville and Highcroft
Roads petitioned the Council to use the property as a playground and
park as the population of children from the 228 existing Council flats
in the area were more than enough. Some of the Council tenants in the
district may have looked on a slum clearance scheme in Waltersville
Road as a threat to their status, but the main concern they expressed
was a lack of playspace. What is intriguing is that a deputation of
women, two from Leyden Mansions and one from Heathville Road, waited
on the Council, and besides expressing concern about the future use of
Stanley Lodge, they used the opportunity to claim that the Council's
rents were too high, the hot water geysers at Leyden Mansions were
unsatisfactory, and that there was a need for schools in the area.

In February 1936 the Leyden Tenants' Committee made their first
appearance through an anonymous letter to the Housing Committee, informing them that meetings were being held at No 45 Leyden Mansions and 'a good deal of trouble is being caused thereby.' That same month the Committee received a request for a review of rents from W. Winter of No 45 as representing the Leyden Tenants' Committee. Mrs Winter had been one of the women who had approached the Housing Committee the previous June. The main point of contention now was that flats built under different subsidies were let at varying rents. The Leyden Mansions tenants compared their rents with those at 'The Highlands' nearby, an estate which, it will be remembered, had been built without subsidy at the very bottom of the slump, and where rents were about 3/- lower than at Leyden Mansions.

Islington did not adopt the rent rebate scheme by which local authorities could charge economic rents while paying rebates to means tested tenants, the scheme which caused much resentment and rent strikes in Leeds and Birmingham. However, by the mid-1930s the anomalies in the rents of the general needs flats and the introduction of the special needs dwellings with their lower rents, would have appeared unfair to a growing number of the Council's tenants. What would also have been irritating for general needs tenants was that improvements in domestic appliances left them with poorly equipped flats compared to the special needs dwellings, but at higher rents.

On 7 May a deputation from the Leyden Tenants' Committee brought to a Housing Committee meeting a petition signed by the majority of tenants asking for the consideration of a rent reduction. The deputation was not admitted to the meeting, and what was more the police were called, an action which the Leyden Tenants' Committee felt
was completely uncalled for as they complained later:

... the deputation was perfectly orderly; that it was never their intention to enter the Committee Room by force; and asking for an explanation of the Committee's action in summoning the police to disperse the deputation.⁶⁻³

The Tenants' Committee kept pressing their request and in May 1937 rents were eventually reviewed and anomalies in the structure of the rents were rectified although the rents of general needs flats remained higher than those for the dwellings erected under the 1930 and 1935 Acts.⁶⁻⁴

Far from discouraging the Leyden Tenants' Committee, their rough treatment by the Housing Committee seemed to lead them on. Their request for play facilities came to focus upon the playground being incorporated in the Blythe Mansions scheme. They had been told that if there was sufficient room at this playground, their children would be able to play there. The LCC Education Officer had been consulted about the number of children that could be accommodated. The LCC allowed 30 square feet per child as the minimum play space, and as there were 12,600 square feet at Blythe Mansions, 400 children could play there at one time.⁶⁻⁵ Not to let the matter remain too long out of the Housing Committee's attention, the 'Leyden Children's Committee' organised a demonstration of children from Leyden and Warltersville Mansions at the opening of Blythe Mansions on 30 January 1937. An attempt was made to give the mayor a petition with the signatures of 74 children demanding play facilities. Once again the police were called.⁶⁻⁶ Finally in September of that year, the Housing Committee agreed that since there were just 260 children living at Blythe Mansions, children from Leyden Mansions could use the
playground.

Over the winter of 1937 – 38, the Leyden Tenants' Committee did have a brisk success with staircase lighting, an important issue for working-class tenants. Their complaint was that the lighting went off too early at night and came on too late in the mornings. By looking around at a more recently completed estate such as 'The Highlands', they knew that automatic switch control could be fitted which enabled staircases to be lit for short periods after normal lighting hours. The Borough Electrical Engineer reported that an automatic switch control was not practical on the existing lighting circuit and a separate lighting installation on low wattage would cost £12.15.0 per staircase. The Housing Committee then asked if the present switches could be adjusted so that the light went off at 12:30 am and came on again at 4:30 am. This proved to be the answer at a cost of only £3 per switch and an additional £30 per year for the extra current. The Tenants' Committee made a special point of expressing their satisfaction at this decision.

From the summer of 1937 to the following July the water heaters at Leyden Mansions occupied the attention of the Tenants' Committee with both the Tenants and the Housing Committee using the Gas Light and Coke Company to prove their respective cases. In June 1937 the organising secretary, Mrs McCarthy, made representation that the hot water geysers were unsatisfactory. These were 'Sunhot' geysers which were supposed to give a continuous supply of hot water. The geysers filled automatically and the water was heated by a small burner, kept alight and controlled by a thermometer tap which reduced the gas consumption to a minimum when the whole of the water in the
container was hot. One of its drawbacks was that it took several hours to heat in the first place and the tenants claimed it was expensive to run.

The Housing Committee asked the Gas Company to canvas the tenants, but most of them said they were satisfied with the heaters. They seemed to have said one thing to the Gas Company and another to their Committee, because in December 1937 the Tenants' Committee still maintained that the tenants were dissatisfied. The Housing Committee then arranged for the Gas Company to install a separate meter in the caretaker's flat to control gas supply to the hot water heater so that they could establish the cost of running the heater. In January 1938 they claimed that on the evidence from this experiment there was no need for further action.

The Tenants' Committee would not accept this decision. They were probably well aware that Ascot water heaters were being fitted at the Council's new flats in Warltersville Road and Crouch Hill, and that tenants at Addington Mansions were being given the options of having their old water heaters overhauled or of having a new Ascot installed. The tenants went directly to the Gas Light and Coke Company who said that if all or at least a substantial majority of the tenants were prepared to undertake the hire of Ascot heaters, the Company would install them at a cost to the tenants of 2/9 per quarter. The Tenants' Committee undertook to discover how many tenants would be interested in taking up this special offer, and in June 1938 they made their report. Out of the 110 tenants, 49 were in favour of the Ascot heaters and 61 against, but of the latter 39 would accept if no charge were made for the Ascot and the removal of the 'Sunhot'
heaters. Twenty-two tenants were satisfied or contemplated moving. The Tenants' Committee argued that while only 49 tenants could afford the extra 2/9 per quarter, 80% were still dissatisfied with the old heaters. For their part, the Gas Light and Coke Company were willing to put Ascots in 50 flats at the special rate of 2/9.

The Leyden Tenants' Committee was distinguished by their staying power and the active methods they employed to achieve their ends. The Committee Secretary, Mrs McCarthy, seems to have been a formidable opponent, and the involvement of women is another notable characteristic of this Committee. Radical housing action at this time, whether it was rent strikes in East London or Mrs Borders taking on the building societies in Kent, was sustained by the commitment of women, as Noreen Branson has noted:

In all the East London struggles, it was women who did the picketing, women who often dominated the committees making up the Stepney Tenants' Defence League, women who came out on demonstration. 33 Mrs McCarthy continued to work as secretary even after she moved to Friern Barnet, but in 1939, the Committee seems to have been transformed into the Islington Borough Council's Tenants' League, and it is likely their effectiveness was curtailed by the outbreak of the War. 34

It was not fortuitous that the Leyden Tenants' Committee chose the method of water heating as an issue, since it was in the matter of domestic power that the Council could offer their tenants a measure of choice. Since 1919 gas had been an important source of power in the Council's flats, fuelling the cookers, the copper, the hot water heater, and in some flats, radiators. Coal was used for the main
source of heat and electricity for light, but gas powered the domestic activities of the household. The weakest part of the gas system seems to have been the hot water heaters which not only caused complaints, but also became the object of debate in the late 1930s when hot water heating was being reviewed as an amenity in the Council's new flats. The Ascot water heater was then available and the choice for the Housing Committee fell between that method and the back boiler. In April 1937 the architect reported on the means of hot water provision with reference to the Brecknock Road estate. Four systems of water heating were put forward. First there was the supply by a communal plant operated by the Council and generated by coal, gas, oil or electricity. This method was considered unsatisfactory and wasteful with heavy costs at installation and for upkeep. In 1919 the Committee had contemplated putting this system into its new estates, but rejected it because of the high cost. The second method was by a gas heated boiling copper which fed hot water into the bath by gravitation. This system was used at Blythe Mansions and Wakelin House, but it had the disadvantage that hot water could not be made available over the sink or a wash basin. The third means of water heating was by a boiler provided behind the living-room fire. This method could be difficult to fit and it also meant that the kitchen range would have to be lit in the summer months to obtain hot water. Finally, hot water could be supplied by gas water heaters, particularly the new Ascot instantaneous heaters. Such heaters had been installed at 'The Highlands', Coleman and Hillrise Mansions, and in the opinion of the architect this was the most satisfactory method.

Despite the apparent agreement, not least among the tenants, that
the Ascot was the most satisfactory method of water heating, the amenities sub-committee during 1937 and 1938 kept suggesting that a boiler at the back of the living room fire was preferable. This suggestion may have been connected with the controversy over the type of power desirable for the Council's flats, gas or electricity. Among the requests from both individual tenants and tenants' committees were ones for electric power. Until nationalisation in 1947, electricity in Islington was provided by the Borough Council and administered by the Electricity and Lighting Committee under the direction of the Borough Electrical Engineer. From the first the Housing Committee installed electric light in all their newly built flats, so that only in the converted flats was there gas lighting. However, the Committee had an arrangement with the Gas Light and Coke Company that they would carcass the Council's buildings without charge and provide the necessary appliances like gas cooker, copper, and hot water heater. During the 1930s the Housing Committee came under pressure to install electricity for power purposes in their flats, and although some of the pressure came from tenants, most of it seemed to originate with the Electricity and Lighting Committee, which in turn were not unmoved by the expanding electrical appliance industry. At the same time the Housing Committee was aware of the danger of losing the concessions made to them by the Gas Light and Coke Company, although the 'all electric' flat could also be used as a threat in bargaining with the Gas Company. This was a period when the gas industry was fighting a rearguard action with electricity, and how a Borough like Islington became involved in what was a trade war must be dealt with more fully elsewhere. Only a brief summary can be given here.
In April 1933 the Electricity and Lighting Committee recommended that the Council install in all future housing schemes electricity for all heating and lighting. As the Town Clerk commented, the Electricity Committee wanted to improve their load factor during each 24 hours, and the Council's housing was a ready-made market. At the time the Housing Committee were building 'The Highlands' and the architect reported that to supply each flat with the required pipes for gas and with the necessary appliances, the Gas Company charged £11.15.9 per flat. In addition there was £7.10.0 per flat for electric light. For one flat to be wired with electricity for both power and light, as well as fitted with the necessary appliances would cost £47.0.0. The difference was obviously too great for the Committee even to consider the 'all electric' flat.

In 1935 the Electricity Committee tried again to convert the Housing Committee to electricity. This time they suggested that power points should be installed in all the Council's flats already built to allow tenants the use of domestic electrical appliances. On investigation, it was discovered that the estimate for such an undertaking would be £20,920.16.5, and two years later when this action was again considered the estimate had risen to £25,000.

The Electricity Committee, although unsuccessful with pushing the 'all electric' flat and the rewiring of all the Council's housing for power, was able to get some power into the new flats being built after 1935. At Blythe Mansions two power points were provided in each flat, and after this power points became a standard fitting. The next campaign was to convince the Housing Committee that tenants should have the choice between electricity and gas. The Electricity
Committee requested that both gas and electricity for power be available in the newly built flats, and that no appliances be fitted until the tenants had chosen between the two. To help tenants with this choice, they asked that a showflat with the usual electrical appliances be set up in a ground floor flat of one of the new blocks. The Housing Committee agreed to this, but they decided that a gas showflat should also be set up. The flats were ready at Blythe Mansions extension and Brecknock Road in July 1939, so their usefulness may have been limited by the outbreak of the War.

The interest taken in Islington Council's dwellings by the Gas Company and the Electricity Committee demonstrates how important the public sector was regarded as a potential market. From the first the Council's flats were better equipped than the tenemented houses in which most people in Islington lived, simply because they were self-contained and had their own supplies of water for sinks, baths, and WCs. That each tenant had a coal stove, and gas cooker and copper, would have made their domestic circumstances superior to those of most people living in shared houses in the Borough. There was a section of the housing lobby which had always believed that the working classes in Britain needed not just more houses, but better houses, and this belief had been elaborated in the detail of the Tudor Walters' Report. Better standards of amenity, it was thought, would lead to better standards of hygiene and nutrition when lack of equipment could no longer be given as an excuse.

While local authorities during the 1920s were providing general need housing for the better-off working-class families, a certain level of amenity was expected. However, during the 1930s and the
attempt to do away with the slums, there seems to have been an additional desire to introduce the working class into the middle-class world of consumption. This effort might be compared to the Business House Sports movement, mentioned by Ross McKibbin, which sought to wean working-class men away from their traditional leisure pursuits and to incorporate them into a middle-class culture based on the firm. 74 The new flats, likewise, could be seen as an introduction to and incorporation into a modern and more middle-class way of life as Alison Ravetz has suggested:

It sufficed that the slum clearance campaign now brought flats within reach of the general idealism of the housing movement. Housing was the gateway to health, education, higher domestic standards - the essentials that were crucial in transforming the culture of poverty into what later became the affluent society. Up to now these goals had been attached to suburban houses and the people who inhabited them. Before flats could be allowed to share them they and their population had to lose the old image of slum culture and tenement. . . . 75

During the early days of Islington's flat building, the architect had suggested those amenities included in the flats, but it was a mark of the 1930s, especially after the Labour majority was elected in 1934, that the Housing Committee took a more active part in deciding the amenities.

The first amenity over which there was debate within the Housing Committee was the type of heating apparatus suitable for the living room. From 1919 the Council's dwellings were fitted with a coal fired kitchen range in the living room and a gas cooker in the scullery. On the 1919 estates the 'Compax' range was the one used. While at Tyndale Mansions and possibly Laycock Mansions as well, the 'Interoven' was installed. 76 This arrangement assumed that one of the functions of the living room would be the cooking of meals, particularly when
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roasting or baking was required. Some tenants as we have seen preferred to confine this function to the scullery, and would rather have had an open fire in the living room than a range. Perhaps this preference lay behind some of the complaints about the 'Compax' range. In 1929 when Avenell Mansions was being built the question was raised what type of living room fire would be suitable. Should the Housing Committee install 'open stoves' or the 'old-type combination stove used in the other flats'? These words suggest that a range in the living room was now considered, at least by some members of the Committee, old fashioned, even for Council dwellings. At £6 each the open fires, including tile surround and hearth, were also cheaper than the combination stoves.

During 1934 and 1935 tenants at Halton and Addington Mansions asked for open hearths to replace their ranges. Although these requests were few in number, some tenants, as was noted earlier, seemed to have installed open grates on their own initiative. There was enough controversy over heating methods for the Housing Committee to resolve in December 1935 to consider the type of stoves suitable for the newly planned Blythe Mansions. A Sub-committee visited housing estates in Finsbury and Bethnal Green, and reported back in January 1936 that they considered the 'Leader' type of kitchen range used in the Finsbury housing scheme was appropriate. The 'New Leader' portable cooking range was installed in the living rooms of Blythe, Coleman, and Hillrise Mansions. At Hornsey Lane a 'modern cooking range' was again supplied by the same firm, Smith and Wellstood Ltd., but with a back boiler for hot water heating.

The question of whether an open fire or range should be fitted in
the Council's flats arose again in February 1937. It had just been decided that if the tenants at Addington and Halton Mansions who wanted to replace the 'Compax' range with an open grate, obtained a grate of approved type, the council would pay for the fitting. Now it was proposed to take a census of the tenants at Wakelin House and Blythe Mansions to elicit opinion on which method of heating was preferred. In December 1937 the amenities sub-committee again came down in favour of the 'New Leader' type of portable range. In November 1938 they were still in favour of the range, but they asked the architect to investigate the cost of the Triplex 'Greybridge' Range No. 1 for the flats at the Blythe Mansions extension.

In 1943, in preparation for the renewal of Council flat building after the war, a list of desired amenities was drawn up. An open coal fireplace in the living room was recommended, and this arrangement was approved in the 1946 Housing and Local Government Exhibition held at the Town Hall. Here a model flat was set up to show what sort of amenities tenants could expect in the Council's new flats. The living room was fitted with a new smokeless fuel grate and positioned so that 'easy chairs can be placed on either side'. From being an integral part of the domestic work of the household, the living room fire had become a symbol of leisure and relaxation as well as a source of heat.

In the pamphlet accompanying the Exhibition, the main room in the model flat was described as the 'dining-living' room. Now that no cooking was to take place in this room, the function of the kitchen was finally confined to the scullery, which became the 'kitchenette'. The separation was not complete since the kitchenette still led

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directly into the main room. Another indication of the ambivalence felt about the function of these two rooms had appeared in 1938 when the amenities sub-committee suggested that the kitchen dresser, until then a standard fitting in the living rooms of the Council's dwellings, be placed in future in the scullery along with the food and coal cupboards. A little later in the same year the architect was asked to report on the possibility of fitting kitchen cabinets in place of the dresser. In the 1943 list of amenities it was suggested that cupboards be included under the sink in the kitchenette, but in the 1946 model flat the arrangement was more uncompromising. In the kitchenette 'a fitting comprising upper and lower cupboards, the upper part having a glass front, takes the place of the old fashioned dresser', while in the living-dining room, in the space formerly occupied by the dresser 'bookshelves or bureau can stand. . . .'' All trace of the function of food preparation had now been banished from the living room.

The decision to form an amenities sub-committee was made early in December 1937. The Housing Committee as a whole had made specific suggestions in July of that year for the amenities in the two new estates of Coleman Mansions and Hillrise. Those amenities they identified as desirable were provision of playground space and a boot repair shed; clothes airers; back boilers for hot water heating; cement or concrete skirtings; rubber studs for iron door frames; and wash basins in all flats. Some of these items suggest an interest in the convenience of the tenants, while others show the Committee's awareness that these dwellings were intended to re-house people from clearance areas.
The first report of the amenities sub-committee prepared by the Housing Manager and delivered late in December 1937, related specifically to Hornsey Lane and Brecknock Road as well as to future Council dwellings. In the grounds of the two estates, the sub-committee suggested that garden plots be laid out for cultivation by the tenants and that courtyards be surfaced with 3/4 inch concrete chippings bedded in bitumen. Within future dwellings they recommended that wherever possible, sculleries should lead off the living room and that bathrooms might lead off the scullery, but WCs should be separate from the bathroom. The sub-committee could not decide on the type of flooring most suitable for the Council's flats, so they suggested a visit to housing schemes in neighbouring boroughs. There should be cement skirtings, cupboards in bedrooms, and flush doors. Scullery windows overlooking access balconies ought to be opaque only in the lower panes, and external coal shoots should be provided so that coal may be delivered from the balconies. Heating in the living room, as has been seen, was to be by the 'New Leader' type of portable range, in a grey mottled finish. For the bedrooms, heating would be by a coal fire in the first, gas fire in the second, and all subsequent bedrooms would be provided with a point for an electric fire. An electric power point in every habitable room was desirable, but the architect was asked to produce an estimate for the cost. Whether the Ascot or the back-boiler was preferable for hot water heating still depended on the relative cost of operation which was yet to be determined.

The sub-committee subsequently made recommendations on other individual amenities like window-boxes at Brecknock Road, but it was
in December 1943 when the Council began again to think of their future housing schemes that a comprehensive list of amenities was drawn up which reflected what was perceived as desirable in a new generation of dwellings and also stood as a criticism of existing provision.

First of all, walls and floors were to be made of sound resisting materials, all internal and external angles of plastering were to be rounded, and skirtings coved. The provision of cupboards was to be much more generous than in the pre-War flats. There were to be cupboards in the smaller bedrooms and under the draining board and sink in the scullery. An airing cupboard was to be provided wherever possible, depending on the type of water heating, and where this was not possible a separate linen cupboard was to be fitted. In the scullery the cooker would be gas or electric according to the choice of the tenant, water was to be heated by Ascot, and there would be a point for a refrigerator. The dado in the scullery, bathroom, and WC would be painted in gloss. In the bathroom along with the bath were to be clothes drying rails and a hand basin. Lighting would be by electricity, and a wireless point was to be fitted in the living room along with an electric power point. An open coal fire would heat the living room and the largest bedroom, while all the other bedrooms were to be fitted with an electric point and a half-flue for a gas fire. Curtain rails ought to be fixed in all the windows, flooring throughout should be composition, and coal storage be sufficient for a minimum of 5 cwts. Outside the flats pram sheds would be provided for 50% of the households, yards surfaced in coloured material, and dwarf railings placed around grass plots, gardens, and allotments. Many of these were amenities which had been debated during the 1930s, and were
now adopted, at least in principle, for a new generation of general
need housing in the Borough.

It is instructive to observe the degree of detail with which
Islington's Housing Committee concerned themselves. It might be
argued that they consulted their tenants only about the superficial
aspects of domestic comfort such as the type of stove or the number of
power points, but the larger questions about the type and location of
dwellings was outside discussion since the amount of rent the Council
could charge acted as a serious constraint, and they had no control
over the structural poverty of their tenants. Indeed, while they were
discussing the advantages of gas over electricity the Housing
Committee were also making arrangements for the possessions of the
special needs tenants to be fumigated before they moved into their new
flats. And some of their tenants, especially those moved out of
furnished lodgings, needed help with essential furnishing which the
Committee undertook to provide on a leaseback scheme. 30

Flats, as has been seen, were part of the London housing market
during the 1920s and 1930s along with the suburban speculative houses
which dominated the market at this time. Not only were luxury flats
built, but also flats for white-collar workers, or as the defenders of
Tufnell Park claimed, people who were able to pay £2 a week. 31  Seen
within this context, most of Islington Council's dwellings, despite
the protests from those hoping for private developers to buy their
houses, were not so very different from the main stream of
contemporary flat building. This was especially so when domestic
technology cast a cloak of equality over small flat provision, so that
even the special needs flats could claim conveniences undreamt of
twenty years before. In 1934 the Gas Light and Coke Company asked permission to set up at the Building Trades Exhibition at Olympia a facsimile of the scullery arrangements at 'The Highlands', then newly built. Their reason was that the flats were 'the best example they had had through their hands'.

In 1938 Ascot Gas Water Heaters requested that the Housing Committee allow them to photograph the kitchens of the Hillrise estate for their publication of that year. This book, *Flats, Municipal and Private Enterprise*, featured Kensal House, the pioneering modern flats designed by E. Maxwell Fry, along with a selection of newly built flats in both the private and the public sectors. Included were the Marquess of Northampton's flats in Richmond Grove, behind Islington Town Hall, but also Tollington Court at Tollington Park North Islington, flats erected by a private developer. But the contradictions which abounded in the public provision of dwellings for people who could not afford economic rents tarnished the image. In October 1942 the Housing Committee was suggesting that a trained social worker was needed on the Council's estates and already the Mary Ward settlement was sending volunteers to Blythe Mansions, those same flats which had been described as 'modern' when they were first opened in 1937.

By 1939 Islington Council had provided approximately 1,800 dwellings on 31 acres, which housed 9,566 people. This was still only about 5% the total number of dwellings in the Borough. But the LCC had built an additional 1,598 flats which meant that municipal flats accounted for nearly 8% of the total dwellings in the Borough. That Islington employed one architectural firm to design all their inter-
War flats meant that despite differences in appearance, the flats bore a strong organisational similarity. No experiments were carried out with novel building materials or architectural form. Basically the flats were load-bearing brick boxes approximately 28 feet wide in which were arranged the necessary spaces and amenities. Those dwellings built in the leafy areas of the Borough in the 1920s could hold their own with flats in the private sector, and it has been noted that private developers were interested in buying the Council's stock.

The management of the Council's dwellings was a constant preoccupation of the Housing Committee, and they were quick to establish caretakers on their estates, even before they employed a housing manager and began the process of developing a housing department. Nevertheless, the Housing Committee was involved in the day-to-day running of the Council's dwellings, concerning themselves with lettings, transfers, arrears, and complaints. Channels of complaint for tenants were limited, but it is significant that the Leyden Tenants' Committee established themselves while Labour had the majority after 1934. Under Labour's influence the Housing Committee reduced the responsibility of the caretakers and employed women housing managers to provide a much more interventionist style of management, especially for the special needs housing. While becoming more interventionist the Housing Committee attempted to take a closer interest in their tenants' concerns, sometimes to the point of appearing paternalistic. For example, when styles of working-class living changed over the inter-War period, it was up to the Housing Committee to translate the perceived changes into the design and equipment of their flats. The result was that the Housing Committee
assumed the voice of their tenants, who increasingly came from a
greater cross-section of the working classes, and unwittingly,
perhaps, the Committee set up the sort of autocratic style of
management which became alienating in more recent times.
Footnotes – Chapter Eight


4. Ibid.


6. Personal communication from John Monson.


8. Ibid., Vol 116, 17 January 1919, p. 70.

9. Ibid., Vol 100, 26 May 1911, p. 643.


12. Ibid., p. 176.

13. Ibid.

14. IHCM, 13 March 1924.

15. Ibid., 13 May 1920.

16. Ibid., 24 June 1920.


21. Ibid.
22. IHCM, 1 April 1937.

23. Ibid., 4 June 1936.


26. IHCM, 15 March 1923.


28. IHCM, 10 February 1921.


30. IHCM, 17 September 1935.

31. Ibid., 16 December 1920.

32. Ibid., 11 September 1924.

33. Ibid., 29 November 1934.

34. Ibid., 7 February 1935.

35. Ibid., 21 September 1922.

36. Ibid., 17 September 1935.

37. Ibid., 21 September 1922.

38. Ibid., 10 December 1925.

39. Ibid., 30 November 1922.

40. Ibid., 10 December 1925.

41. Ibid., 16 March 1922.

42. Ibid., 7 November 1935.

43. Ibid., 5 January 1928.

44. Ibid., 2 February 1928.

45. Ibid., 13 July 1922.


48. IHCM, 6 June 1935.

49. Ibid.

50. Ibid., 6 February 1936.


52. IHCM, 7 May 1936.

53. Ibid., 4 June 1936.

54. Ibid., 6 May 1937.

55. Ibid., 7 January 1937.

56. Ibid., 4 February 1937.

57. Ibid., 6 January and 3 February 1938.

58. Ibid., 3 June 1937.

59. Ibid., 8 July 1937.

60. Ibid., 6 January 1938.

61. Ibid., 3 February 1938.

62. Ibid., 2 June 1938.


64. IHCM, 1 June 1939.

65. Ibid., 1 April 1937.

66. Ibid., 23 December 1937, 6 January 1938.

67. Ibid., 30 June 1938.

68. Ibid., 6 April 1933.

69. Ibid., 1 June 1933.

70. Ibid., 7 November 1935, 3 June 1937.
71. Ibid., 30 June 1938.

72. Ibid., 13 July 1939.


75. Alison Ravetz, *op cit.*, p. 130.

76. IHCM, 4 February 1937.

77. Ibid., 4 July 1929.

78. Ibid., 4 October 1934, 7 November 1935.

79. Ibid., 2 January 1936.


81. IHCM, 25 February 1937.

82. Ibid., 24 November 1938.

83. Ibid., 2 December 1943.


86. IHCM, 7 July 1938.

87. Metropolitan Borough of Islington, *op cit.*

88. IHCM, 23 December 1937.

89. Ibid., 2 December 1943.

90. Ibid., 21 October 1937, 30 March 1938.


92. IHCM, 5 July 1934.

93. Ibid., 7 April 1938.


95. IHCM, October 1942.
Conclusion

In 1919 when Islington Borough Council embarked on its first housing programme, the local housing market had had a full century to mature. The market was complex, but among the inhabitants of Islington it was well defined, and there was space for both the exclusive Holly Park in Crouch Hill and the disreputable Campbell Road. Islington's Housing Committee had to work within the existing market, and their disputes with the Ministry of Health were generally over their perception of the logic of the market which sometimes ran contrary to the Ministry's own ends.

The Housing Committee depended on offers from the public for their sites while building under the general needs subsidies. Of necessity they chose freeholds, in a predominantly leasehold Borough, and they looked for property which would require little compensation for sitting tenants. These constraints led them to purchase sites in the north of the Borough where were found the larger houses set in generous gardens. When challenged about the location of these sites in relation to housing need, the Committee at this time could claim that need spanned all classes of their population.

In terms of management and rent Islington's Council dwellings built under the 1919 Act were not much different from the upper end of the private rented market in the area. The Housing Committee tried to keep their rents relatively low, but the standard to which they had built and the pressure from the Treasury on the Ministry of Health meant that the Ministry insisted on higher rents than they would have wished. On the other hand the Housing Committee spent more on maintenance and management than was acceptable to the Ministry and
later they had to put up with the opprobrium of the LCC for paying their caretakers too well.

Because of the relatively high rents, the tenants attracted to the Council's dwellings belonged of necessity to the better paid working class, and even some of them belonged to the lower middle class. The large population of the Borough meant that the Council did not have difficulty filling their flats, despite the high rents. Although a close check was kept on rent arrears, especially after the housing manager was appointed, the tenants did not seem to suffer from undue deference, and the Housing Committee was regarded as any private landlord would have been, and perhaps their tenants expected even more of them.

A change came over the public sector in Islington when the Council became involved in providing housing under the special need legislation of 1930 and 1935. This change may have been a reflection of what was happening in the rest of the Borough. Although renting continued to be the dominating tenure in Islington, the erosion of profits from letting through the vicissitudes of the market and the various measures imposed by Government to keep prices down, meant that there was little new investment in the housing stock. Multi-occupation, which had risen during the ten years from 1921, further wore down the physical fabric, and by the mid-1930s there was evidence that the better off were leaving Islington for the outer suburbs. While there was overcrowding in the populous south, in the larger houses in the north there were now vacancies, and it was only a matter of time before Tufnell Park and Highbury would surrender their middle-class status.
With the 99 year leases beginning to fall in, there was always the hope among owners that the property would be redeveloped. It was too late for Islington to participate to any extent in the expansion of the 'new' industries whose proprietors preferred greenfield sites in the outer suburbs, but for a time there was an interest in the northern reaches of the Borough by private flat builders. The hope that house owners in the better parts of Islington would be able to sell their houses for flat development perhaps lay behind some of the anguish expressed by the owners when first the LCC and then Islington Council sought to buy houses in Tufnell Park, Highbury New Park and Hornsey Lane by compulsory purchase for slum clearance and overcrowding.

The return of the Labour majority in 1934 coincided with the Council's building under the slum clearance and overcrowding legislation, and the Housing Committee took a much more interventionist approach to management of all their housing stock. The caretakers' duties were redefined and their responsibility reduced, while a woman housing manager was employed to assist with the running of the special needs estates. The tenancy agreement was greatly expanded to include standard procedures for payment of rent and the giving of notice, and the selection procedure was made less opaque if not more rational. But once Islington Council became involved in special needs housing the contradictions in what they were doing became apparent. While they were debating the pros and cons of the 'all-electric' flat, they were arranging to fumigate their tenants' belongings before they occupied their new dwellings. Under the general needs subsidies the Council could draw on the better off
among the working class in Islington, but under the special needs legislation they were constrained to accept only those who had been moved from the poorest housing. Even these tenants were not the worst off, since they still had to be able to pay the rent, which, as was shown, though very low at Wakelin House, crept up when building costs rose as the later special needs flats were being built. The classic problems which have come to be associated with the public sector emerged early at Wakelin House, for example, where graffiti appeared on the stairs and there were incidents of vandalism within weeks of the tenants moving in. For the poorest people in the Borough and more generally, subsidized housing was no substitute for higher wages.

The hoped for redevelopment of Islington did not take place before the Second World War, and after, the Borough shared the characteristics of other inner London boroughs like Paddington and parts of Kensington where the larger houses were turned into flats and rooms for a migrant population. The Council undertook a large scale flat building programme after the War, still using the same firm of architects, and the Council's flats came to house the stable indigenous residents. Indeed, the best options for working-class people living in Islington after the War who wished to improve their housing situation was to obtain a Council flat or to move out. The rented sector, for so long starved of investment, provided cheap accommodation, but in a physically worn out housing stock. When new investment appeared it came in the unexpected form of owner-occupation as 'gentrification' began to spread through the Borough from the southern wards north. At this point the housing market in Islington was on the point of beginning a new phase in which the other tenures
besides owner-occupation would have to find their place.
### Appendix 1 - Conversions Undertaken Under the 1919 Housing Act

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Addresses</th>
<th>No. of Units</th>
<th>Acquisition £</th>
<th>Cost Conversion £</th>
<th>Cost per Unit £</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Council's Schemes</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>93 Highbury Quadrant</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>486</td>
<td>1,180</td>
<td>416</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 Aberdeen Park</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>809</td>
<td>1,390</td>
<td>550</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>130 Elthorne Road</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>357</td>
<td>1,320</td>
<td>559</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Highbury New Park</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>1,150</td>
<td>437</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>82 Aubert Park</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>643</td>
<td>1,250</td>
<td>631</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 Rupert Road</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>323</td>
<td>537</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>390 Hornsey Road</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>422</td>
<td>611</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63/65 Highbury Hill</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1,051</td>
<td>2,833</td>
<td>555</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/8 Charles St.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>530</td>
<td>1,026</td>
<td>518</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 Highbury Terrace</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1,213</td>
<td>1,332</td>
<td>636</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>422 Hornsey Road</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>779</td>
<td>677</td>
<td>364</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Barnsbur St.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>564</td>
<td>456</td>
<td>1,020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>City and Queens Mansions</strong></td>
<td>89</td>
<td>19,059</td>
<td>64,982</td>
<td>944</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>128</td>
<td>26,497</td>
<td>78,341</td>
<td>598</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Office of Works Schemes</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Park House</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2,290</td>
<td>4,067</td>
<td>1,271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 Highbury Grove</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1,012</td>
<td>2,493</td>
<td>876</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>88 Hazellville Road</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1,798</td>
<td>5,085</td>
<td>688</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Colebrooke Row</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>937</td>
<td>2,071</td>
<td>1,003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6,037</td>
<td>13,716</td>
<td>959</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Islington Housing Committee Minutes
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>No. of Units</th>
<th>Cost Land £</th>
<th>Construction £</th>
<th>Cost per Unit £</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Addington Mansions</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>157,074</td>
<td>1,561</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Halton Mansions</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>11,200</td>
<td>169,035</td>
<td>1,099</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manchester Mansions</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>1,202</td>
<td>46,064</td>
<td>1,524</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warltersville Mansions*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Warltersville Rd.</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1,665</td>
<td>22,510</td>
<td>1,209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 &amp; 11 Warltersville Road</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>4,000</td>
<td>16,344</td>
<td>783</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>28,067</td>
<td>411,027</td>
<td>1,235</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Combined 26 purpose built flats and 20 converted flats

Source: Islington Housing Committee Minutes
## Appendix 3 - Islington Council's Flats Built Under the 1924 Housing Act

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>No. of Units</th>
<th>Cost Land £</th>
<th>Cost Construction £</th>
<th>Cost per Unit £</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tyndale Mansions, 1924</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>18,500</td>
<td>65,413</td>
<td>822</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laycock Mansions, 1924</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>14,200</td>
<td>73,935</td>
<td>667</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avenell Mansions, 1928</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>1,650</td>
<td>22,870</td>
<td>613</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leyden Mansions, 1929</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>5,500</td>
<td>66,279</td>
<td>646</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Highlands 1933</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>2,900</td>
<td>31,082</td>
<td>478</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>456</strong></td>
<td><strong>42,750</strong></td>
<td><strong>259,579</strong></td>
<td><strong>663</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Islington Housing Committee Minutes
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>No. of Units</th>
<th>Cost</th>
<th>Cost per Unit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Land £</td>
<td>Construction £</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wakelin House 1933</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>8,000</td>
<td>39,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blythe Mansions 1935</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>6,760</td>
<td>56,831</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coleman Mansions 1936</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>6,000</td>
<td>24,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hillrise 1937</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>11,850</td>
<td>61,148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hornsey Lane 1937</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>50,728</td>
<td>133,174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blythe Mansions Extension 1938</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>13,600</td>
<td>50,915</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brecknock Road 1938</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>65,552</td>
<td>155,448</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>874</strong></td>
<td><strong>162,490</strong></td>
<td><strong>521,616</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The Canonbury Estates and The Chestnuts were not completed until after World War II.

Source: Islington Housing Committee Minutes
Appendix 5 - Average Rents of Islington Council's Dwellings 1919 - 1939

Inclusive rent per week

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Estate</th>
<th>2 Rooms</th>
<th>3 Rooms</th>
<th>4 Rooms</th>
<th>5 Rooms</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conversions 1919 Act</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per Room</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>14/8</td>
<td>17/1</td>
<td>22/11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Build 1919 Act</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addington Mansions</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10/6</td>
<td>18/8</td>
<td>20/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manchester Mansions</td>
<td>12/-</td>
<td>13/10</td>
<td>16/-</td>
<td>18/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Halton Mansions</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>12/7</td>
<td>14/-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waltersville Mansions</td>
<td>10/3</td>
<td>13/2</td>
<td>18/-</td>
<td>19/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per Room</td>
<td>5/6</td>
<td>4/3</td>
<td>4/2</td>
<td>3/9½</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924 Act</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tyndale Mansions</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>12/6</td>
<td>16/6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laycock Mansions</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>11/10</td>
<td>15/-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avenell Mansions</td>
<td>10/-</td>
<td>14/-</td>
<td>18/-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leyden Mansions</td>
<td>10/6</td>
<td>13/9</td>
<td>16/-</td>
<td>17/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'The Highlands'</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>12/-</td>
<td>15/6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per Room</td>
<td>5/-</td>
<td>4/2</td>
<td>4/-</td>
<td>3/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930 and 1935 Acts*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wakelin House</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>9/7</td>
<td>11/10</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blythe Mansions</td>
<td>8/2</td>
<td>10/8</td>
<td>12/11</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coleman Mansions</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>13/10</td>
<td>15/9</td>
<td>18/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hillrise</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>14/-</td>
<td>16/-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hornsey Lane</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>14/3</td>
<td>18/5</td>
<td>21/11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blythe Mansions Ext</td>
<td>8/2</td>
<td>10/8</td>
<td>12/11</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brecknock Road</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>14/11</td>
<td>17/1</td>
<td>19/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per Room*</td>
<td>4/-</td>
<td>4/2</td>
<td>3/9</td>
<td>3/11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1937
Average Inclusive Rents - Special Needs
- 12/11 15/1 19/2

Average Inclusive Standard Rents
- 18/9 21/11 24/10

*Inclusive of Rates and Water Charges

Source: Islington Housing Committee Minutes
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