

A History of Housing in Wolverhampton 1750 to 1975

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Chapter 1 – Housing in the Nineteenth Century

The Development of the Town

The topography of Wolverhampton can be compared with a wheel with eleven roads radiating like spokes from the centre to neighbouring towns.

To the north roads lead to Stafford and Cannock. On the east three roads radiate to Wednesfield, Willenhall and Bilston respectively. Southwards there are three roads to Birmingham, Dudley and Stourbridge, while to the west, roads radiate to Shrewsbury, Bridgnorth and Trysull. The outlines of this road system have existed for several centuries, and it is to this embryonic road system that the development of the town will be related. Two factors above all have determined the extent of which houses and workshops have been built along the spokes of this wheel. These are firstly the pattern of landownership in the town, and secondly the existence of the coalfield and constraint that this placed on building. With regard to landownership, this will be dealt with in detail as we consider town development, but in general it can be said that manorial lands held by the Church and much of the land held by two or three landowners who owned much of the land of the town was not available for building until very late in the nineteenth century. The effects of the location of the coalfield can be dealt with at once.

With regard to Wolverhampton it is often considered to be the capital of the Black Country, but in fact the coalfield touches only the south-east corner of the town, and it is the area between the Willenhall Road and the Birmingham Road which saw the development of collieries and the associated iron works. Here houses were built, but most housing was off the coalfield. The calamitous effect of building on the coalfield can be seen from the example of Bilston, which is now part of Wolverhampton and reference will be made to housing in Bilston to compare it with Wolverhampton, but this study will confine itself to the pre-1966 town before the five county boroughs were formed by the amalgamation of neighbouring areas.

Wolverhampton has hallways been the largest town in the Black Country. The Black Country developed from the 1750's, with the utilization of Abraham Darby's discovery of the smelting of iron with coke by John Wilkinson. This enabled the magnificent 10 yard high seam of coal to be utilized and this area of only about 100 square miles developed as an inferno of smoke and flame as collieries and ironworks transformed the area into one of the great industrial centres created by the Industrial Revolution.

Before 1750 the Black Country was a collection of Industrial villages specialising in the making of nails and other metal crafts. Its position on the western edge of the Black Country gave Wolverhampton the dominating position in the trade with Shrewsbury and central Wales, and it was as a trading as well as an industrial town that Wolverhampton developed faster than other Black Country towns and kept ahead of Walsall which was the only corporate town of the Black Country with its long established saddlery and horse furniture crafts.

The development of Wolverhampton can be studied from 1750 with a detailed map of the town engraved by Isaac Taylor. At this time the area was a town of many metal trades. Water power was non-existent and the main tool was the file.

In 1750, according to Isaac Taylor there were 7,454 inhabitants of Wolverhampton occupying 1440 houses. The town was orientated north to south (see map) hemmed in to

the west by Goat Street (present North Street) continuing south at Cock Street (present Victoria Street). 214 houses and workshops were in High Green (the present Queen Square and part of Dudley Street) and the present Dudley Street. There were 209 houses in Tup Street and 180 houses in Boblake (Victoria Street) and Barns Street (Salop Street). There were 127 houses in Stafford Street and 112 in Rottons Row (Lichfield Street) which were to become the most notorious slum area of Wolverhampton. Another area of heavy occupation was Berry Street with the old Workhouse off Horseley Field.

Details of housing in Wolverhampton in 1750 are available from the vast mass of deeds at Wolverhampton Public Library, which the Council acquired from the slum clearance of the 1870s. Most of the working-class houses were likely to have been the first generation of brick and tiled dwellings as opposed to the earlier wattle and daub.

Nearly forty years later there is the Godson map and rate plan of Wolverhampton of 1788 which shows that the number of inhabitants had increased to 11,368 and the number of houses to 2270. Thus the population had increased by 52% in 38 years and the housing stock had increased by about 58%. This population increase amounted to about 14% over each decade, which was a much slower rate of population growth than in the first half of the nineteenth century.

From Godson's map it would seem that the new houses had been built in Courts squeezed into gaps in the existing houses. These courts were to be the curse of Wolverhampton housing. Very few back-to-back houses were built, but the absence of building regulations meant that houses round a central courtyard were built to the highest possible density, and such houses have continued to exist until very recent years. The only identifiable new area of housing was in Canal Street and its courts where 658 persons occupied 132 houses and workshops in the area where the new canal ran. Owing to the fact that this was low-lying land it quickly became another notorious slum area.

Godson's map also enables the large landowners of the town to be identified. The largest landowner was William Pulteney of the Leveson-Gower family, who owned about 300 acres including much coal bearing land. Mrs Petite owned about the same amount. John Wightwick owned about 200 acres north of the town in the Dunstall area. The Giffords, Lord of Bilston manor and the Marquis of Stafford each owned about 100 acres, each of mainly coalbearing land to the east of the town. The total titheable area of Wolverhampton at this time was about 3000 acres.

Of these large landowners, the Leveson-Gowers were the most notorious. Originating as a Willenhall family in the 13th century they showed a remarkable gift for the acquisition of manorial and church land in the Wolverhampton area which was only equalled by their ability to retain it. Purchasing much land on the dissolution of the monasteries, this Catholic family sided with the King against Cromwell, and had its land confiscated, but by litigation and other means soon restored and extended its land holdings. In the 19th century by marriage, the family became Dukes of Sutherland, the largest landowners in the United Kingdom and responsible for the notorious highland clearance.

The further development of Wolverhampton and the extension of house building can be followed through a magnificent series of plans of the town now in the public library and also from housing materials contained in the ten-yearly Censuses.

A map of the 1820's shows a build-up of courts and alleys in the Stafford Road and Littles Lane area and the development of Caribee Island, the Irish and prostitute quarter of the town. St John's Square was at this time a most fashionable part of the town. The

area between Walsall Street and Bilston Street was losing its rural character. There was another development at Pipers Meadow with the building of Queen Street, Castle Street and later, Tower Street. On the west of the town Darlington Street had been driven to facilitate the Shrewsbury/Wales trade and further opened up the fashionable areas of Tettenhall and Compton Road.

For 1842 there is a detailed Tithe Map. In the south-west the area bordered by Great Brickkiln Street, Zoar Street, Merridale Street – Worcester Street was laid out. In the south-east between Penn Road and Dudley Road there was some development with Graiseley Street as a centre and another around Poultney Street. To the east Cleveland Road had been built to connect with Bilston, but between Cleveland Road and Dudley Road there was virtually no build-up at all except for some houses in Steelhouse Lane and the new workhouse on the Bilston Road. Much of this land was owned by the Duke of Cleveland and is a clear example of a large estate limiting the amount of building land available. In the north-west of the town there had been little development. A broad street had been driven north from Darlington Street known as Wellington Road but later called Waterloo Road. It ran parallel with the two existing roads in the direction of Stafford. This wide and important thorough-fare remained for a considerable time without any of the imposing mansions which now flank it. Much of the land west of Waterloo Road belonged to the Dukes of Cleveland. East of Waterloo Road was owned largely by the Hordens, bankers and large landowners of Wolverhampton.

Landowners owning more than 50 acres in 1842 were:-

Wolverhampton Landowners 1842

Landowner	Land Held (Acres)
Duke of Cleveland	447
Henry Horden	223`
Dukes of Sutherland	198
Louis Hayes Petit	178
Thos. Perry	173
John Lewis Petit	165
John Gough	162
Geo. Jones	111
John Corser	70
John Stokes	63
John Dixon	57
 Total titheable land in Wolverhampton	 <u>2923</u>

The 1885 Tithe map shows development in the Ablow Street area and Pearson Street linking Dudley Road. The Cleveland lands were beginning to open up development in the triangle – Dudley Road – Green Lane (now Birmingham New Road) and Derry Street. Further south Blakenhall was developing, again on Cleveland lands, in the area Hall Street, Franchise Street – Cross Street. Another important development was at Whitmore Reans in the north-west. Great Hampton Road (now Newhampton Road) had been built linking Waterloo Road with Tettenhall Road at Newbridge.

Along this road Great Hampton Street linked Dunstall Lane – and further west came streets such as Coleman Street, Evans Street etc. and Hordern Road up to Gibbs Street. Much of this development was from the Hordern lands.

The Outline Plan of the Borough of Wolverhampton of 1877 shows in the south and west, development along Tettenhall Road. Connaught Road and Albert Road had been built by what had been the Racecourse, but had then become West Park. The area St Judes Road, Riches Street and Sweetman Street was also built up. All through to Francis Street and up to the railway. East of Waterloo Road, Molineux Street and the streets off it had been built. In the north-east there was development along Wednesfield Road with Lincoln, Vernon and Grosvenor Streets and the Crimean Streets Alma and Inkerman further east. In the south-west the area between Brickkiln Street and Merridale Road was being developed and the complex of streets from Peel to Stephenson was laid out. In the south-east Ranelagh and Knox Road had been built off Dudley Road, but east of Green Lane (Birmingham New Road) there was still virtually no development on land eminently suitable for building. However, a skeleton of streets – Dixon, Major, Cable and Park Lane were appearing at the south-east corner of the Borough.

An 1895 plan of the Borough of Wolverhampton showed that in the north-west Leicester Street, Dunstall Road, Bright Street, Sherwood Street and Alan Road had been built. In the north-east there was development to the north of Cannock Road in the Prole Street area. Along Wednesfield Road there was very little development on land belonging to the Petit family. In the south west there was development south of Merridale Road and south of Brickkiln Street. Cemetery Lane had been improved and re-titled Jeffcock Road. This was a period of very rapid growth of the town particularly in Graiseley and Blakenhall. In the south-east of the town the Cleveland estates were at last being developed around Vicarage Road and All Saints Road. By this time the town had taken its modern shape – or rather the shape known to its inhabitants before the post 1945 clearances of recent years, except for the Council houses which constitute a separate story.

If one turns to the number of houses provided, material from the Wolverhampton Censuses provides the following picture:

Census	Population	% increase since last Census	Houses Inhabited	Uninhabited	Person per Inhabited house
1801	12565		2344	190	4.3
1811	14836	17	2826	63	5.2
1821	18380	24	3338	157	5.4
1831	24732	35	4901	388	5.0
1841	36382	48	6952	438	5.2
1851	49985	37	9184	472	5.4
1861	60860	22	11770	1069	5.4
1871	68291	12	13272	790	5.2
1881	75766	11	14470	1166	5.2
1891	82662	9	16089		5.1
1901	94187	14	19277	1717	4.9

These figures show the enormous increase in population. The rate of increase built up from 1750 and rose to a fantastic peak of nearly 50% in 1841. After this, growth tailed off as the coal and iron of the Black Country became exhausted. With the Great Depression from 1874 to about 1890 population growth fell to very low levels for the Black Country and entailed a considerable degree of net emigration from this area, since the natural increase of births over deaths amounted to a greater increase than the total recorded. The figures of density of persons per house are interesting. The 1750 figure is 5.2 persons per house. This ratio tended to deteriorate during the period of maximum population growth and was 5.4 during the 1850's and 1860's. With the comparatively slow rate of population increase from 1870 the housing situation improved and by 1901 was down to 4.9. The present day density figure for Wolverhampton is 3.2 persons per house.

The number of empty houses also grew sharply as population growth slowed down. It is held by some observers that empty houses demonstrate an excess of supply over demand which gives tenants greater choice and tends to lower rents, but if this were so one would expect the ratio of persons per house to drop more rapidly. It is more likely that a large number of the empty houses represented derelict houses as the housing stock became older and few houses were demolished.

In 1900 the total number of houses in Wolverhampton was about 20,000. Of these, about half had been built before 1850 when building regulations were non-existent. About one quarter of the houses were built before 1830 in the centre of the town. It was here that the festering slums were to be found and as we shall see, this was the only accommodation that many working people could afford to rent. New housing in the town consisted of artisans' dwellings which could be rented (or exceptionally, bought) only by the highest paid workers.

General Housing Conditions in the 19th Century.

The condition of housing in the east of the town on the coalfield can be seen from a letter of January 1848 from a Wolverhampton solicitor, George Robinson, to T.W. Gifford, lord of the Manor of Stowheath. It is a report Robinson was asked to prepare on the prospects and advantages of enfranchising the copyholders of the Manor. The town principally involved was Bilston. Robinson showed that of 2450 houses in Bilston, only 200 were rated above £10, the rateable value being calculated as seven eighths of the letting value. The remaining houses (or to use Robinson's own figure 2040 which does not reflect very well on his arithmetic) were rated under £10. This would mean that no working-class house was rented above 4/6d. a week. There were nearly 700 copyholders in Bilston (out of perhaps 4500 families – G.B.) but most of these would not be in a position to buy their franchise even at 4 to 6 years' purchase, Robinson went on. In addition, it had been customary for the steward of the manor to take possession of void strips between old enclosures and road as belonging to the lord and granting them at 3 lives to cottagers who took possession and built houses on the strips. 116 of such leases brought in £67 per annum. They were said to be covered with 350 houses of the most wretched description. The quotations relating directly to housing in the letter are as follows:

“Of Bilston... eight tenths of the land is covered with heaps of mineral rubbish and five sixths of the houses are of the poorest description”.

“...With the exception of a few good houses in the principal street the whole of this township is a scene of desolation, except for mining purposes, and many of the houses of the smaller class are falling down – 150 of them are now in untenable ruin. In fact it answers better to get any small compensation from the Coalmaster for injuring the houses and let them fall down than repair them when they are not worth ten years to purchase.

Until the era of the Council house in the 1920's the vast mass of Wolverhampton building has always been done by the shadowy figure of the speculative builder who has left no records and whose activities, cost and profits etc. are almost impossible to chronicle. However, building societies have been active in the West Midlands from the eighteenth century and indeed, this was a pioneering area for such societies. But such societies made no impact on the basic housing problem which was, and still is, how to house all working-class people decently at “economic rents”. In addition to building societies there were various philanthropic schemes to build houses for the lower paid which would yield 5% on the invest capital. But the twin objectives of housing the lower-paid and producing a profit were mutually exclusive. An example is the Metropolitan Association for Improving the Dwellings of the Working-Classes in the 1850's which spread from London to the West Midlands. A branch in Dudley built dwellings and a Wolverhampton branch was formed. At a dinner of the Dudley branch of the Association Lord Ingestone said “If Wolverhampton did not strictly operate the common lodging houses Act, one thousand people (poor creatures) would sleep nightly in the streets”. Common Lodging Houses were the resort of the itinerant and near destitute; the destitute went to the Workhouse as tramps. The number of Common Lodging Houses in Wolverhampton varied through the century. In 1853 there were 340, and in 1861, the enormous number of 560. In the middle years of the century they tended to fall (302 in 1868) and rose again with the Great Depression (539 in 1872).

The sum total of the activities of the Metropolitan Association seems to have been a row of model cottages erected at the junction of Brickkiln Street with Peel Street to be let to working-class families at a nominal rent of 3/-d. per week. In fact, such a rent could only be afforded by quite well-paid workers in regular employment. After a few years the Association was wound up.

During the 1850's Land Societies proliferated. This was a direct result of both the appalling housing conditions under which a majority of working people lived and also the revolutionary agitation of the most important working-class movement of the nineteenth century – Chartism. One of the most important activities of Chartists from 1845 was the Chartist Land Scheme. This aimed to settle workers on the land with their own house and this would also achieve the aim of Chartism for working men to have the vote. Considerable numbers of Black Country workers joined the Chartist Land Scheme and fifteen were allotted land. Shares cost £1.6s.0d. which would be paid in weekly sums of any amount. With a paid-up share, one's name was entered in periodic ballots for the allocation of land bought with the total sum of money from paid-up shares. An important focus of Black Country activity was the Chartist land colony at Gt. Dodford near Bromsgrove. Numbers of the original cottages still exist here, but these and the land on

which they stand are now by the irony of fate extremely expensive, highly desirable middle-class dwellings.

To counteract Chartist influence a Birmingham Freehold Land Society was formed in 1847. This was the first of its kind in the country. By 1849 its membership was 7213 of whom 706 were from Wolverhampton. A separate Wolverhampton Freehold Society was formed in 1848. These Societies stressed that landownership conferred the vote and all of them vitriolically repudiated Chartism.

Building Societies also received an impetus from Chartist activity and the Wolverhampton and South Staffordshire Building Society started in 1847 was, within a year, one of the largest in the county. Unfortunately the activities of these institutions can only be followed through scanty reports in the local press. Parts of Wolverhampton known to have been developed by Building Societies in the middle of the 19th century, include Moorfields Road, Newhampton Road, Larches Lane and some development along the Merridale and Wednesfield Roads.

The basic problems of the provision of decent working-class houses were as follows. First was the insoluble problem already noticed of providing reasonable housing at a rent that working people could afford. This can be quantified as follows. It is likely that less than one quarter of working-class families lived at or above a minimum standard of comfort which would enable them to rent new or nearly new dwellings out of the town centre. Another quarter of families lived on wages which could not even provide a basic subsistence of food, shelter and fuel. The other half of the population lived at a standard above subsistence, but below minimum comfort. It was this 75% of working-class families for whom a housing problem existed. The second problem concerning housing was the lack of local housing bye-laws until the 1860's which meant that houses were crowded into existing courts and alleys provided with neither light nor ventilation. This merges with the next problem which was the appalling sanitary state of the town resulting in extremely high death rates. Included in the sanitary problem was the provision of a pure and adequate water supply.

Sanitary Conditions in the 19th Century

In 1777 the town's first Improvement Act was passed. The progress made in 80 years was summarised by a Special Sewerage committee set up in 1858. The Committee found that the average depth of existing sewers was from four feet to one foot six inches which was not even sufficient to drain cellars. Such sewers as there were, were generally in good condition but few of them received waste from water closets or solid matter of any kind. Of 38 miles of streets only twelve had any drainage below the surface and only 5½ miles had sewers deep enough to drain cellars. 26 miles of streets had no drainage at all. The Committee sent a questionnaire to towns whose sewerage was thought to be advanced, and this included, oddly enough, Bilston. This town replied that its sewers were 10½ miles in length, that the sewage passed through filtering beds into Bilston Brook and that all 40 of Bilston's water closets were emptied into the sewers. How advanced Bilston was can be judged by the fact that in 1900 the whole ward of Moxley was unsewered together with other roads which included the main Bilston-Wolverhampton Road, Wellington Road.

Cheltenham was said to be the first town which separated solid from liquid matter by filtration and the Committee applied to Mr Dangerfield, the Cheltenham surveyor, who proposed the following scheme. That there should be a single outfall for Wolverhampton

into the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal below Compton Road. That main sewers should encircle the town at a depth from 6 feet 6 inches to 2 feet 6 inches. The Committee stated that the present state of the sewerage imperatively demanded the immediate adoption of an efficient and complete system and with these strong words recommended the acceptance of the Dangerfield scheme to cost £50,000 plus a sewerage works costing £4,000. If the Council raised £60,000 over 50 years this would be equivalent to a 6d. annual rate. The first fruit of this labour was the formation of a permanent sewerage Committee in November 1861. In 1882 there was a Council motion that £55,000 should be raised, not more than £7,000 to be spent each year and work was to commence in January 1863. When that month arrived an extended meeting of the Sewerage Committee voted that no action should be taken until a properly qualified person should report on the scheme and a Mr Curley of Hereford was appointed. He reported in March 1863 approving in general the scheme of the Wolverhampton Borough Engineer (who had in 1861 modified Dangerfield's scheme to include 3 outfalls for the town). In November 1864 tenders went out for the sewers, but a month later legal difficulties were raised. In February 1864 a resolution was carried by the Council to petition Parliament for legislation on sewerage schemes and asking for an enquiry into the best means of dealing with sewage. The chairman of the Sewerage Committee congratulated the Council on not having spent its money as future legislation would perhaps allow them to dispose of solid sewage by sale without polluting streams. He quoted a report from Leibig the famous chemist, that London sewage was worth £2m a year and from this the chairman concluded that Wolverhampton sewage would therefore be worth between £40,000 and £45,000 a year.

Long before this it had been apparent that the inherent difficulties of the situation were being taken advantage of by the anti-sewerage party in the town. In 1862 those who supported the sewerage of the town took the offensive with a literary piece called *Fellowsiana* – A Dramatic Sketch dedicated without permission to the Goldthorn Hill Lodge of Oddfellows and to the Aldermen, Town Councillors and Burgesses who are opposed to the Sewerage. It began:

Smokery, chokery, stenchiness, slum,
How do you like your filthiness done,
Stagnant, preserved, or sent off with a run,
Electors of Carrabee Island.

The sketch was written by Frank F. Fellows who claimed that he had been defeated in the local election by the plural votes of the anti-sewerage party. There followed the speech he would have made before the Council:

There be thousands in our city
In noisome alleys pent
Where every breath of air that comes
Is foul and pestilent;
Where from the narrow casements
All that they can descry
Are the reeking, rotten houses
And a little square of sky.

There, crowded all together
To live as best they may
Are children, men and maidens
And mothers of yesterday.
There are thousands in our city
That drink from day to day
The water in the stagnant butt
All black with foul decay.

So let us work together
To win the happy time
When our fair city will be cleansed.

He then identified the anti-sewerage party:

Are there not owners of small tenements
Whose only incomes are the hard wrung rents
There noisome houses yield; and who would fain
The ills 'neath which their tenants droop retain
Rather than wisely spare the smallest fraction
To give their tenants health and satisfaction.

An appendix gave the reasons of some councillors for opposing the sewerage.

Councillor Willcock	-	Commercial depression
Alderman Wallace	-	Wait the working out of mines at Monmore Green
Councillor Sidney	-	The matter should be decided by a referendum

A Councillor who shall be nameless – he owns small houses upon the rents whereof he is almost exclusively dependant. As he cannot diminish his income from that source he does not desire sewerage and thinks those who want it should pay for it. This man owns 15 small houses the rateable value of which is £73.10s.0d. and this would cost him ¼ per house per week or 1/4½d. per house per annum.

In 1867 the ill-fated Barnhurst Farm was purchased for depositing treated sewage and carrying on farming operations. The farm has been a lively political issue for over 100 years to the present day. The Barnhurst Estate was purchased for £27,915 and was let at £750 per annum for the first two years with the privilege of the lesser utilising the town's sewerage when the sewage works was built on the farm.

In November 1868 a tender was accepted to build a sewage works and exactly a year later work was proceeding on laying the town's sewers. This continued until November 1872 when it was reported that all contracts for sewers had been completed. The town council preened itself on a job well done. But was it? To answer this question we must turn to the fate of the sewerage which was to have passed through the sewers.

In 1860 while preparing plans for the sewerage it was ascertained that there were 472 water closets in the town. (The 1861 Census showed 9,656 houses in the town – G.B.).

By 1874, two years after the completion of the sewerage and the year in which Dr. Ballard made a devastating criticism of the sanitary state of the town, the number of water closets had risen to 500. From 1851 until the setting up of the Special Sewerage Committee, responsibility for the sanitary state of the town rested with the Health of Town Committee and to its proceedings we now turn.

In 1853 the Committee reported that three new street sweeping machines had been hired, resulting in a marked improvement in the state of the streets. In the same year the 69th section of the Public Health Act making landlords responsible for the making up of parts of streets fronting their properties had been invoked. A long list of streets was given as cleaned "which hitherto had been filthy and almost impassable". In the same year a flagging rate was raised and by 1854 much of the town centre was said to be flagged. The approach of cholera led to the appointment of 8 Sub-Inspectors of Nuisances, six of whom were dismissed the following year. In 1854 the health of the town was reported "very satisfactory". This was in the year when the death rate in East Wolverhampton was 41.6 per 1000, the highest since the cholera year of 1849.

In 1855 a Mr Rose of Liverpool was given a contract to remove the night soil from the town for 5 years for £1,896 per annum. For the first time we can judge the regularity with which privies were emptied. In 1855 3,092 applications were received to empty middens and ashpits. If all these were attended to (by no means a fair assumption) less than one third of the town's houses were attended to in that year. This report also complained of the total want of powers of the Council to control the situating and construction of buildings with the result that houses continued to be constructed in ill-ventilated courts and alleys. The Borough Engineer had drawn a privy which could easily be converted to a water closet and this had been lithographed and distributed to all builders in the town. Progress had been made with numbering the houses and corners of streets throughout the town had been labelled with cast-iron plated with moulded lettering painted white. The emptying of privies and ashpits rose for 6,590 in 1856 to 7,578 in 1859.

The contract for night soil was re-let in 1863 to the Wolverhampton Manure Company for 15 years on more modest terms. Payment of £5000 was to be made the first year and this was to fall by £100 per year with no payments being made for the last ten years. This would result in a saving to the Council in the first year of £1050. This contract soon passed to R. Deans & Son, who held it until 1868 when the Council took it over. Responsibility for sewage then passed to the intriguingly named Team Committee. The premises in School Street were purchased from Deans with a Council grant of £1000. In the first year it was estimated that night soil was sold for £263 and stable manure for £23. The capital cost of providing this service was £865. In 1869 things were still going well. Accumulations of night soil within the Borough were things of the past. Demand for night soil had been so great that some customers had not received their boatloads. Sales of night soil had reached £1614 while costs of removal had been £1500.

In 1870 the Sanitary Committee, as was its wont, congratulated the Town Council on the satisfactory state of public health. With a death rate of 27.4 per 1000 in East Wolverhampton that year, there was perhaps rather more than the usual justification for such self-deception.

By 1871 there were 17 public urinals in the town. Sales of night soil were still profitable, but were rather lower due to the freezing of the canals, boats sales being more profitable

than those from the depot. The next year cost exceeded sales. The establishment of the Team Department was given as 32 horses and 75 men (in that order – G.B.) By 1873 the Team Committee was making its first report and announced that 17,368 ashpits and closets had been emptied. Sales of manure were £1,500 but costs had risen to £2,900.

1874 produced the bombshell of Ballard's Report on the Sanitary Condition of Wolverhampton. The complacency of the Council had now reached the stage noticeable in modern Wolverhampton town councillors, some of whom can hardly be brought to believe that improvement is possible. Ballard explained that the common receptacle for excrement and ash was the privy midden which was emptied on request to the Council. The scavenging was fairly done except in the poorer parts of the town. Ballard criticised the emptying which was done at night by depositing the whole content of ash and excrement onto the roadway and allowing the liquid to run away, after which the solid was shovelled onto the cart. The water supply was found contaminated. He then criticised housing conditions and concluded that in many cases they were such as could be remedied by the Sanitary Authority. Pigs were unwholesomely kept in nearly all parts of the town. Some bakeries were extremely dirty and close to filthy privies and dung pits. No continuing records of inspected premises were kept. Where court cases were brought by the Sanitary Authority the JPs in most cases were members of the Town Council or owners of low property in the town. And so the criticisms went on; no systematic inspection of the town, unwholesome food not dealt with, slaughterhouses not inspected, disinfection of houses badly carried out etc. The Town Council was so shocked that Ballard's report was printed with an elaborate defence by the Mayor prefacing it.

Ballard had noted in 1874 that there were only 500 water closets in the town and recommended that if extension was not likely in the near future that the pail system should be adopted. This was to be the sanitary innovation of the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Older houses had been built with vault middens resulting in a vast, underground store of excrement. Later houses contained the privy with a connecting door to the ashpit, an adjoining shed for ashes and rubbish which were shovelled over the excrement. The main health hazards of this system were the leakage of liquid manure and the lack of ash to cover the manure in summer. It was proposed to substitute for the privy a pail which would be regularly emptied. This presupposed the closing of the ashpit which would eventually lead to the necessity for the modern dustbin. In 1874 the Sanitary Committee proposed the adoption of pails and ashtubs, the cost of alteration and provision to be £3 to £4 per house. This can be classed as perhaps the most disastrous sanitary decision taken in the nineteenth century. Why was it taken when the cost of installing water closets and connecting them to the sewers could hardly have cost much more than the provision of pails? The answer was given by the Wolverhampton Medical Officer of Health who, in an authoritative way expressed a widespread middle-class prejudice:

“In a mixed population where the majority of the working-classes have little regard to cleanliness, care or decency, the water closet is unsuited to universal application.”

The pan system progressed as follows:

1875	1877	1878
850	2,050	3,889

It was claimed in 1877 that 1,664 of the 2,050 pans were being emptied weekly. A sanitary census of 1882 revealed the following:

Pans	7,907
Closets into Vaults	1,429
Closets into Pits	2,411
WCs with Water	1,579
WCs without Water	362
Earth Closets	21
	<u>12,709</u>

From these figures it appears that more than half the houses of the town (14,536 at the 1881 Census) had pans and nearly 13,000 houses had closet accommodation of some sort. In 1881, 311,240 pans were emptied giving a weekly average of about 6,000. In 1884 pail closets were still being installed in most new houses.

In 1884 Henry Mallet, the new Medical Officer of Health, made his first report. Like most newcomers to the sanitary services of the Black Country he was shocked by what he saw; like others before him, however, he soon became inured to such conditions. Mallet criticised the pan system because of the liquid matter and the failure to keep the pan dry with ashes, particularly in the summer. He stated that in many parts of the town there were open middens, and still worse, closed cesspits. These were often fed by several closets and retained their contents for years. The convenience and external cleanliness of these closets made it difficult to persuade people that they were a danger to health.

In 1891 the MOH was saying that water closets were probably impossible in some houses owing to the carelessness of tenants, but that they were particularly suitable for new houses. A major impediment to the provision of water closets was the water charge. The water supply was still inadequate for all purposes and the enormous charge of 10/-d. a year was made for water to a closet. This led to the development of the waste water closet which the MOH in his 1893 report considered was the only type of water closet possible outside a house where frost precautions were impossible. In 1894 Mallet noted that if the Council made a charge for pans in new houses it would encourage landlords to erect waste water closets instead. In 1899 the MOH listed the three main sanitary problems of the town and long with better housing and better treatment of ash refuse he listed the necessity for replacing pails with water closets. Mallet reported in 1900 that there were 12,000 pail closets in the borough (20,945 houses in the 1901 Census) and there was little prospect of a rapid transfer to water closets. In fact, pail conversions were not completed until 1924 and waste water closets existed until 1932.

Water Supply

In Wolverhampton the earliest reference to the water supply is in R. Plot's famous Natural History of Staffordshire, 1686. Plot said that there were only four weak springs in the town, "from which they bring all the water used for meat and drink in great leathern Budgets laid cross a horse with a tunnel at the top to fill them". The Wolverhampton Constable's Account Books 1688 to 1750 name 8 wells and 10 pumps in the town. Stebbing Shaw in 1801 speaks of a "Waterworks which has long supplied this town is the property of Dr. Wilkes". Wilkes was a famous historian and medical

practitioner in Willenhall. Nothing further is known of this early waterworks, but the inadequate supply of water led to the sinking of deep public wells and wells in private houses. At the beginning of the nineteenth century there were mineral springs at Chapel Ash, Monmore Green and Grazeley Brook, while a Cold, Warm and Swimming Bath was kept by E. Farmer, near Town Wells, Cock Street.

The supply of water by wells continued until 1844 when the Wolverhampton Waterworks Company was formed in the face of much opposition. A proposed pumping station at Tettenhall raised the ire of the inhabitants of that fashionable quarter outside the town and the Staffs and Worcs Canal opposed the Company on the ground that it would interfere with their water. The initial capital was only £26,000. The Company supplied its first water in April 1847. Its early hope of raising one million gallons a day was not realised. In 1849 it supplied 130,000 gallons a day to 1,300 houses and water was cut off from 7 pm to 5am except at weekends. A new waterworks was built at Goldthorn Hill with a reservoir for 1½m gallons, but this was as disappointing as Tettenhall, producing only 235,000 gallons per day instead of the scheduled 575,000 gallons. Difficulties with water led the Company to supplement its supplies from the Rough Hills Collieries. This led to complaints regarding the quality of the water, one alderman in debate saying that in adding the water to brandy the contents of the glass had turned as black as ink.

The Town Council made various attempts to acquire the Waterworks, the most monumental failure being that of a Parliamentary Bill of 1854. The consequences were unprecedented. The costs came to £6,500. Two or three engineers demanded their fees, and the Council had no money to pay them. While the council debated the matter a representative from the High Sheriff came with a writ giving him powers to sell the property of the Corporation if his demands were not satisfied. He placed bailiffs in the Town Hall and laid hands on the furniture including the historic oak, mayoral chair, robes and mace. A second lot of bailiffs were sent to the police barracks where they seized everything – police clothing, bedding, water-carts and fire engine. The police were deprived of their handcuffs and truncheons and jeered at in the street. The sheriff came to the meeting and told the Council that if a claim for £1,388.17.6d. was not met in five days he would advertise and auction all the goods in his possession. At a subsequent meeting it was agreed to pay £738.18.0d. out of the Magistrate Fee Fund and the bailiffs were withdrawn. Eventually special towns meetings had to be called to authorise emergency rates to pay the debts.

The Corporation finally took over the water supply in 1868. by the time of Ballard's Report in 1874 it was claimed that 9,500 houses out of 13,222 were supplied with water at a charge of 2/6d. a quarter for all houses rated under £7. By then the sources of water were three pumping stations at Tettenhall, Goldthorn Hill and Cosford, supplemented by water from Cosford Brook and Albrighton Brook. The water from the wells was pure, but both the Brooks had drains and privies which discharged into them along their whole length and were thus contaminated. Ballard complained that the Council closed contaminated public pumps without providing an alternative source of supply. The Council operated its water supply as a trading company selling only to those who were willing to buy, but Ballard reminded them of their responsibility to supply free water to all those who could carry it away. In Wolverhampton, however, there were only four public fountains. One of these had been provided by Councillor Fowler in 1859, the council paying for the water which cost £4 a year. The Council was also bound to supply

water where the existing source was unwholesome. This the Council did not do, said Ballard.

Tap censuses subsequent to Ballard's inspection suggest that the number of houses supplied with water was greatly exaggerated, in his Report. In 1880 for instance, there were reported to be 4,188 water taps in the borough and the 1884 report of the Sanitary Committee gave 5,349 premises supplied with tap water and 560 supplied by wells. Since there were nearly 14,500 houses at that time to which must be added the innumerable workshops, factories and offices, etc. it is quite clear that only a small proportion of working-class houses were supplied with water.

Health and Housing

The appalling housing conditions of large numbers of the population led to general death rates much higher than in the country as a whole. Throughout the 19th century (and persisting to the present day) was a wide disparity between death rates in the working-class east of the town and the more salubrious west. The high mortality rate affected largely the under-fives and was a veritable slaughter of the innocents from scarlet fever, diphtheria, measles, whooping cough etc. Finally, the unprecedentedly rapid development of the town in the first half of the century and the deep depression of the period 1875-90 meant that death rates fell very slowly up to 1900.

From the 1840's death rates in Wolverhampton were as follows:

	Death rate per 1000		
	1841-50	1851-60	1861-70
Wolverhampton East	32	33.1	29.9
Wolverhampton West	21.3	23.0	20.6
Wolverhampton Borough	27.0	28.0	24.0
England and Wales	22.4	22.2	22.5

By the 1880's deaths were down to 20.8, but rose again in the next decade.

	Death rate per 1000		
	1871-80	1881-90	1891-1900
Wolverhampton Borough	24.8	20.8	21.6

Infant mortality (children under 5) accounted for about half of all deaths:

	Total Deaths	Deaths under 5
1842 Wolverhampton Registration District	2,389	1,314

In the 1880's infant mortality ranged from a high of 188 per 1000 to a low of 156. In the 1890's infant mortality rose. In 1889 deaths from TB of children under 5 were twelve times greater in the east than in west Wolverhampton. In 1891 the Wolverhampton Medical Officer of Health reported "mortality fearfully high" with the death rates the highest since 1875, but in 1895 the death rate was still higher. Epidemics swept through the crowded and insanitary houses. Between 1872 and 1884, 790 children died from scarlet fever, 353 from measles, 461 from smallpox (446 of these in the epidemic of 1872) and 1,120 from diarrhoea. Differences in the death rate between the east and the

west of the town continued as high as ever and when corrected for the fact that the Workhouse was in the east, gave the following:

	Death rate per 1000		
	East	West	Borough
1893-98	25.4	18.1	21.5

The 1875 Improvement Scheme

In 1875 Wolverhampton Council made its first incursion into a municipal assisted housing scheme. This arose from the Artizans and Labourers Dwelling Act of 1875 and was greatly influenced by a great Birmingham clearance scheme under the leadership of Joseph Chamberlain. The ideas of Chamberlain were extremely powerful at this time. Unfortunately Chamberlain suffered from the delusion that if local authorities cleared the slums, then private enterprise would build houses. As he said to the 1885 royal Commission on the Housing of the Working-Classes: "The difference between London and the Provinces is a simple one. In the Provinces it is necessary to destroy unhealthy and overcrowded houses and private enterprise may be safely left to reconstruct and re-house the poor".

All subsequent experience has shown this to be disastrously false. As a result, the spectacular schemes in Birmingham and Wolverhampton had the effect of clearing crowded, insanitary slums and driving wide, central thoroughfares through the slum areas, but they made no contribution to the solution of the housing problem. In fact by pulling down more buildings than they replaced they aggravated the housing situation.

The Wolverhampton Street Improvement Scheme began with a public enquiry in April 1877. The scheme proposed to clear the worst area of the town, roughly between Queen Square, Berry Street and Stafford Road. This included the notorious Carribee Island, haunt of the Irish and prostitutes. The area comprised 846 properties. 704 of these were houses of which 632 were inhabited. 408 of these were old and dilapidated and 54 in ruins and condemned. The 632 houses had 39 w.c.s and 366 privies.

An estate to the north of the town at Springfield was purchased for £5000 and a further £3500 spent on sewerage and laying out the streets. This estate would contain 290 houses for 1,400 inhabitants. On the rebuilt clearance area it was estimated that 110 houses could be built. The Town Clerk estimated the net cost of the scheme at £45,000 less the income from the new building. The scheme was opposed by various interested parties within the proposed demolition area and much of the opposition, inevitably, attempted to reduce the total area to be demolished on the grounds that substantial and sanitary buildings within the area should be spared. The Bill which passed through Parliament in 1877 cost £2,000. It was said that this would have been only a few hundreds had the Bill not been obstinately opposed in both Houses.

In 1878 the Council bought the estate at Springfield and here the first snag occurred, for when the land was offered at auction there were no buyers. The Council then proposed to sell the lots singly. By the end of that year properties had been bought up in the condemned area costing £70,000. In 1879 purchases totalled £11,000 but only 4,382 square yards of land had been sold at Springfield for a perpetual rent of £45.12.11d. This was about one-tenth of the estate which the Council had hoped to sell at 5/- a yard. In 1880 the scheme was brought to a close. By then £160,000 had been spent in purchasing property and the area had been cleared. But only 75 houses had been built at Springfield.

With regard to the price at which properties were purchased, the Town Clerk had said at the enquiry that the rateable value of all the condemned properties was £7,967 which at 20 years purchase gave a market value of £159,340. He added, however, that many of the condemned houses would not fetch 10 years purchase in the open market. If therefore, the Council eventually paid £160,000 for these properties it appears that the experience of Birmingham was repeated and the Council paid inflated prices to the landlords for their properties. To what extent the scheme was eventually self-supporting is not known, but by 1880 a considerable part of the £6,000 annual interest charge on the £150,000 borrowed from the Public Works Loan Board at 4% must have been a drain on the rates.

The Garden Suburb Movement in Wolverhampton

The dreadful housing and sanitary conditions of most working-class houses in Wolverhampton continued to be a vital political and social issue. From the 1880's socialist ideas revived in the Black Country with branches of the Marxist Social Democratic Federation and William Morris' Socialist League having branches in Wolverhampton. This was followed by the Fabian Society, the Independent Labour Party and by 1900, the Labour Party. This political development was centred on the factories, the growth of trade unionism in the town and the Wolverhampton Trades Council. It was reflected in working-class representation for the first time on public bodies in the town, first the Poor Law Board of Guardians and in 1892 the first Labour Councillor. By 1899 there were five Labour members of the Council, and until the 1st World War Labour representation was a greater realism in such matters as Poor Law, Education and Housing. But although the housing situation was forced on to public attention in a new way, the Tory and Liberal majority on the Council managed to limit activities to talk and planning.

A limited, but interesting initiative in housing came with the development of the Garden City movement in Wolverhampton. This was an extension of the national movement which produced Letchworth and Port Sunlight etc. and in Birmingham – Bournville and Harborne. At Fallings Park there was a 400 acre estate owned by a progressive landlord, Sir R.A.S. Pagett who was prepared to sell the property if healthy working-class houses were erected. A co-partnership society was formed called the Fallings Park Garden Suburb Tenants Ltd. Subscriptions were invited for £1 shares which would yield 5% or loan stock at 4%. The houses thus built were to be let and the tenants of the houses would receive any surplus profit in proportion to the rents paid.

The site to be developed was around the triangle Cannock Road – Bushbury Road – Victoria Road. There was to be a wide range of model dwellings, shops, a chapel and an interesting circular open space in the middle of the triangle. In February 1908 the first houses were completed and others followed. Later in the year there was a Model Housing Exhibition. Each group of houses was individually designed and entered for prizes in different classes according to the accommodation. The prices ranged from £170 - £280. Over 50 of the houses and some of the shops were built, but the estate was never completed. The houses were built to a high standard, are still very pleasing aesthetically and ways and means ought to be found in these days of consciousness of the environment to display these houses to the best advantage as an interesting contribution to the architecture of Wolverhampton. Where streets had been laid out, the Council after

1920, built Council houses in the area and made some attempt to keep to the character of the estate. Indeed, this model suburb could have served as the standard to which Council houses were built, after the war. Unfortunately, Council houses when they were built, were cheaply built and badly designed with a dreary uniformity which, as the Fallings Park suburb shows, was completely unnecessary.

The Housing Situation 1880 – 1918

From 1866 there was a long series of enactments which made it possible for local authorities to improve or erect dwellings through powers of compulsory purchase, loans and favourable interest rates from the Public Works Loans Board and finally by the 1909 Housing Act, powers to prepare and carry out town planning schemes. Despite the presence of Labour Councillors after 1900 the Council resolutely set its face against any municipal intervention in the improvement of housing conditions.

In 1890 eight houses were built at an estimated cost of £1,050, but these were for firemen in the borough. Since annual charges would be £80 p.a. and the fire service was, at that time, paying £83 in rent, the scheme was deemed profitable and thus acceptable.

Nothing was done for ten years. Then in 1899 it was carried unanimously by the Council:

“That a special Committee be appointed for making such enquiries as are desirable with a view to reporting to the Council the desirability, or otherwise of carrying into effect Parts II and III of the Housing of the Working-Classes Act 1890”.

Part II of this Act gave powers to make existing houses habitable and Part III gave local authorities power to build houses.

The Committee reported to the Council in May 1901. The report surveyed the provision of accommodation in Common Lodging Houses showing that there were nineteen registered houses, mostly in Pipers Row and Salop Street. Total available places were 495 and on 22nd June 1899, 343 people were accommodated in lodging houses comprising 27 married couples, 262 single men, 11 single women and 16 children. The Committee considered that lodging house accommodation was “for the most part unsatisfactory” but they had no immediate proposals for improving it. The report reiterated that the problem was to build dwellings for labouring people as distinct from artisans and that no accommodation would be considered which rented at more than 4/-d. a week. It quoted the “strong comments” of the Medical Officer of Health on housing over the years. His 1896 report had stated that nothing short of doing away with the numerous houses in alleys and courts would satisfy the needs of sanitation. Also, that in spite of the vast amount of new property built in the Borough in recent years, none of this was accommodation for the very poor for “it does not pay to provide it”. The Medical Officer of Health’s report for 1897 stated that deficiency of air space was the gravest defect even in houses in fairly good repair.

“A gypsy in a ragged tent in the open air is more healthily housed, even in the winter, than those in houses without proper air space”.

The Committee had considered flats in London and Birmingham built many storeys high, but had rejected this as a solution since land was cheaper in Wolverhampton. With regard to cost of housing it was noted that the Congress of Sanitary Engineers the previous year had passed a resolution asking that money for labourers’ dwellings should be available at low rates of interest over 60 years for the building and 100 years for the

purchase of the land. The Committee disclaimed any intention of competing in the provision of houses with private enterprise. It claimed that the large number of artisan dwellings at that time empty, had no bearing on the provision of houses for the labouring class. It objected to the rule that those in receipt of Poor Relief should not be entitled to the benefits of housing under the 1890 Act. Finally the Committee made the following proposal:

That a small model scheme should be prepared. That the site should be in Green Lane (now the Birmingham Road) on 4,000 sq. yds of land belonging to Lord Barnard who would sell the land for £550 (£665 per acre) and he would bear the costs of street making. It was proposed to erect 12½ units of 50 cottage tenements. Each unit would have four dwellings, two on the ground floor and two on the upper floor. The ground floor dwellings would consist of a living room 11ft x 11ft 3 ins and one bedroom 11ft x 10ft. 9 ins. The upper floor would have similar accommodation with the addition of one smaller bedroom in the attic. Heights of rooms would be 8ft. 6ins and a damp course would be provided. There would be a common wash house and a Duckett's waste water closet. A tender from G. Cave for £4,682 had been received.

The economics of the scheme were set out. The total costs were £5,232. On the land, with 60 years to repay, interest was estimated at £19.5.0d. a year, repayments at £2.16.0d. giving a total of £22.1.0d. a year. For buildings at 40 years, interest was £163.17.5d. repayments £55.7.6d. giving a total of £219.5.11d.: repayment for land and buildings thus came to £241.5.11d. per annum for the 50 dwellings. In addition the following rates per year were payable – Poor Rate 10/-d., Improvement Rate 10/-d, Water Rate 8/-d. Voids were 6/11d. Commission (e.g. costs of rent collection etc.) were 13/11d. and 9/8d was allocated for repairs. If the downstairs flats were let at 2/8d. a week plus 1/3d rates and the upstairs flats at 3/8d rent and 1/3d rates, the scheme would be self-supporting.

The specification for the houses was altered and the contract was eventually given to G. Cave & Son only in 1902 at an enhanced price of £5,068. So there came into existence those monstrous, barrack-like buildings on Birmingham Road, now housing mostly old-age pensioners, which are Wolverhampton's first Council houses.

The Committee responsible for preparing the scheme was made permanent in 1904 as the Housing of the Working-Classes Committee, and the first members were the Mayor, Alderman Johnson and Councillors Sidney, Stroud and Weaver. Very little progress was made in the ensuing years despite a considerable amount of pressure from the Local Government Board. For instance, in 1903 a letter was received from the LGB calling attention to the provisions of the Housing of the Working-Classes Act 1903. This was ordered to be entered into the Council Communication Book, but no action was taken on it. In 1909-10 there was another spate of correspondence concerning the Housing and Town Planning Acts of 1909. In January 1908 a conference was held at the Town Hall on Co-partnership in Housing and Town Planning. In 1910 a regulation was made by the Local Government Board under the 1909 Act that there should be thorough inspection of all dwellings in a town periodically by an official working under the Medical Officer of Health. For this purpose the first Housing Inspector was appointed in Wolverhampton in 1911. At this period it was stated that a custom was growing in Wolverhampton of letting tenements which were never intended to be let and were utterly unfit for this purpose. As a result of this and the appointment of the Housing Inspector, there was a considerable increase in the number of houses classified as unfit for human habitation.

It was not until 1914 that public pressure forced the consideration of another housing scheme on the Council. In January 1914 a resolution from the Housing Committee to the Council stated that the Committee was satisfied that there was insufficient housing accommodation in the Borough particularly in respect of houses of rentals not exceeding 4/-d. a week and it was their unanimous view that a scheme for the erection of such houses should be further implemented. In full Council there was an amendment to raise the amount of rent from 4/-d to 6/-d supported by Councillors Beattie, Bent, Clarkson, Frost, Jeffs, Tildesley and Walsh, but this was defeated 30-7, and the original resolution passed. The number of Councillors owning slum property was highlighted by a proposal by Councillors Bent and Sharrocks to move a resolution "that it is detrimental to the speedy solution of the housing problem that members of the Council hold an interest in slum properties". An amendment was moved by Councillor Mander and Alderman Lewis: "That it is not desirable that members of the Council should be owners of slum property". Even this watered down amendment was too much for the slum owners and after discussion both resolution and amendment were withdrawn. Typical of working-class pressure for the building of Council houses was a letter from the Railway Women's Guild to the Council in July 1914 pressing for the speedy provision of cheap houses. A housing scheme was prepared adjacent to the Green Lane (Birmingham Road) project in Cartwright Street. The proposed site was 16,545 sq yds and it was proposed to erect 90 dwellings ultimately, but 60 at that time. Total costs were estimated to be £12,031, including the purchase of the land, about £200 per dwelling compared with the cost of the Birmingham Road flats of £100 each. The houses were to be built in blocks of 6, 5 and 4. No baths were to be provided, although the question of baths in future houses was to be referred to the Council. Houses at the end of blocks were to be 3 bedroomed and the other 2 bedroomed. Sculleries were to be small (9ft. 7 ins by 6ft 8ins) with a boiler and receptacle for coal. The water closet was outside. The 3 bedroomed houses were to be let at 4/6d. a week and the 2 bedroomed at 3/9d. Presumably rates would be extra and at such total payments these houses would have been outside the purse of those whose housing conditions were worst. A deficit of £187 was left to be met from the rates, but against this the beneficial effect on the public health of the Borough had to be considered. Land was purchased for £1,050. In September 1914 there was to have been a local enquiry into the question of a £12,000 loan for dwellings under the Housing of the Working-Classes Act 1890. However, the 1st World War broke out in August 1914 and all housing activity ceased. During the War, the Housing Committee either made no report or reported "nothing to report" and during these years the housing situation rapidly deteriorated. In November 1918, when victory was in sight, the Council passed a resolution to proceed with the Green Lane scheme, but the necessary finance was not sanctioned by the Government.

Costs and Rent

Little can be said on the costs of house building through most of the 19th century, nor the rates of return on capital which the letting of houses brought. Today, we are used to scanning the local papers for houses for sale, to let etc. but such advertisements are a modern development and only began to appear after the 1st World War. Before then, houses were often advertised for sale or to be let, but in such cases neither prices nor rents were given. This raises the whole question of how tenants learned of houses to let

and landlords found tenants. For virtually the whole of the housing stock was let and not bought. The middle-class as well as the working-class invariably rented their houses. Material on these questions of costs and profitability of housing lie with estate agents, solicitors and building societies. There is also a vast mass of deeds in Wolverhampton Public Library of property bought by the Corporation. Some of these deeds go back to the early seventeenth century, but since most of the property has been demolished, the prices of properties given are of little value to the historian, who cannot view the property.

Sir F.M. Eden in his book: *The State of the Poor*, written in 1797 mentions a Wolverhampton spectacle maker paying rent of £6 a year (about 2/3d a week), but he let part of his house to another tenant for 1/4d a week. The inflation of the Napoleonic Wars doubled rents. In 1842 evidence at the ENQUIRY INTO THE SANITARY CONDITIONS OF THE LABOURING POPULATION gave the following costs for 14 (unspecified) Poor Law Unions in Staffordshire:

Cost of building 2-roomed cottages	-	£20 to £80
Cost of building 4-roomed cottages	-	£35 to £100
Cost of repairs per annum	-	4/-d to 45/-d
Rents of 4-roomed cottages	-	£2 to £4 per annum (9d to 1/6d a week)

One of the few known figures for rent in the Black Country in the first half of the 19th century is one given for Bilston in the Midland Mining Commission of 1842. Here a working man paid 3/1d rent for a “superior house”. For 1887 there is a very valuable survey of rents in Bilston in a Stowheath Manor Survey. Taking typical working-class streets it shows rents in Friezealand and Pipes Meadow from 1/3d to 2/6d per week. In Beckett’s Street and Bridge Street at 1/6d to 3/-d. In superior Mount Pleasant middle-class people rented their houses from 5/-d to 10/-d per week. At the other end of the scale, 5 houses in Quarry Street rented at 9d a week. Rents would be slightly higher in Wolverhampton. The Bilston evidence showed that most landlords were small, owning up to half a dozen houses. The only landlords owning more than 6 houses were the ironmasters Hickmans with 43, and Sparrow with 23, while T.W. Hale and Ward and Son owned 20 and 22 houses respectively. Landlording in Wolverhampton probably followed a similar pattern.

In 1891, the Amalgamated Society of Engineers made a return of rents paid by its members to the Royal Commission on Labour. Average rent paid by Wolverhampton members was 4/6d a week compared with a national average of 5/9½d. In 1919 the Council made a return of pre-war rents paid in Wolverhampton:

	Rooms			
	2	3	4	5
Weekly Rents	2/9d	3/9d.	5/6d.	6/6 to 7/7d.
	Rent of a 4-roomed House			
Before 1800	1840’s	1880’s	1900	1914
1/6d	3/-d	3/-d	4/6d	5/6d

This would indicate a doubling of rents as a result of the Napoleonic Wars, stable rents to 1860, rising thereafter, but declining during the Great Depression 1874 to 1890 and thereafter a rapid rise to the beginning of the 1st World War. Relating living standards and wages, I have shown elsewhere that there was no significant or permanent rise in living standards in the Black Country between 1840 and 1890. If one takes the wages of miners as typical of trends of wages in other occupations, the daily wage was 3/- a day in 1850 and still 3/- a day in 1880. During that time wages had risen as high as 5/6d a day during the brief boom of the early 1870's, but the average for the whole 30 years, taking into account unemployment, would be about 3/-.

The budget of a miner with a wife and two children earning 18/- a week in 1850 would look something like this:

Rent	3s. 0d.
Food	9s. 0d.
Shoes and Clothing	1s. 6d.
Household durables	1s. 6d.
Miscellaneous (education, medicine, newspaper, subscriptions, pocket money)	2s. 0d.
Services (travel, postage, entertainment)	1s. 6d.
	<u>18s. 0d.</u>

It will be noted that such a budget makes no allowance for drink, tobacco, savings for old age, emergencies, holidays or many other things. The miner would live at subsistence level. With regard to a labourer earning only 2/3d a day, it is difficult to see how he existed at all; what is certain is that he lived in one or two rooms in a hovel in the centre of Wolverhampton.

Summary of Housing Conditions up to 1918

Fairly detailed analysis of housing conditions begin to be available for Wolverhampton from 1890. The first survey of overcrowding from the 1891 Census:

Wolverhampton Tenements Under 5 Rooms

Total Tenements	1 Room	2 Rooms	3 Rooms	4 Rooms	Total Tenements under 5 Rooms	
					No	%
16,262	54	1,450	1,402	5,548	8,454	52

Thus, 52% of Wolverhampton dwellings were of less than 5 rooms, although the worst Black Country town was Quarry Bank with 86%. Overcrowding can also be estimated from the figures given. If one takes the 1957 Housing Act, schedule 6, as the standard of overcrowding of two persons sleeping in a one-room dwelling, three persons sleeping in two rooms, five in 3 rooms and 7½ in four rooms, 18% of Wolverhampton people living in up to 4 rooms were overcrowded and 9% were grossly overcrowded. If it could be assumed that families living in tenements of more than 4 rooms were not overcrowded, our figure would be about 10% of the population living in overcrowded conditions. However, it is quite certain that many larger dwellings would be overcrowded and it might be that dwellings over 4 rooms were as crowded as those under 4 rooms. In this case overcrowding would be 20%. Perhaps a total of 15% of the population living in overcrowded conditions would not be too wide of the mark.

Overcrowding is only one aspect of bad housing. Overcrowding may and does occur in dwellings otherwise fully adequate, for human habitation. The number of dwellings without adequate air and space, unsanitary and in other ways unfit for human habitation cannot be known, but a report on the Courts and Alleys of Wolverhampton undertaken in 1901 showed the following.

Of the 94,487 people in Wolverhampton, 5,422 of these lived in Courts. The death rate in the Courts was 27.84 per 1000 compared with 16.69 per 1000 for the town as a whole. In addition to the 384 Courts in the town, there were 166 back-to-back houses in which 594 people lived. Comparative population densities in various types of accommodation were as follows:

	Persons per Acre
Artizan houses with gardens in Bright Street	97
Court houses	384
Back-to-back houses – East Wolverhampton	392

Of the 384 courts, 280 contained some condemned “more or less damp” or dilapidated houses, leaving 101 Courts free from such defects. The defective Courts and back-to-backs totalled 838 dwellings and contained 3,231 people consisting of 1,969 adults and 1,262 children living at a density of 3.85 persons per dwelling.

The weekly family income coming into 1,377 of the Courts and back-to-back was:

Under 10/-	10/- to 15/-	15/- to 20/-	20/- to 25/-	25/- to 30/-	30/- to 35/-	Over 35/-
137	164	517	265	159	52	83

From the above figures the first conclusion would appear that overcrowding and living in defective housing was not the same problem, since although the density per acre in the Courts was very much higher than in artisan houses, the persons per house was lower than 4.9 for the town as a whole. Also from the small proportion of children to adults it seems that the Courts were largely occupied by old people or couples on low wages whose families had grown up. Whether individual courts and back-to-backs were or were not either overcrowded or dilapidated their insanitary state and lack of space and air meant that they were all sub-standard houses. If one takes the suggested figure of 15% for overcrowded houses in the borough, then one must add 9% of the town’s population living in Courts and back-to-backs whose housing conditions were deplorable. This would mean 24% of person lived in unsatisfactory housing conditions, not counting the large number of people living in artisan houses in various parts of the town which were insanitary, damp or defective in other ways.

The final survey of housing conditions before the 1st World War is the survey of housing needs of 1919 which the Council was obliged to submit to the Minister of Health together with a programme of post-war Council house building. By 1918 the estimated population was 96,280 an increase of about 1,500 on 1914. Dwelling houses totalled 22,042 with a density of 4.7 persons per house. The estimated number of houses required in the next three years was 5,659. 1,500 were to abate overcrowding, 3,659 were to re-house persons from unhealthy areas or from houses not fit for human habitation and 500 were to meet growing population. These figures show that 22% of the housing stock was unsatisfactory for one or other of the reasons stated above. At least 30% of the population would be housed in this 22% of the housing stock, and since these figures were subsequently revised upwards, it must be concluded that one third of the population

existed in thoroughly unsatisfactory housing conditions in 1918 and that much the same proportion of unsatisfactory housing had existed throughout the 19th century. This figure ties up with my estimated figure elsewhere that 27% of Black Country families had a family income which was below subsistence level, which meant that over all their lives they were deprived of some part of the food, shelter and fuel necessary to subsist or at periods of their lives they were utterly destitute.

Chapter II – Housing 1918 – 1939

The Era of the Council House

The first World War was the “War fought to end all wars” and after the War there were to be, in Lloyd George’s words “homes fit for heroes to live in”. In order to carry out these grandiose promises the Housing Act of 1919 required each town to make a survey of housing needs and submit housing schemes to the Minister of Health. As has been seen, Wolverhampton housing needs for the three years after 1919 were estimated at “the very large number of 5,659”. The average number of houses built during the five years before the War was 152 and the number of houses built during the War had been 90. Since the key question was promises of houses at rents working people could afford, prevailing rents were given as follows:

Parlour, living room scullery	- 2 bedrooms	- 2/8d to 6/2d a week (including rates)
Parlour, living room , scullery	- 3 bedrooms	- 6/5d to 9/9d a week (including rates)
Tenements in block buildings		- 2/11 to 3/5d a week (including rates)

	Acres	Houses	Population
Baker Street, Dale Street and Russell Street	5	175	700
Littles Lane, Herbert Street, Faulkland Street	16	326	1400
Shillington Street, Albion Street, Shakespeare St	5	253	1040
Commercial Road, Navigation Street, Oxford Street, Union Street	40	841	3915
St Matthew Street, Moore Street	4	305	1250
Gower Street	4	30	135
Cobden Lane	½	35	150
Bloomsbury Street	1	48	200
	<u>75½</u>	<u>2013</u>	<u>8790</u>

A footnote to this table stated that the “worst housing need” was not of the above areas, but in the courts and back yards of the town. Such houses number 1,639 with a population of about 6,335. The Wolverhampton scheme for housing provision was:

Houses with living room, scullery and 3 bedrooms	2,000
Houses with parlour, living room, scullery and 3 bedrooms	2,000
Houses with parlour, living room, scullery and 4 bedrooms	880
Block dwellings	779
	<u>5,659</u>

The timetable proposed was to build 100 houses in 1919, then 750 houses each year from 1920 to 1926 and complete the programme with 309 houses in 1927. This scheme was adopted by the Council in October 1919 with the proviso that the financial liability of the Council should be limited to a rate of 1d in the £.

The only scheme in hand at that time by the Housing Committee was the Green Lane scheme approved in 1914, but postponed because of the war. In February 1919 this scheme was amended to provide 50 instead of 60 houses with a reduced width of

roadway. The inflation caused by the war was the chief cause for concern in 1919 and the Government proposal of the time was to relieve local authorities of 75% of the estimated deficit between rents charged and costs for a period of 7 years. After this period properties were to be revalued and the Government would then relieve local authorities of 75% of the excess (if any) of the loans outstanding. The local Government Board would also be given discretion to increase its assistance beyond 75% if the deficit of 25% was greater than the product of a penny rate.

In October 1919 the Town Clerk wrote to the Housing Sub-Committee asking it to consider priorities of letting houses, the rents to be charged and electricity and water rates. The Town Clerk also submitted his own scheme which was as follows:

1. Priority of lettings

1. Service personnel
2. Relief of overcrowding
3. The clearing of insanitary property
4. Persons in apartments not overcrowded
5. Persons under notice to quit
6. Persons giving up houses in Wolverhampton during the war and wishing to return
7. Person outside the borough
8. Other persons

The most urgent cases, apart from servicemen would be, the Town Clerk thought, those in unhealthy, insanitary or overcrowded premises:

“At the same time, generally speaking, the class of tenants who inhabit overcrowded or insanitary houses is not the class to which it will be desirable to let the new houses being built, and if some method could be devised it would be desirable that these houses be tenanted by respectable residents and houses which they vacate should be taken by those who are now inhabiting overcrowded and insanitary premises. It might be desirable to require some evidence of character and reserve the right to refuse unsatisfactory tenants This question, however, will probably settle itself on economic grounds since the rents of the new houses are bound to be high and the class of tenant I have in mind will usually be the least able to pay high rents”.

Prevailing anti-working-class prejudice could hardly have been put plainer and working-class councillors were to battle bitterly against such attitudes throughout the inter-war years.

2. Rents

Here came the bombshell. The Town Clerk showed that prevailing rents for similar houses to those being built in Green Lane with 3 bedrooms, a parlour, a bathroom, were 9/-d a week including rates. The Council houses in Green Lane, called Type B, with parlour, living room, scullery and 3 bedrooms however, were expected to cost the enormous sum of £980 each including £22 for the cost of land. Such was the house, the Town Clerk estimated, was 18/4d. a week, less rates. Such a rent could clearly not be charged, but he suggested an aim of covering this rent plus rates by 1927, and passing the buck to the Housing Committee to decide actual rents, he contented himself with the

suggestion that the Committee should err on the high side rather than the low side in fixing rents.

With regard to lettings, the Town clerk's advice was accepted in the main, but it was suggested that large families should be given preference within the limitations of the accommodation available and also that the Committee should have discretion to depart from these principles when they saw fit.

In March 1920 the Borough Surveyor reported that the first twelve Council houses were expected to be completed by April 7. The first post-war Council house tenants were then selected. They were:

- Green Lane Estate - Thomas Lewis, 21 Portland Place
- J. Lloyd, 40 Poplar Street
- J. Percival, 15 Alexander Road

- Birches Barn Estate - F.C. Shale, 255 Parkfield Road
- Wm. Power, 88 Norfolk Road
- H.J. Hosiaux, 22 Lewis Street
- Wm. Hannon, 1 Birches Barn Road

- Parkfield Road Estate - J. Cox, 115 Parkfield Road
- Mr Hampton, 119 Parkfield Road

The Housing Committee was moving quickly. A report of November 1919 showed that sites for 1,800 houses had been secured in the previous twelve months. The main problem was to find land within the Borough. In addition to the three sites mentioned above where the first houses were almost complete, 24 cottages were to be built for farm labourers at Barnhurst Farm, and the largest purchase to date, 85 acres for 800 houses had been made in acquiring Oxley Golf Course.

Both Wolverhampton Trades Council and Wolverhampton and District branch of the National Council of Women asked for representation on the Housing Committee which from 1920 was: The Mayor, Aldermen Johnson and F.H. Skidmore; Councillors Clark, Didderidge, Hodgson, Hughes, Morgan, Tildseley and Walsh.

By now it was becoming necessary to tackle seriously the question of rents to be charged, and in December 1919 Councillor Hughes presented a Report of what had been done on this subject. It stated that houses should be let at an "economic rent", but this rent could not be obtained. The Ministry of Health regulation gave only very general guidance, he complained, and each authority had been left to fix its own rents. The general guidance was that local authorities should obtain as high a rent as could reasonably be charged, taking into consideration general rents in each area, and the fact that the Council accommodation being offered was superior to other houses available. It was anticipated that by 1927 costs would have declined by one third and the aim should therefore be to charge an "economic rent" of two-thirds of the present cost. Such a rent would be 19/-d a week, plus rates, whereas similar accommodation was being rented at 5/9d a week plus rates. The Housing Committee had put its dilemma to the Minister of Health, for it feared that if it fixed its rents too low, the Government subsidy would not be forthcoming. The Minister had proposed that rents be fixed at 10/-d a week, plus rates,

with a 1/6d increase the next year and an understanding that further increases would be necessary. The Committee considered that 10/-d plus rates could not be obtained and the full Council on the 8 December had agreed with the Committee passing unanimously a resolution stating that these rents could not be obtained and referring the report back to the Housing Committee to inform the Minister of Health. It was not until May 1920 that rents were finally decided:

	Type A	Type B
	Living room, scullery, 3 bedrooms	Parlour, living room Scullery, 3 bedrooms
Green Lane Estate	8/-d	9/-d
Birches Barn Estate	10/-d	11/3d

The rates for Green Lane, Type A, were 6/-d a week, giving a total outlay of 14/-d a week for the cheapest Council accommodation available. Clearly at these rents, not many of those whose housing plight was desperate, were likely to have their situation improved. In March 1920, George Green, the Borough Surveyor, had been appointed Housing Director and in July, John Peers, the well-known Wolverhampton Sanitary Inspector had been appointed Housing Inspector. In the meantime, the first two Council houses built in Wolverhampton had been opened on 6 November 1919 and it was claimed that these were the first two Council houses built in England.

The first Council contracts for houses had gone to Parkinson & Son (Blackpool) Ltd in 1919, for 48 houses at Green Lane for £33,848. Some further contracts in 1920 are given below:

T&S Ham	-	12 houses at Birches Barn	-	£9,785
Amies & Sharratt	-	18 " " "	-	14,682
Tarmac	-	20 " " "	-	14,400
Wm. Roe	-	24 " Barnhurst Farm	-	22,964
Arthur Powell	-	6 " Parkfield	-	4,492
Henry Gough	-	14 " "	-	10,689

Clearly with the cost of the land, roadmaking, sewerage etc. Council houses were still costing around £1,000 each throughout 1920.

At the end of 1920, a Housing Committee report stated that progress was not up to expectations. This was due to the unsettled state of the country and to shortages of raw materials and skilled labour. It had been hoped that 600 houses would have been built by the end of 1920, but only 80 had been completed to date. The problems of fluctuating prices and wages had been met by an agreement with the Master Builders Association to fix contract prices on a sliding scale. In December 1920 however, a contract was entered into with Sir Robert McAlpine to pay 1/3d per sq. ft. plus 10% profit for building houses on a recently acquired Billbrook Estate. It was estimated that the 12 cottages concerned would cost £12,000. Thus with land and other charges, Council houses were costing much more than £1,000 each at the end of 1920.

To finance house building, Ministry of Health permission had been obtained to issue £1 million worth of Housing Bonds. Up to October 20 only £70,815 had been subscribed to.

1921 saw the end of the post-war boom. Unemployment rose rapidly and wages were slashed. Tenants had formed themselves into a Municipal Tenants' Association and began to demand rent reductions. At the end of the year the Council agreed that as from January 1922, and subject to Ministry of Health approval, rents be reduced as follows:

Estate	Existing Rent		Proposed Rent	
	Type A	Type B	Type A	Type B
Green Lane	8/-d	9/-d	7/-d	8/-d
Parkfield	9/-d	10/-d	7/6d	8/6d
Barnhurst	9/-d (6d extra for piggery)		8/6d + 6d for piggery	
Birches Barn	10/-d	12/-d	8/6d	10/6d

Those rents were reduced between 1/-d and 1/6d.

In 1922, final Contracts were coming in for early houses. For instance, the increase over the agreed contract price for the 24 cottages at Barnhurst was nearly 25%, giving a final contract price of £27,997, giving a total cost with land and roads etc. of well over £1,000 each. The contract price of four "B" Type houses at Birches Barn was finalised at £983, making the cost of these also well over £1,000. By the end of 1922 however, building costs had dropped over 50% and Eadie Towers of Wolverhampton were contracting to build "A" Type houses at £383.10.0 each and "B" Type houses at £437. on Oxley Estates.

1923 saw uncertainty as to the continuance of the Government subsidy as the original housing programme came near to completion. In addition the Government limited subsidies to houses of 850 superficial feet thus preventing the Council from building "B" Type houses with parlours. Wolverhampton Council demanded that the limit be raised from 850 to 1020 sq. ft. In March 1923 Council house rents were again reduced; this time by 6d. all round making the main rents:

Estate	Houses	
	Type A	Type B
Green Lane	7/-d	8/6d
Parkfield	7/6d	9/-d
Birches Barn and Oxley	8/-d	10/-d
Barnhurst	8/-d plus 6d for piggery	

In November 1923 the Housing Committee reported that 576 houses had been completed on 5 estates, and that gardens were attractive and well cared for. 1923 also saw the beginning of a rate subsidy to private builders and the building of Council houses for sale. Both of these developments will be more fully dealt with in the section on private house building. In October 1923 fifty-six acres of Old Heath Colliery were purchased, primarily to provide work for the unemployed, and it was then proposed to build 72 houses at a cost of £22,740 (about £320 each), but application for private plots on this land were to be considered.

During 1923, at the request of the Municipal Tenants' Association, rates began to be collected weekly with the rents.

While the minutes of the Housing Committee show a certain complacency on the progress of Council housing, the annual reports of the Medical Officer of Health strike a very different note and show the sever crisis in housing. In 1921, Dr Jolly, who took over from Dr Malet as Medical Officer of Health in that year, was noting that the Census of

1921 had been taken at a time when many people were away on holiday and had been revised upwards by the Registrar by 2% to make the population 104,000. Housing, he said was at the root of most of the problems of the Health Department. In 1921 there had been 1,000 applications for the 260 houses built. In 1922 the population had increased by 1,700 and the Corporation had built 129 houses. At 4.52 persons per house, this was not even keeping pace with the increase in population. The Medical Officer of Health maintained that the Census had considerably underestimated the real deficiency of houses, as it was common for young people to marry and live with their parents, and these had not been counted as extra family units. Investigations at houses where there were infectious diseases suggested that about 10% of all houses had more than one family living in them. He did not think the housing problem could be solved by the Corporation alone and that until it paid private builders to erect working-class housing, shortages would continue. In his 1923 Report the Medical Officer of Health noting a population increase of 1,700 was “inclined to think that a shortage of houses was preventing newcomers settling in this area”. He also attacked workers for not being prepared to pay high rents:

“It is absurd to think that a modern 5-roomed house can be rented for the same money as a slum dwelling. Before the War a man reckoned a certain percentage of his wages in rent and this often afforded little better than a hovel. A man wants a nice house but it not prepared to pay more.”

In 1924 the Medical Officer of Health was reporting that there appeared to be no amelioration of housing conditions. Almost every day his assistance was sought in obtaining Council houses and he gave the following as typical examples. A family in a two-roomed house; the bedroom, about 11ft square was occupied by a man, his wife, two girls aged 8 and 3 years and six boys (16, 14, 10, 5, 2 and 1½). Or another two-roomed houses where 11 slept in the bedroom, including a boy aged 18 and a girl aged 16. Such cases could be listed almost indefinitely he said. There were 2,000 houses which needed to be demolished.

1924 saw the return of the first Labour Government and the expansion of social services began in the second half of that year. One of the few left-wing Ministers in Ramsey McDonald’s Government – John Wheatley – was made Minister of Health, and so was responsible for housing. Labour representation on Wolverhampton Council had risen from 3 before the War, to 6 in 1919 and to 11 in 1924/5. The composition of the Council in that year was Conservatives 22, Liberal 12, Labour 11 and Independents 3. The 1924 housing programme in Wolverhampton was planned to be 250 houses compared with 133 houses built in 1923, 89 in 1922 and 260 in 1921. In the event only 172 houses were built in 1924. Houses to be started were 10 houses at Birches Barn, 72 in Willenhall Road, 140 on the Newbridge Estate, 22 at Sweetman Street, and 44 of a new, smaller “C” type houses in Gorsebrook Road. In addition, the Housing Committee was instructed to prepare a plan for a further 500 houses. Tenders accepted during 1924 included:

A. Powell	44 “C” houses at Gorsebrook Road at	£335 each
“ “	22 “B” houses at Sweetman Street at	£380 each
Pool Brothers	136 “B” houses at Newbridge Estate at	£390 each
M.A.Boswell	56 “B” houses at Oxley Estate at	£450 each

The Oxley houses were concrete ones. The land in Gorsebrook Road cost £35 per house. Roads and sewers for the Oxley Estate cost about £45. Thus “B” type houses at this time were costing approximately £460 each. The total housing position in 1924 was:

	Capacity	Tenanted	Building
Parkfield Road	184	184	-
Green Lane	48	48	-
Oxley	156	100	56
Barnhurst	24	24	-
Sweetman Street	22	-	22
Gorsebrook Road	44	-	44
Crowther Road	136	-	136
Coalway Road	360	-	-
Willenhall Road	412	8	64
Birches Barn	396	388	8
Beckminster	216	-	-
	<u>1998</u>	<u>752</u>	<u>414</u>

The problem of empty housing in the midst of a housing famine was also raising its head again. During the war, empty houses had disappeared. By 1921 the Medical Officer of Health was reporting 119 empty houses in the town with the number probably increasing. In 1924 the Council made strong representation to the Government that empty houses should be liable to rates and taxes after being empty for a certain period, particularly those with a rateable value below £30 since owners were refusing to let such houses on the grounds that they were up for sale.

In 1925, at the instigation of Labour members of the Council, the first consideration of a Council Direct Labour Scheme was made. A committee, consisting of the Mayor, Aldermen Bantock, Clark, Johnson and Myatt and Councillors Dideridge, R.J. Evans, Hughes, Walsh and Whittaker was appointed. They took information from 71 authorities showing that 28 of these had direct building departments. These enquiries were “not of much assistance”: we are told that the Borough Engineer was then asked to give a report. This was done in January 1926. It stated that in 1924 houses were erected at a low figure, but this was now rising. The tenders accepted by Wolverhampton Council were “much lower” than in other parts of the country, and a recent survey had shown Wolverhampton the lowest of 20 authorities at £76 per house less than the average for non-parlour type houses and £84 less than the national average for parlour type houses. With such a report, the Housing Committee recommended that no direct building department be set up. In full Council this was confirmed but a motion to refer back to the report was lost by only 17 votes to 20. This was far from being the end of the matter, however. Contractors tended to promise more than they could perform, and a direct building force of some kind became a necessity. Later in 1926, Poole’s who were building houses at Newbridge were unable to complete their contract and the work was put out to tender. The lowest price quoted was by the Direct Building Department and their contract was accepted. Problems later arose because much of Poole’s contract had been sub-contracted. In addition, builders were frequently found in breach of contract for standard rates of wages and conditions, and in such cases these firms were not permitted to tender for new Council contracts until a stipulated period had elapsed. Apart from the question of

tendering for large contracts the Direct Building Department took over such contracts in default and there was also being built up a force to repair houses.

The general shape of the building plan was now clear. Industry was mainly in the east of the town and the Council had set its face against building in the west so that workers did not have to cross town. Sites within the borough were few and therefore, the main development would take place beyond the borders in Old Heath, Oxley, Low Hill and Bushbury with some building in the south-west, notably Parkfield. In 1924 Showell Estate of 101 acres had been bought at £100 per acre and in 1926 A. Powell of Wolverhampton contracted to build 292 houses at Low Hill at £414 each for "A" type houses, £450 for "B" type and £381 for "C" type. On the Old Heath estate, A.M.Griffiths was building 80 houses, mainly "C" type at the same price as Powell.

A further 232 acres at £97.10.0 per acre had been purchased in Low Hill and Bushbury from the Low Hill-Bushbury Estate Company Ltd. Later it was found that the Estate Company had reserved two central and valuable sites which they were unwilling to sell to the Council. The Council then put in a compulsory purchase order which the Estate Company contested and the Minister of Health decided that a public enquiry should be held. The enquiry was held at the Town Hall on 23rd April, 1925. It transpired that the Estate Company had sold the two plots in 1920 to Atkinson's Brewery for £5,000 with benefit of monopoly of beer and other intoxicating liquors within the estate. The Minister confirmed the compulsory purchase order, whereupon both the Estate and the Brewery put in claims for compensation. The Estate claimed at the rate of £125 per acre for 228 acres and the Brewery claimed £2,880 for their loss on the bargain. These claims went to arbitration and the award was as follows:

The Low Hill-Bushbury Estate Company was awarded £24,330 and £210 towards their costs.

Atkinson's Brewery was awarded £640 and £31.10.0 towards their costs as well as receiving from the Corporation the original purchase price.

A further £160 of costs were awarded against the Corporation.

The Housing Committee considered that they had been justified in going to arbitration and recommended that a loan be raised to cover the amount.

1927 was the peak year of Council house building. In that year 1,280 houses were built. Previous and subsequent figures were:

1925	1926	1927	1928
538	966	1,280	320

In the three years 1925-27 the great pre-1939 war estates were virtually started and completed. The 2,800 houses built in that time (Housing Committee figures differ from those of the Medical Officer of Health) represented the greatest programme of house building that Wolverhampton had ever known. By the end of 1927 there were 1,892 houses at Low Hill and Bushbury, 396 houses at Birches Barn, 374 in Old Heath and 186 at Parkfield, and in all there were more than 3,900 Council houses.

In 1928 the Housing Committee considered the future of Council house building. One view was that the Corporation had done better than most municipalities and had largely solved the housing problem. In the last 4 months of 1927 houses had been completed more quickly than tenants could be found for them and there had been an average of 85 houses empty during these months. Wolverhampton had built one house for every 34 of the population, whereas an average of 32 other local authorities showed an average of one house for every 109 of the population. The present annual Government subsidy for Council houses was £60,000 and the subsidy had been reduced in October 1927 from £9 to £7.10.0 per house over 40 years, and the rate subsidy was £20,000. People holding these views argued that Council house building should go on, but suggested that for twelve months building should cease. Those with opposing views held that the housing problem had not been solved; that the thousands most in need of housing accommodation could not afford to rent a Council house. By the casting vote of the Chairman it was decided not to build further Council houses in the next year. This decision was reviewed at a later Housing Committee meeting as it was felt that the previous decision had been taken at a meeting without a full attendance and it did not fairly represent the view of the Committee. The Housing Manager was, therefore, asked to report. The decision hinged on two questions. The first was the effective size of the Council waiting list. This, the Housing Manager reported was nominally of 876 applicants, but 265 of these were already householders within the borough, while there were 211 applicants "who might be considered unsuitable or who for other reasons could not be accepted". The Housing Manager thus reduced the "effective" list to 400. On the question of rents, the annual report of the Housing Committee for 1927 discussed this at length. The nearest they had come was the small, 3 bedroom, non-parlour Type "C" house of 825 superficial feet which rented at 7/-d but with rates cost 9/10d. If a fixed bath were not provided the cost could be cut, but in that case the house would not qualify for the Government subsidy.

In 1928 only 320 houses were built. The Council was now building 2 bedroomed houses and A.M. Griffiths was building 56 such houses at Old Heath at £304 per house, while A. Powell was building 44 at Parkfield for £303. Both these builders were also building 3 bedroomed non-parlour houses at £364. Final accounts settled in 1928 showed M.A. Boswell slightly overspent on 1,000 houses built at £450 and £400 for parlour and non-parlour types respectively and A. Powell's contract for 292 houses at Low Hill settled at an average of £420 per house.

As the Estates were completed, limited facilities came into existence. During 1928 Low Hill Tenants' Association leased for 28 years a site for a recreation ground and a site was sold to Dr Byrne Quinn for the erection of a house for a resident doctor. Trees were placed on footways and many small areas were turfed and shrubbed. Educational facilities consisted of a temporary infant school and the use of Buckley Hill Farmhouse. A new Old Fallings School was almost complete and the Roman Catholic school had been built on Cannock Road. Showell Circus had been laid out as the centre of the estate. In 1929 the Council was building 100 2 bedroomed houses to be let at 7/6d a week. These had an area of 650 superficial feet. Most of these were to be built in blocks of 8, with a water supply only to each block. A bath was to be installed, but instead of a back boiler there was to be a gas copper. They were to be built on narrow roadways in cul-de-sacs.

During 1929 the subsidy for houses built before October 1929 was £7.10.0. per annum for 40 years, and houses built between November 1929 and October 1931 was £6. Uncertainty as to the exact subsidy to be expected occurred frequently during the 1920's and 1920's, and on this occasion, once the subsidy was settled, the Council decided to build about 250 houses. The tenders accepted showed that A.M. Griffiths was building 2 bedroomed houses at £283 each while for 3 bedroomed non-parlour types he was charging £387.

The building programme for 1929 of 370 houses was duly completed, bringing the number of Council houses completed to 4,374 of which more than 3,000 were 3 bedroomed. Inclusive rents ranged from 9/9d to 16/8d.

The 2 bedroomed houses were occupied during 1929. The first 100 were let, as promised, at an inclusive rent of 7/6d, and the remainder were let at 8/3d including 9d per week electricity. This relatively low rent was a very urgent need and in a large number of cases tenants transferred from 3 bedroomed houses. In all cases tenants would have found it difficult to pay for a 3 bedroomed house.

The Committee did not fail to point out the heavy rate burden of house building, although they said nothing of the advantages to the town of reasonable housing.

Council House Building 1930 – 1939

Slum Clearance in Wolverhampton

For most of the period between the wars those responsible for housing suffered under two main difficulties. The first was the uncertainty regarding both the amount and continuation of the Government subsidy on housing. The second was the division of functions between the Housing Committee responsible for Council housing and the Health Committee and the Medical Officer of Health responsible for the health of the town and under who the responsibility for slum clearance was placed. A third problem was the multiplicity of over-lapping Housing Acts, which made it almost impossible for anyone to fully understand housing finance.

The housing problem contained three elements. The first was the building of houses to meet the demands of growing population and to abate overcrowding. The second was to demolish unfit, slum individual houses. The third was the clearance of unfit areas, some properties in which might be in a reasonable state of repair.

With regard to unfit houses, the Survey of Housing in 1919 classified 896 houses as unfit for human habitation and 750 as below a reasonable standard. This represented 8% of the housing stock and the Medical Officer of Health subsequently considered this as a serious underestimate. The problem of unfit houses was that they could not be closed unless alternative accommodation was available.

Until 1929 the number of unfit houses demolished was very small. In that year there was a survey of the town to determine the number of unfit houses. The number found was 1,266 or 4% of the housing stock. 160 of these houses had been chosen for immediate attention. Of the 160 families involved, 42 could afford the rent of a 3 bedroomed house, a further 18 could afford a 2 bedroomed house, but 100 families could not afford to pay a higher rent. This in a year when the national figure of unemployed was 10%, but less than in any year between 1920 and 1939, except 1927. In 1928 1,089 dwellings had been

inspected and only 11 found unfit for human habitation; in 1930 1,047 dwellings were inspected and 956 found unfit for human habitation. It would seem, therefore, that Sanitary Inspectors had instructions to be less lenient to slum landlords in the latter year, although only 17 demolition orders were made in that year. The Corporation programme under the 1930 Housing Act was to demolish 500 individual unfit houses. The 1933 Medical Officer of Health Report stated that overcrowding was still rampant and poverty rendered the problem insoluble. The inspection statistics for that year were that an average of about 2½ inspections had been made on 8,500 houses. 805 of these had been found unfit for human habitation and those “not in all respects reasonably fit for human habitation” totalled 6,800. By 1935, 510 houses had been compulsorily demolished and 189 voluntarily demolished in anticipation of action under the 1930 Housing Act Part II. The number of individual unfit houses demolished continued to rise and even in 1940, 184 such houses were demolished. By 1941 when demolition virtually ceased 2,358 individual unfit houses or 6% of the housing stock had been demolished.

Turning to the question of clearance areas, the 1919 report had shown eight areas as unhealthy, with 2,103 houses containing 8,790 people, full details of which have been given on page 27.

This was a further 10% of the housing stock, but a footnote to the report stated:

“The most urgent housing need is not in connection with areas like the above, but in the courts and alleys and back yards..... The courts are the worst housing evil and the first steps should be to demolish the houses in them.”

The first Wolverhampton clearance scheme since 1876 was prepared in 1923 and started in 1925. It was the clearance of the Faulkland Street, Littles Lane area under the general heading of the Faulkland Road Scheme. The clearance of the 300 or so 50 non-parlour type 3 bedroomed houses on the cleared site and 200 similar houses in the vicinity of Thompson Avenue. Notice the continuation of an ancient tradition that clearance schemes provided for less new houses than the number demolished. The houses in Thompson Avenue had been occupied by people from the Clearance Area from 1927. In 1928 it was ascertained that 64 families still needed re-housing. Some of these could be accommodated in 2 bedroomed dwellings, but any departure from the agreed scheme could mean the loss of the subsidy. After protracted and anxious negotiations with the Minister of Health it was approved that 30 2-bedroomed houses should be built on the cleared site and another 26 similar houses on the Parkfield site.

Brickkiln Croft was the next clearance area and a scheme was prepared in 1927. The area contained 195 houses in 4.65 acres at a density of 38.2 houses per acre compared with a Wolverhampton average of 3.3 houses per acre. The area contained 678 adults and 246 children. 90% of the houses were from 70 to 150 years old. 174 or nearly 90% of these houses had not water supply inside the house. 130 had no gas or electricity. In 166 cases sanitary conveniences were shared by two houses, most of these were w.c.'s but 22 were waste water closets. The death rate in the area was 17.3 per 1000 compared with 11.9 for the whole of Wolverhampton and the infant mortality rate was 117 per 1000, compared with 81 per 1000 for the whole town. A first local enquiry was held in July 1927, but the scheme held fire until a second local enquiry was held in July 1931. the scheme was finally approved in November 1931, by which time the area contained 158 houses and 6 works in Salop Street, Peel Street, Gt. Brickkiln Street, Brook Street,

Art Street and Brickkiln Croft. 120 families were to be rehoused in Bushbury and altogether 104 3 bedroomed houses and 54 2 bedroomed houses were to be built. The scheme was completed in 1934.

In September 1933 a local enquiry began for the third clearance scheme known as Walsall Street (West). Here in an area of 7.2 acres were 448 unfit houses with 2,122 people. The average density was even greater than at Brickkiln Croft at 58.55 houses per acre.

In 1933 the Housing Committee drew up a long-term programme of slum clearance and re-housing under the 1930 Housing Act. This provided for:-

I Clearance Areas:

Walsall Street (West)	1934-36	Total houses demolished 1523
Walsall Street (East)	1937-39	Total people displaced 7122
Monmore Green	1940-41	Total new houses 1514
Horseley Field (North)	1942-43	
Moseley Village	1942-	

II Improvement Areas:

Dale Street	1939-40
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160 houses to be demolished displaced 752 people and 160 new houses to be built.

III Individual Houses:

695 houses to be demolished.

By 1935 most of the Walsall Street (West) houses had been demolished and 874 houses in all had been cleared – 279 at Faulkland Street, 165 at Brickkiln Croft and 430 at Walsall Street (West). The 1936-37 clearance programme included the Walsall Street (East) scheme. By October 1937, 212 houses had been demolished in Walsall Street (East) and 10 in Ward Street, 8 in Navigation Street, 5 in Shrubbery Street and 10 in Wood Street, making a total of 245.

In 1938 Dale Street, became a Clearance Area. A Health Committee Report stated that the Dale Street-Baker Street area had been designated back in 1919, but priority was given to Brickkiln Croft, Walsall Street, Monmore Green and Moseley Village, because these areas contained more Courts. The Dale Street area was originally smaller, but then included the majority of buildings in the area Brickkiln Street, Merridale Street, Zoar Street and Little Brickkiln Street. The immediate vicinity of Brickkiln Street was known to be one of the oldest parts of Wolverhampton and had existed for more than 100 years. The houses had been erected before there were building bye-laws and were so densely packed that proper access to light and ventilation was impossible. All these houses were in a serious state of disrepair and structurally worn out. Walls were buckled, roofs sagging, woodwork rotten and brickwork perished. 80% had no internal water supply, 72% had no sink inside the house, 60% had no separate sanitary convenience and 61% had no lavatory inside the house. A very high proportion of these houses were infested with vermin; 53% of the houses had bed bugs. There were 459 houses in the area at a

density of 34.8 houses per acre. Costs of removal, demolition and acquisition were estimated to be £61,500 and the cost of re-housing £213,000. 484 houses would have to be built.

The Dale Street scheme became operative in June 1940, but by then the war had virtually brought re-housing to a standstill. On the outbreak of war these were contracts for 300 houses. It was arranged with the Government that these should be completed to rehouse families in structurally dangerous dwellings. Future Clearance Scheme were not to be confirmed unless special reasons could be given. As far as Dale Street was concerned, one third of the buildings were in a serious state of disrepair and structurally dilapidated and for these reasons the Corporation successfully urged the Minister to confirm the scheme. In 1940 it was reported that a total of 1,893 houses had been demolished since the Faulkland Road scheme in 1925. This included 95 demolitions in Monmore Green, Moseley Village and Dale Street. Demolition proceeded until 1943 and in that year 238 potentially dangerous houses were demolished in Dale Street together with another 95 for which special permission had to be sought.

Council Houses 1930 – 1939

The 1930 Housing Act required that plans for future housing should be made for 5 years ahead starting with 1930. Since slum clearance was a matter for the Health Committee, the Housing Committee agreed to a target of 150 houses a year apart from those built to replace slum clearance. The number of Council houses built in the 1930's was in fact as follows:

1930	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937	1938
582	490	398	468	480	434	388	550	834

Most Council house building was done on the existing estates.

With the crisis of 1931 and the mass unemployment of the 1930's, the constant search was for cheap building. In 1930, 50 3-bedroomed houses with a superficial area of 742 feet compared with the usual 825 feet were built. The inclusive rental of these houses was 9/6d. In 1932 it was reported that of a waiting list of 1,857 600 had not renewed their application. This was said to be the result of the depression where people were willing to improve their housing conditions, but could not afford the rent of a Council house. In addition, those in Council houses were finding it difficult to pay the rent and where possible were transferring to lower rented houses. The Housing Committee claimed that this situation had been met by the Council building the smaller "D" type – 3 bedroomed houses, let at 9/6d to 9/9d and the 2 bedroomed "E" type.

Cost of houses were as follows in the 1930's:

Builder – A.M. Griffiths

1931	60	small 3 bedroomed houses at Low Hill	£296.15.0 each
"	30	" 2 " " " "	£271
1932	40	" 3 " " " "	£291
"	22	" 3 " " " Willenhall Road	£293
1934	58	" 3 " " " Low Hill	£272
1936	80	D (3 bedroomed 650 sq.ft) houses	£349

1936	66 E (2 bedroomed houses)	£289
1936	6 F (Bungalow – old married couple)	£200
1936	6 G (Bungalow – old person single)	£180
1936	38 H (4 bedroomed houses)	£420
1936	32 J (4 bedroomed houses with parlour)	£430
1936	10 K (4 bedroomed – large bedrooms)	£411
1936	6 L (6 bedroomed with parlour)	£432
1936	6 M (As L, with different layout)	£465

From 1936 prices of individual houses are not given and trends in prices must be judged from overall contract prices which do not distinguish the various types of houses built.

1937	J. McLean	128 houses	Three Tuns	£47,784
	A.M. Griffiths	76 houses	Walsall Street	£25,680
	A.M. Griffiths	94 houses	Low Hill	£34,462
	Biddulph & Thrift	12 houses	Low Hill	£4,581
1938	McLean	154 houses	Low Hill	£56,500
	Griffiths	92 houses	Pond Lane	£37,626
	W. Whittingham	388 houses	Marsh Lane	£152,460
1939	A. Poole	6 houses	Navigation Street	£2,514
		32 houses	Pond Lane – lowest tender £10,896 but cannot establish ability to carry out contract and recommend next best	£12,032

Trends in land prices are difficult to establish. Most land was bought by 1926 at a cost of about £100 per acre, although there were considerable variations from this:

Year	Location	Land bought	Cost per Acre
1922	Hordern Road	7078 sq. yds. From £250	
“	Willenhall Road	2/6d per sq. yd.	
1924	Newbridge	42,252 sq.yds. £5,000	
“	Sweetman Street	6175 sq. yds. £750	
“	Coalway Road	39 acres £4000	£102
“	Showell Estate	101 acres	£100
“	Old Fallings Farm		£130
1926	Low Hill and Bushbury	232 acres	£97.10.0

The level of rents was and remains the most contentious of housing matters. In 1932 rents of the new “E” small-type 3 bedroomed houses were 9/6d to 9/9d inclusive, while the “C” type – 2 bedroomed were 7/6d to 8/3d. In 1932 rents remained the same with an extra 9d a week for a hot water system.

With the deepening of the economic crisis interest rates were lowered and in 1934 the Council reported that it was paying off loans and re-borrowing at reduced rates. Since Council houses had been built under various Housing Acts it was not possible for there to

be blanket rent reductions without either raising legal problems or the question of the amount of the subsidy. In the event, the reductions were a bitter disappointment ranging from 1/3d to 3d a week, while for some houses there was no reduction at all. The 1935 Housing Act simplified this situation by consolidating existing housing legislation and there came into existence a single Housing Revenue Account. The 1935 Act also required regular rent reviews and gave instructions with regard to surpluses. The latter was not particularly helpful to Wolverhampton which had a surplus of £5,000, for it was pointed out that a variation of 1/8% in the rate of interest cost the Council £4,000. Since there was to be no Government subsidy for clearance under the 1935 Act and building costs were rising, it was thought best to use the small surplus for other purposes. In addition, the Government subsidy had been cut by 1/-d from July 1936. It was therefore resolved that rents of existing houses should be raised by 6d. a week from September 1936 and a further 6d from March 1937. Some rents were, however, reduced between 3d and 1/2d a week. Rents remained at this level until the War.

The collection of rents was a lively issue throughout the thirties. Rents were collected by a private estate agent who took a percentage of the rents collected. In 1930 a report was called for on this matter. Seventeen midland local authorities were circularised as to their method of collection. Fifteen of these collected their own rents while the other two were about to discuss their practice of having rents collected by agents. The Report showed that average arrears of rents in these other authorities were 15/10d per tenant, whereas Wolverhampton arrears were 13/6d. It was estimated that collections of rents by the Council would cost between £1,730 and £2,000. This compared with the £2,300 which was commission of 2½% on the rent collected. The Committee therefore recommended that the existing system continue. At full Council an amendment to refer the matter back to the Housing Committee was defeated by 29 votes to 12 and the old practice continued. Here for the first time in protest is the name of Councillor Lane. In February 1933 a Council resolution to reconsider the question of rent collection was passed by 17 votes to 15. A similar report was prepared. This time Wolverhampton arrears averaged 12/-d per tenant, whereas other authorities averaged 11/3d. The estimated costs of collecting rents would be £1,960 to £2,350 compared with the present cost of £2,500. The report considered that the estate agent worked efficiently and at reasonable cost and again recommended no change. This was confirmed in full Council 33-12. In July 1936 Councillors Lane and Gould made a more substantial attack. They asked for such information as:

1. The amount of control the Housing Committee or Housing Manager had in instructing bailiffs to levy distress for rent arrears.
2. On whose authority such proceedings were adopted.
3. The cost of printed forms and statements supplied to rent collectors by the Housing Committee.
4. The estimated time spent by the Housing Manager and his staff on matters which would ordinarily be referred to Rent Collectors if these were employed by the Housing Committee.

This led to yet another report on rent collection in 1937, which covered the same sort of ground as before. This time the Borough Treasurer was asked for an opinion and gave it that financially there was little in it; in other respects it was a matter of policy for the

Council to decide. The Housing Committee again recommended no change. Before full Council Ted Lane moved an amendment that the Council collected their own rents. When time ran out, he unsuccessfully moved the suspension of standing orders. The matter was adjourned to the next Council meeting when Lane lost his amendment by 15 votes to 22.

Lane was a scourge to the Tory, Liberal and Independent Councillors. In 1935 he and Lawley moved a motion that when hot water systems were installed rents should not be increased. This was lost, as also was his attempt to suspend standing orders. In August 1936 Lane and Lawley tried to refer back the acceptance of a contract of A.M. Griffiths for 250 houses at the Scotlands, Low Hill on the grounds that the cost was too high. In the same year Lane, and other Labour councillors were demanding rent relief fro those with disability pensions and sickness benefit, etc. In 1937 Lawley and Lane were viewing with grave concern the letting of a Council house to an ex-Councillor who was unmarried and without a family. This was lost by 13 votes to 30. Lane was the most vocal and ingenious of Labour party critics on all matters besides housing. After the 2nd World War he was Chairman of the Housing Committee. The propaganda effect of all these criticisms was considerable, but Council policy was, in the first place, firmly in the hands of the Government, particularly with regard to housing, and such decisions as were possible at local level were made by a Tory controlled council. Thus the small Labour group was vocal but powerless.

Private House Building 1918 – 1939

By and large, the stock of housing kept pace with the growth of population in the 19th century and no more. This indicates that a large section of the population was in no economic position to demand a greater diversion of resources to the building of adequate houses. The greatest relative period of house building was between 1821 and 1831 when the housing stock of the town was increased by 1,563 houses or 47%. In the following decade housing increased by 42%, but population increased by a staggering 48%. In absolute terms, the greatest number of houses, 3,188, was built in the decade 1890-1900, an increase of 19% in houses compared with population growth of 14%.

Details of these houses, however, are to be found only in the deeds, which are available for public inspection only when the Council purchases the houses; since they are then usually demolished within a short period one is left with a deed, but with no house with which to compare vital details.

When advertisements for houses first began to appear in the local press the number of the street was often not given. A representative selection of houses advertised in the Wolverhampton Chronicle for 1900 is as follows:

4 houses Powlett Street		Net rentals £71
8-5/-d houses, always well- tenanted		£145 per house
Owen Road	4 houses	£1,000
Humber Road	4 houses	£825
Kimberley Street- several houses		£280 each
Goldthorn Hill villa		£450
Fawdry Street		£225
Low Street	4 houses	£840

Bath Road	2 reception, 5 bedrooms	£630
Merridale St. West	4 houses	£720
Gorsebrook Road	8 houses (from 45 up) rents £104	£1,150
Cannock Road	4 room house 4/-d a week	

Here is a list of rents and sale prices for 1913:

		Rents per week
Bruford Road	6 rooms	7/-d
10 Peel Street	6 rooms	4/6d
149 Sweetman Street	(next to the laundry)	4/9d
139 Waterloo Road		11/-d
Powell Street	6 rooms	5/-d
156 Tettenhall Road	4 rooms	8/-d
Zoar Street	4 rooms	3/6d
40 Lyndurst Road	5 bedrooms, bath, electricity	12/-d
37 Fawdry Street	Bath, hot and cold water	6/-d
183 Jeffcock Road	3 bedrooms, bath	8/-d
107 Bright Street		6/-d
71 Drayton Street		6/-d
		Sale Price
29 Williamson Street	3 bedrooms, let@ 7/- per week	£195
Clark Road	4 bedrooms (£350 can remain on mortgage)	£440
116-27 Lowe Street	12 dwellings, gross rents £140.8.0	£1050

Rents and prices of houses moved little between 1900 and 1913. At the beginning of the war rents rose quite sharply but by 1919 when the housing shortage was extremely acute rents had been controlled and these were reflected in the prices of houses:

£5 for the key of a home – rent 5/6d to 7/6d – No children

£10 key money for houses – 7/-d to 15/-d rent.

£10 key money demobilised soldiers – 6/-d to 8/6d.

8 houses Dudley Road – 6 rooms – Gross rent 7/-d each week – Price £225 each

Private house building for sale started very slowly after the war. In 1921 only 19 such houses were built, in 1922, 40 – and in 1923, 71. Under these circumstances the Council stepped into the breach. The 1923 Housing Act offered a subsidy of £75 per house privately built between 620 and 850 sq. ft. To this it was accepted that from the rates a further subsidy of between £25 and £35 be made by the Council. In addition, loans should be made to builders where requested, although it was agreed between the Council and the local Building Societies that loans for construction were properly a matter for the Building Societies. Where necessary, therefore, it was agreed that the Council should guarantee the loans made by the Building Societies. Loans were to be for 20 years at 5%. Since building land was so short within the Borough, these facilities were extended outside the Borough, but to Wolverhampton residents only. The first result of this was

that the Council decided that the Beckminster Estate should be sold off in individual plots to private builders. A very large number of applications were received and 227 building plots were eventually sold at 3/-d to 4/-d a yard, which ensured both that houses would not exceed 850 sq. ft. and also that the Council was reimbursed for the sum originally spent to acquire the estate. In addition the Council adopted a policy of the sale of Council houses on selected sites. The first estate was Newbridge in 1924 where all the council houses in the Crowther Road, Hordern Road area were eventually sold. 39 acres of land was also bought at about £100 per acre in Coalway Road and these houses were eventually sold privately. The Council houses at Birches Barn were also sold and it is noteworthy that all these estates are in quite select residential areas in the south-west of the town. Many houses were let before eventually being sold. Private houses built with the subsidy rose as follows:

1923	1924	1925	1926	1927
71	88	151 (including 87 outside the Borough)	170	332

By 1926 the Council were agreeing to sell the 52 parlour type houses at Oxbarrow costing £520 each, privately where possible, and also houses at Low Hill.

In 1927 the Government subsidy was lowered to £50, but the Council agreed to keep the rate subsidy at £25. The reduction in the subsidy had a marked effect on builders and the figures for houses privately built in subsequent years were:

1928	1929	1930
108	170	119

Sales of Council houses slowed down as private building fell. In 1928 it was said that houses were sold as they became vacant at Birches Barn, Gorsebrook Road, Newbridge, Oxley (Greenwood Road only), Sweetman Street, Thorneycroft Lane, Tudor Road and Low Hill; but only 65 houses were sold that year.

In September 1929 the subsidy to private builders ended. In the seven years between 1923 and 1929, 1039 houses had been built with subsidy.

With the virtual completion of the Council house estates and the onset of the Depression, house building declined sharply. Council house building was about 250 houses per year in 1930 and 1931 and private building averaged 150 houses in the same years. I should be noted here that figures for houses built do not always tally either across time or between Housing Department figures and those of the Borough Engineer. The figures given above are from the Housing Committee.

Council house building between 1932 and 1936 averaged about 400 houses a year. During this period private house building rose to a peak in 1936, easily surpassing Council house building:

1932	1933	1934	1935	1936
249	495	607	807	1120

After the post-war slump in building prices, costs of new houses moved as follows: (3 bedroomed semi-detached unless otherwise stated). These prices are taken from advertisements in the Wolverhampton Chronicle.

1926	Alexandra Road, car entrance		£650
	Near Sunbeam works, 2 reception, kitchen, scullery, bath, h&c		£525
1927	Prestwood Road (£350 can remain on mortgage)		£550
1932	Penn House Estate, car space	from	£585
	Trysull Road, Deposit £50, 15/3d a week repayments		
	Codsall Road – 5 roomed bungalow		£475
	2 houses Oxley Rent 18/-d and £1		
1933	Skelding and Boucher. New houses		
	Pinfold Lane		£465
	Bhylls Lane		£500
	Bridgnorth Road		£465
	Goldthorn Park Estate	£600 to	£850
1934	Ward Road, Goldthorn Park		£575
	Marsh Lane, Oxley		£395
	Lane Green Estate, Codsall – 2 bedroomed		£310
		3 bedroomed	£400 to £575
		4 bedroomed	£600
	Cannock Road, Bushbury		£375
	Prestwood Road		£435
1935	Warstones Crescent, mortgage 11/9d per week		£450
1936	Hollybush Estate	£367 to	£397
	D'Eynecourt Road		£475
1937	Oak Hill, Finchfield		£450
	Marston Road	£445 to	£540
1938	Marsh Lane 12/9d a week £25 deposit		
	Warstones Road (4 years old)		£500

The records of the South Staffs Building Society, which I was kindly allowed by Mr C Warner to examine, throw further light on private house building. In 1933 new semis in Bryan Avenue were granted a mortgage of £320 on a total cost of £360, the mortgage being guaranteed by the builder A.M. Griffiths. The guarantee was sometimes asked for by the Building Society. Occasionally builders were granted advances from the South Staffs Building Society. For instance, an advance of £350 on each of 50 houses being built at Blakeley Green on houses selling at £495 was granted to a builder in 1936. Other

advances to builders were usually smaller, e.g. £2,100 on 6 houses and £2,825 on 7 houses, both in 1937. In 1933 Wolverhampton Corporation had guaranteed a small number of mortgages. In 1938 the following figures were given a guaranteed mortgage:

Guarantor	No. of Mortgages	Amount
Legal & General Ass. Soc. Ltd	480	
Brookes & Edwards	95	£7,696
M. Withers	60	£4,120
B & E Estates	28	£2,300
Cuthberts Estates	15	£1,500
A M / H M Griffiths	32	£ 960

A few other people had guaranteed smaller amounts. In each case arrears were negligible. From 1938 the Society made some larger advances, for instance £100,000 interest only mortgages at 4% for hotels etc., in some of which transactions the value of the society was involved.

In the inter-war years there were three main building societies in Wolverhampton. Two were of considerable antiquity, while the third, the South Staffs Society, was started in the 1920's. Their respective assets in 1928 were:

South Staffordshire Building Society	£1,193,000
Wolverhampton & District Building Society	£2,038,056
Wolverhampton Freeholders' Permanent Building Society	£2,178,598

In 1939 investments in the South Staffordshire Society were £2,214, and withdrawals were £1,057.

Advances on mortgages of the Wolverhampton Freeholders' Permanent Building Society moved as follows in the 20th century:

1903	1913	1919	1923	1929	1934	1937
£18,000	£20,000	£30,000	£60,000	£200,000	£300,000	£500,000
% increase per annum		-	25%	39%	10%	22%

These figures show that although the amounts advanced increased very rapidly after the 1933 Finance Act which both encouraged private house building and allowed the building societies to advance more of their assets, the Society made its greatest stride forward in the 1920's.

The inter-war period saw a rapid growth of home ownership and the development of private suburbs in Wolverhampton linked mainly to the bus routes. These estates were mainly in the west of the town, particularly at Penn, Bradmore and Merridale. Some private building took place in North-East Wolverhampton, but these were usually the less "selective" areas and private houses co-existed uneasily with the Council house estates. Overspill development for Wolverhampton people also took place. This was largely based on the railway. Around every station from Codsall to Blakeley Rise to Compton, south to Wombourne, estates of cheap semi-detached houses for white-collared and skilled workers arose.

One of the most interesting and exclusive developments was the Goldthorn Park Estate, built from 1929. This was planned as a garden suburb of 200 houses, each to be approved by Sedgley Council. Twin lodges were built marking the entrance to the estate from Goldthorn Hill and Spring Head. Sales were effected from the Earl of Dudley's estate office and a 24-page brochure prepared. Model houses were designed by A T Butler of Dudley and included cottages, a typical house for a small family, and small houses which could be run without servants. Open spaces, playing fields, and a golf course were planned. At the heart of the estate was the famous Sedgley Park Hall, which had been a school for the training of Roman Catholic teachers for many years. The reality was less than the design. Some very substantial houses were built on this estate, prices ranging from £600 to £1,000. The school is now Park Hall Hotel. Tennis courts were constructed, but the reality of a garden suburb was never realised.

Private builders strove to reduce prices. Some of the very cheapest 3 bedroomed houses were built at Warstones Crescent Estate by Arthur M. Griffiths & Son Ltd. The following details are by courtesy of Mr Alan Griffiths. These were 750 sq. ft. houses at £365 with 3 bedrooms, sitting room and living room. The kitchen also served as a bathroom. There was garage space of 7ft at the side of the house, and there were large gardens. It is clear, therefore, that the price of land was not the limiting factor in lower house prices. The deposit on this house was £25 and mortgage repayments were 9/8d per week. Rates and water were approximately 2/7d. Total weekly outgoings therefore, were about 12/3d per week. This would amount to 18% of the income of skilled workers earning £3.10.0d. per week. For those earning less, those liable to unemployment or those who were in middle age, the possibility of house purchase, even at £365 was not a viable proposition.

The Housing Position 1919 – 1940 – A Summary

From 1919 to 1940 when house building stopped for the duration of the war, between 15,000 and 16,000 houses were built in Wolverhampton. The uncertainties arise from the differences reported from time to time in the annual reports of the Medical Officer of Health who obtained his information from the Borough Engineer and the information contained in the Housing Committee minutes each year. In particular figures from the Medical Officer of Health's report do not tally with the table given in the 1935 Medical Officer of Health's report in which complete figures for building from 1919 were given. In view of demolition of houses, the sale of Council houses, the building of houses outside the Borough boundaries, etc, it is not to be wondered at that the figures differ. By 1940 the estimated number of houses in the Borough was 40,840. This gives a density of about 3.7 persons per house, compared with a density of 4.7 persons per house in 1921, and an average density of about 5.2 persons throughout the nineteenth century. From 1918 to 1931 the local authority was overwhelmingly the most important provider of houses. From 1933, however, private building overtook Council house building, but for an exceptional year in 1938 when 834 Council houses were built compared with 799 private houses. The largest numbers of Council houses ever built were 966 in 1926 and 1,280 in 1927 when the main Council house estates were being completed. Private housing nearly approached this with a peak of 1,120 houses in 1936.

It is interesting to compare the 37% (18½% every 10 years) added to the housing stock in the twenty years from 1920 to 1939 with additions to the housing stock in other periods.

House building from 1801 to 1901 averaged 24% addition to the housing stock per decade, indicating that much more of the town's resources were devoted to building in the 19th century than has been the case since.

Of the estates built by the Council those at Low Hill and Bushbury were of overwhelming importance with 4,320 houses accounting for more than half of all Council building. The next important estate was Parkfield with 654 houses followed by Willenhall Road with 498 and Heath Town with 448.

With regard to types of houses built by the Council, these were as follows:

A Type	2074
B “	1482
C “	942
D “	1634
E “	1458
F “	82
G “	82
H “	166
J ”	302
K “	52
L “	30
M “	30
Pre-1914 flats	50
Houses and shops	25
	8409

By the end of the inter-war period the falling birth rate had made the 2 bedroomed house important and the Council provided a much greater range of houses than private builders. The continued existence of a mass of overcrowded, slum houses was the main feature of the inter-war years. Taking the standards of the 1935 Housing Act, the housing position as revealed by the Censuses was:

Overcrowding by 1935 Standards		1921 Census	
1 room	2 persons	55 families	189 persons
2 “	3 “	522 “	2631 “
3 “	5 “	437 “	3035 “
4 “	7½ “	348	3342
5 “	10 “	81 “	948 “
6 – 7)			
6½)	13 “	7 “	101 “
8-9	15 “	-	
10 “	20 “	-	
		1450 families	10246 persons
		6.3%	10%

Nearly half of these families were grossly overcrowded:

Gross Overcrowding in 4 roomed houses (2 bedroomed)

294 families of 8 in 2 bedroomed houses
 201 families of 9 in 2 bedroomed houses
 104 families of 10 in 2 bedroomed houses
 33 families of 11 in 2 bedroomed houses.

Overcrowding by 1935 Standards		1931 Census	
1 room	2 persons	194 families	360 persons
2 "	3 "	610 "	2974 "
3 "	5 "	234 "	2893 "
4 "	7½ "	770 "	5937 "
5 "	10 "	35 "	804 "
6 – 7	13 "	6 "	88 "
8-9	17 "	--	-
10 "	20 "	--	-
		1849 families	13056 persons
		5.7%	9.8%

Between the two Censuses there was virtually no improvement, indeed larger numbers of people were overcrowded in certain types of dwellings. Particularly noticeable is one or two roomed dwellings. Nearly 100 families of from 3 to 9 people lived in one room. 130 families of from 6 to 10 people lived in two rooms. Three bedroomed dwellings were slightly less overcrowded than in 1921, but the 4 roomed houses in which one-third of the total population were housed, showed even worse overcrowding than in 1921 with 770 families ranging from 8 to 14 persons occupying these 2 bedroomed houses.

For the 1935 Housing Act, the Council were obliged to make a detailed survey of all working-class houses in the Borough. This enquiry is not entirely comparable with the 1921-1931 Census figures given above. The main differences are that although the same number of persons per room has been taken as standard, the 1935 Act also gave a table of room areas, and where the rooms were over a certain area, a larger number of persons were permitted. In addition children up to 1 year were not to be counted at all, and those from 1 to 10 counted only as half a person. The survey showed the following:

	Council Houses	Private Houses not in Clearance Area	Private Houses in Clearance Area
Dwellings Overcrowded	328	339	420
Persons Overcrowded	3185	2150	2427
	Total Dwellings Overcrowded =	1087	
	Total Persons Overcrowded =	7762	

Surprising about this Survey is the emergence of Council Houses as an important source of overcrowding. This was mainly due to two families living in the same house either because the tenant could not afford the rent or because he was sharing the house with married children. In view of the under-counting of children in this 1935 Survey, it must be assumed that only limited progress had been made between 1934 and 1935 in the diminution of overcrowding.

To summarise the housing position between the wars, if we take the 40,000 houses in Wolverhampton to represent approximately the same number of families to be accommodated then:

1. 6,500 middle-class and higher paid working-class families or 16% of the population purchased new houses and became owner-occupiers.
2. 8,500 working-class families on or above the average wage and of higher than average security of employment representing 21% of families or about 1% per annum moved into Council houses during the inter-war years.
3. With regard to some slum clearance:
2,358 individual unfit or 6% of houses were cleared and 1,893 houses in slum clearance areas were demolished. Some of the worst slums in the town were destroyed, but such was the poverty of the period that new slums were created almost as fast as the old ones disappeared.
4. With regard to overcrowding, there was no improvement between 1921 and 1931, despite the fact that from 1919 the fall in the birth rate and smaller families tended to abate overcrowding, without additional housing having to be provided. From 1930 slum clearance improved the position slowly and it is possible that overcrowding declined from the nineteenth century average of 15% of the population to half of that by 1939.
5. For the more than 60% of people who did not move into new houses in the inter-war period, it is likely that their housing situation remained unchanged compared with 1914, for while many may have moved into sound dwellings vacated by the 16% who moved into private houses, unemployment and the inability to pay higher rents tended to create new slums.

Chapter 3 – Housing 1945 – 1975

Council House Building

Over much of the country, German bombing and missiles had greatly aggravated the housing problem by 1945. This, however, was not the case in Wolverhampton which had scarcely suffered at all in this respect.

In November 1944, the Housing Committee presented a report to the Council in which it outlined the existing position and put proposals for future housing in Wolverhampton.

The report considered that the housing programme had been “reasonably satisfactory” before the war. The Council’s function had been to clear slum property and areas and rehouse the occupants, while private enterprise built houses to cater for the growth of the town. The Committee considered that the housing needs of Wolverhampton would be 4,000 houses and in addition 2,700 houses would be required to complete the Slum Clearance programme. Again, as after the 1st World War housing needs were grossly underestimated. The existing housing list of 1,660 applicants was taken as a general, but minimum, measure of need. One-third of those on the housing list, were servicemen.

Two housing sites at Bushbury and Willenhall Road, capable of taking 2,200 houses were then available to the Council and consideration of two other sites for 600 and 800 houses on the other side of Willenhall Road and at Warstones Road was being given.

In addition to permanent housing the Housing (Temporary Accommodation) Act 1944 had been passed which provided for the erection of “prefabs” with a life of 10 years.

The administrative details of the scheme were that the local authority was to provide the site and site works. The temporary bungalows would be erected by the Ministry of Works, including construction of the garden path, fencing and external painting. Maintenance and repairs would be the responsibility of the Council and rents were not to exceed 10/-d per week. The Government estimated its annual charges on each bungalow for 10 years at £68.11.0d. per year. The Council would repay the Government £23.10.0d. per year and supply a subsidy if needed to cover repairs and management. Thus the first subsidy on prefabs was to be above £45 per annum each.

The report proposed that 500 temporary bungalows should be acquired and after discussing various sites and the merits and demerits of dispersing the bungalows throughout the town, decided that they should be erected on the two main proposed permanent building sites. In discussing the likelihood of Wolverhampton being allocated prefabs (which would be coming out of the factories at 2,500 a week by March 1945) rather than those towns whose war damage was severe, it was noted that they would have to be allocated quickly and that, therefore, a town with sites ready for the bungalows was more likely to receive them than a town with greater need but less preparedness.

In July 1945, shortly after the war in Europe had ended a further Report from the Housing Committee on measures for speeding up post-war building was presented. In the first place it was proposed that in place of the tender system where one builder was successful and the labour force of the other tenderers perhaps unemployed, that the system of the agreed price be adopted and contracts let out to all builders willing to meet this price. War-time measures, such as variations in labour and building costs, hours of labour etc. would be written into the contracts. In addition, houses for sale could only be built under licence from the Council and would only be granted for dwellings within the range of 730 to 1,000 superficial feet and selling at a maximum of £1,200. Further, all

building and repair work costing more than £10 was to be licensed by the Council. It was felt that these comprehensive measures of control would enable the best use of the workforce to be made.

The position in July 1945 was that roads and services were available for 270 permanent sites and within six months a further 300 would be ready. In addition sites were ready or nearly ready for 400 prefabs. Site works had not proceeded with the speed expected due to shortage of labour. The use of German prisoners-of-war had begun at Bushbury. There were also 1,700 sites with sewers and services for private building, unbuilt on from pre-war days. The Wolverhampton and District Building Trade Employers' Association estimated that in the ensuing twelve months 350 Council and 130 private houses could be built.

In December 1945 the newly elected Labour controlled Housing Committee, Chairman – Ted Lane – reported to the Council. Contracts had been placed at 20/10d per superficial foot with 39 members of the Wolverhampton and District Building Trade Employers' Association for 244 houses on the Willenhall Road site, 154 on the Bushbury site and 4 houses in St. Giles Crescent destroyed by enemy action. In addition 141 houses were being built for private sale. With regard to licensing of building work over £10 – 465 applications had been received of which 437 had been granted, although many for less than the work applied for. Most, it was said, had been under construction reached the stage of requiring painting and decorating licences would not be granted so freely. For the two additional Council house estates 83 acres had been purchased between Willenhall Road and Deans Road, and 131 acres in Warstones Road. The Committee had also considered Circular 182/45 from the Ministry of Health on permanent prefabricated houses. It was estimated that labour on site work was but by 50% to 80% by erecting these houses. The Orlit had a pre-cast concrete frame with pre-cast concrete floor and roof beams and was of 900 superficial feet. The Howard consisted of a series of factory made units mounted on a light welded steel frame and was 915 superficial feet. The desperate post-war housing position had led to regulations forbidding the conversion of housing accommodation to any other use, again to be operated by the local Council. In addition, the Minister of Health had asked all persons with accommodation to spare to share it with those in need. Local authorities were authorised to install cookers etc. to facilitate this, and any such lettings would not come under the Rent Restrictions Acts. In exceptional cases, compulsory powers were granted to acquire grossly under-occupied premises.

Early in 1945 Council house building started on the East Park Estate (Willenhall Road South) and at Bushbury. By March 1945 prefabs were being built on both of these estates. The programme of 400 temporary pre-fabricated houses was finished by 23 November 1946. 293 of these were Tarran types and 107 an American type. The Tarran bungalow had a floor area of 655 feet, including a shed. The walls were units of resin bonded plywood faced with 7½” of concrete bolted together. The roof was timber framed covered with asbestos sheeting. Bathroom units and kitchen cupboards etc. were of steel. The accommodation comprised, a living room of 150 sq. ft. two bedrooms of 125 sq. ft. kitchen, bathroom, separate w.c. and hall. The USA type house had an area of 600 sq. ft. It had similar accommodation to the Tarran, except that the second bedroom was only 100 sq. ft. The construction was timber framed walls covered with asbestos sheets with an asbestos roof covered with bituminous felt.

The Council also built a considerable number of British Iron and Steel Federation Permanent Pre-fabricated houses. These houses were semi-detached of working kitchen type of 882 sq. ft. plus 100 sq. ft. of outbuildings. It was estimated that 35 craftsmen plus 30 labourers could erect 50 steel houses in 5 months. This was about half the labour required for a traditional house. Despite this, the cost of erecting these houses on a site of 50 was £1,307 each. The Council ordered 50 of these houses for each of their four main sites of Bushbury, Warstones, Rake Gate and Moreton. The steel houses were ordered in April 1946. In July 1946 there were 73 completed houses and 152 prefabs at East Park and 12 permanent houses plus 75 prefabs at Bushbury. By January 1947, 1,286 permanent houses were on contract including 400 BISF houses, and total permanent houses completed were 385 plus the 400 prefabs.

At the end of 1946 came the Government White Paper on Housing for 1947 which called for a curtailment of housing contracts during that year.

The Housing Committee devoted considerable time to the problems of allocating Council houses. The first report in July 1945 stressed that in the past general guidance had been given to the Housing Manager and the actual selection of tenants had been at his discretion. In general, the factors taken into account were (i) the date of application (ii) the degree of insufficiency of existing house accommodation (iii) ill-health or incapacity of members of the household and (iv) the general suitability of the tenant. In view of the nature of the accommodation in prefabs special proposals were made for these:

1. Priority to ex-service personnel and their dependants up to 75% of bungalows available.
2. No bungalows to be allocated to applicants with children born before 1939. (This had the general effect of limiting children to those under 5).
3. The family should not consist of more than 5 at the commencement of the tenancy.
4. Tenants should move to alternative Council accommodation on the eldest child reaching the age of 8, if children were of opposite sexes.

For permanent houses only one criterion was laid down, that service and ex-service personnel should be allocated 50% of all, both old and new lettings.

At the end of 1946 dissatisfaction with allocation on the part of unsuccessful applicants and others led to the adoption of a properly balanced points scheme drawn up by the Housing Manager. This gave points for:

- a. Present housing conditions
- b. Family circumstances (size of family, illness etc)
- c. War service
- d. Period since application for house.
- e. Special circumstances (e.g. imminent loss of present accommodation).

Applicants would be classified in four groups and given a general indication of their place in the queue. From the point of view of house-seekers this was some improvement on the old system, but still left a great deal of discretion to the Housing Department in allocating points and dissatisfaction continued. As far as prefabs were concerned conditions of tenancies were even vaguer, the basic condition being that "Tenancies should be limited to families which can reasonably be accommodated in various types of

such houses....". Another cause of concern to tenants was where parents died leaving children. The rule before 1955 was that in such cases the children should be offered smaller accommodation and if this was refused the tenancy was not given to them. After 1955 it was agreed that if the children refused to move they would be allowed to remain in the old house. It was reaffirmed that where a sub-tenant was not a relative no offer of accommodation could be made unless he was in a priority group.

Two matters dear to the heart of the Labour Party were dealt with in the early post-war years. The first was the collection of Council house rents by Corporation officials. This change took place after October 1946. A report in 1948 showed that rent arrears had decreased from £1,097 in October 1946 to £446 in March 1948 and that there were 17 rent collectors each responsible for about 600 houses. The important difference between rent collection by agents and collection by Council officials was that the rent collector would get to know each of his tenants very well and would become in fact, the welfare officer on the estate. This concept has had only limited success to date. In 1949 the rent collector's duties were defined as follows:

1. Collection of rents
2. Inspection for repairs and general cleanliness
3. Examinations and recommendations for exchanges, taking of ledgers, etc
4. To see that the conditions of the lettings were complied with
5. To enlist the help of tenants to arrange transfers
6. To encourage tenants to keep gardens in good order
7. To control the erection of sheds, fowl-pens, etc
8. To take an interest in the welfare of tenants
9. To safeguard the Committee's interest in the properties

The other question was that of a Direct Building Department. The matter was decided in principle at a Council meeting in March 1946. The Direct Building Department was not to be confined to the building of houses and it would absorb the Public Works Department then employing 230 men and executing work of about £90,000 per annum. The Department was to be under the control of the Borough Engineer with its headquarters at Fifth Avenue, Low Hill and an office at the Town Hall. The Department got off the ground with a contract for about 60 houses in Deans Road. The main problems of the Department were to set up a purchasing organisation which could buy building materials competitively, the fact that it could tender for and erect only Council houses and lastly that with this disability it had to tender competitively for contracts against private enterprise. The Direct Building Department regularly received contracts for houses, usually keeping within the contract figure. In 1953, however, 94 flats which it built at Warstones Drive cost £12 per flat more than the contract price. The reason advanced for this was that the costing had been too low, and the Department not having previously built 3 story flats. In addition the winter of 1951-52 had been severe and there had been difficulties in ensuring a constant flow of work to the Department.

The Housing situation deteriorated. The waiting list soared by 1000 applicants per year until in 1949, 1,700 new applicants took the total to 4,737. In 1947 shortages of building materials seriously affected the reduced building programme and rising prices were taking "agreed price" contracts to an increase of £61 per house. In July houses were

£123 above the contract price. Besides the BISF steel house, 80 Orlit permanent pre-fabricated houses were being built at Bushbury. The Orlit had a pre-cast concrete frame and was 900 sq. ft. in area. These houses cost £1,535 each and the Government eventually granted £105 per house subsidy.

By 1947 the Housing Committee was being forced to consider the provision of flats in Wolverhampton despite decisions dating back before the 2nd World War not to build flats. A report in February laid the pros and cons out as follows: Flat could accommodate large numbers of people, flexible accommodation could be provided, flats were suitable for those who did not want to cultivate gardens. Communal facilities could be provided. Against this it was argued, flats were dangerous, noisy and inconvenient. There were difficulties in providing storage space and facilities used in common tended to be neglected. In addition, the higher the flats rose, the greater the difficulty of access for tenants and tradesmen. Problems of refuse disposal, window-cleaning etc. also multiplied. The eventual recommendations accepted by the Council were:

1. No flats would be allocated to families with young children
2. Flats were to be let to single persons, old persons and childless couples
3. That no flats should be higher than 3 storeys

The first large block of flats was at Newbold Estate, Cannock Road opened in 1950. The Housing Manager reported the layout spacious with ample open space and that he had no difficulty in finding priority applicants to tenant the block. During the 1950's a number of low-rise flats were built. In 1953 A.F.R. Godfrey built 156 flats at Merridale Road at a contract price of £256,554. In the same year the Direct Building Department built 94 flats at Warstones for £134,299.

To return to the general building programme, by the end of 1947, 800 permanent houses had been built, which together with the 400 temporary houses, made a total of 1,200. A year later there were 1,500. By the end of 1949 there were 2,600 Council houses built mainly at Bushbury, both sides of Willenhall Road and Warstones. Thus housebuilding since 1945 had averaged about 500 dwellings per year. It was not enough. By January 1952 the waiting list had risen to over 6,000. In the early 1950's the average number of houses built increased with the purchase of estates in Tettenhall and on the 14 October 1953, Sir John Hunt opened the 5,000th post-war Council house.

Slum Clearance

In 1954 slum clearance on a large scale was resumed. Before this time, some slum clearance was carried out at Moseley Village and Dale Street, where clearance had been stopped on the outbreak of war. By 1954, 174 homes had been demolished at Moseley Village and clearance was complete. In addition, individual unfit houses were being demolished, but the figures varied greatly. For instance, in 1951, 105 such houses were demolished, in 1952, 74, and in 1953 only 17 houses.

The limitation on the clearing of unfit houses was the number of new houses the Housing Committee was able to allocate for this purpose. From 1944 this was 50 houses a year. It would take 100 years to clear the slums at that rate, the Medical Officer of Health noted in 1950. In 1951 the Medical Officer of Health reported that the survey of 1946 had shown 5,911 individually unfit houses and the position was clearly deteriorating. A

survey of 687 of the worst houses therefore, had been carried out and as a result the worst 200 were chosen for priority action. From 1952 the allocation of houses for this purpose was raised from 50 to 150 a year.

The Medical Officer of Health was continually bringing the deplorable housing situation to public attention. In 1949 the Medical Officer of Health stated that certain streets and courts criticised by Dr Ballard in his Report of 1873 still stood. In 1950 he pointed out that 2,000 houses considered unfit since 1938 still stood and that there was now a further 3,000.

In 1955 a programme of slum clearance was prepared under the 1954 Housing Act. In the next five years, 2,250 houses were to be demolished in clearance areas and 250 individually unfit houses. Thus a programme of 500 houses per year was envisaged as well as continuing to clear the general waiting list. The final new clearance area was Charles, Herbert and Grove Streets near the town centre. Of the 101 houses in Charles Street, only one had a fixed bath. 63 had no internal water supply. Only 3 had inside lavatories and more than half of the houses shared a lavatory. In Grove Street, out of 69 houses, 54 had no internal water, 42 no separate w.c., 68 had outside lavatories and only one had a fixed bath. In September 1955 the Dale Street development on the site of the old slum clearance area was approved. 232 dwellings were to be provided and Council policy was amended to provide this accommodation. 27 three-bedroomed flats were in 2 storey terraced blocks, and 84 two-bedroomed flats in three or four storey blocks. The remaining dwellings, mainly 1 bedroomed and bed-sitting rooms, were to be provided in 8 storey blocks of flats.

By the end of 1957, 1,385 dwellings had been provided in three years which was almost on the target of 500 per annum. Slum clearance moved on to 142 houses in the adjacent St. Matthew Street, then to the Vauxhalls. Other large clearance areas were Blakenhall and Heath Town. By 1959, 3,000 houses had been demolished and the plan was almost on target. As required by the Housing Act of 1957 a survey of the estimated number of remaining unfit houses was made, and the total was 3,455. It was proposed to deal with clearance areas and individually unfit houses at the same rate as in the previous 5 years, namely, 1,250 clearance and 250 individually unfit per year.

From 1954 the Council added to its housing stock by the purchase of private houses. The origin of this scheme was to lessen under-occupation of houses by offering owner-occupiers of old properties whose families had grown up Council accommodation in return for the purchase of their house at market prices. It soon became a scheme to buy houses, preferably in blocks and modernise them. The first houses thus bought were three together in Salisbury Street for a total cost of £550. The estimated cost of adding a bathroom, inside w.c. and heating system was £1,317 for the three houses. The estimated annual loss was £72, to be met 75% from a Government grant and 25% from the rates. As the scheme progressed, the houses tended to be those bought by the Borough Engineer under slum clearance schemes and temporarily made available to the Housing Committee. By 1965 the Corporation housing stock had been increased by 868 as a result of such house purchases.

The last additional source of housing was Overspill. In October 1951 agreement was reached with Staffordshire County Council, Wednesfield UDC and Seisdon RDC to build overspill houses in co-operation with Wolverhampton. In the following year Seisdon contracted to produce 196 houses and Wednesfield 150. In December 1953 it was agreed

that the overspill authorities would accept tenants nominated by Wolverhampton, but that these should be a fair cross-section of tenants. The overspill authorities were anxious that Wolverhampton should not take the opportunity to place their most “difficult” applicants in the overspill areas. Up to March 1953, Wednesfield built 84 and Seisdon 45 overspill houses. By the end of 1958 Wednesfield had provided 1666, Seisdon 1102 and Tettenhall 71 houses. By 1963 Wednesfield had provided 2243 houses and Seisdon 1534 after which overspill building virtually ceased. At the end of 1965 overspill had provided about 4,000 houses compared with the 10,000 built by Wolverhampton within the Borough.

New Trends in Housing

The changing family led to fundamental changes in the size of Council house accommodation required. Even before 1929 the major requirements had been for 2 bedroomed rather than 3 bedroomed dwellings. Analysis of the housing list at March 1948 showed the following:

Accommodation Required	No. of Applicants
2 bedrooms	2736
3 bedrooms	527
4 bedrooms	79
6 bedrooms	18
Double bungalow for Old People	44
Single bungalow for Old People	67
1 bedroomed flats (single person, childless couples)	1266

In 1959, the Housing Manager reported that 93% of applicants required 2 bedrooms or less. In November 1960 the Housing Committee reported that for some years almost half the housing requirements had been for 1 bedroom, and bed-sitting room dwellings. The remaining half was divided between 2 and 3 bedroomed houses. The proportions were now being changed to provide 30% one-bed, 40% two-bed and 30% three-bed dwellings. The growing number of childless families accommodated had considerable effect on the controversies of the late 1950’s regarding the high rise flats which changed the Wolverhampton skyline in the 1960’s. The Medical Officer of Health in his 1960 Report commented on high-rise flats as follows:

The most obvious sign of rehousing in Wolverhampton is the dramatic appearance in the central areas of blocks of high flats that make a valuable though limited contribution to the housing needs of the town. These units of accommodation cut down travelling time when close to the town centre and work, and they provide quietness, privacy, a good view without a garden to maintain, clear air and unobstructed light. Their arrangement is equivalent to streets running vertically; their restricted size and absence of exclusive yard space present problems of storage, clothes drying and room for hobbies; reliance on lifts, inaccessibility of shopping facilities and inconvenience in delivering goods can be disadvantage; the absence of a fire complicates the disposal of refuse and adds difficulties to the home nursing and domiciliary midwifery services; room for a pram and opportunities for small children to explore and play and to keep pets may be absent. And

due to the lack of a garden the necessity of older children to play at a distance from their mothers imposes anxieties. Although increasing demand for garages will diminish space saved by high flats, they are a welcome contribution to the housing of families with grown up children, childless couples, single men and women wanting their own dwellings and families with a breadwinner liable to be moved from place to place. They are efficient units for those whose interest are predominantly in work or social activities based on the town centre. For those whose interests centre on the home, the family and its needs, houses are more satisfactory.

The building of these estates led to very large contracts which only the largest builders could handle. The Mayfield Estate on the Willenhall Road went to Bryants for £859,896. This was for 164 one-bedroom, 157 two-bedroom and 76 three-bedroom flats, together with 100 garages. In May 1962 A.F.R. Godfrey & Son received a £576,448 contract for Boscabel Estate in Lower Stafford Street for 5 eleven-storey blocks of flats each with 42 dwellings. In 1964 Watts (Midlands) Ltd, won a multi-million £ contract for Blakenhall Gardens at £2,126,475; this was for 580 high rise flats, together with a multi-storey car park, tenants workshops and meeting rooms etc. In December 1965 Wimpey's contracted to build 366 high-rise dwellings at the Leasowes adjoining the Warstones Estate for £1,230,357. The largest development of all, Heath Town, was still being contracted out when our period ends.

Despite the high-rise building, this could not compensate for the fall of overspill and house completions fell well below the 500 a year agreed for slum clearance. From 1963 completions were as follows:

	Wolverhampton	Overspill	Total
1963	263	92	355
1964	345	70	415
1965	465	14	479

Most of these dwellings went to persons from clearance areas and thus the housing list scarcely changed.

The housing list had climbed to its maximum in 1952 at 6,682. This coincided with the high point of population in Wolverhampton as 1953 showed a decline. From 162,300 people in 1952, the population fell to 150,210 in 1965, despite the fact that this was the period of maximum influx of immigrants into Wolverhampton. By 1955 the Housing List was reduced to 5,479. During the year 1873 new applicants had joined the list, but 601 had not renewed their applications. By 1959 the list had fallen to 4,557. In 1960 it was down to 3,960. This number remained virtually constant until 1962 when it again began to rise. By 1965 it was 4,294. How the housing list was kept fairly static during the period can be seen from the position in 1961. In that year 446 new dwellings were built by Wolverhampton and 313 overspill houses became available. 278 existing tenants moved, 379 tenants exchanged with each other and 172 transferred to other Council houses. About 250 tenancies were amended, 150 on the death of a marriage partner, and 100 deaths leaving the tenancy to a son or daughter. In addition, 120 houses were bought by the Corporation, nearly 100 of them in clearance houses.

The Housing Manager's annual reports are informative concerning the administration of Council house estates. In 1959 he reported much interest from various parts of the country in the underfloor heating at the Graiseley (Dale Street) flats, the system of collecting payment with the rent evoking great interest. In 1961 an Exchange Bureau was set up and in that year had 916 Council house tenants registered and 101 private tenants. There were 18 tenants wishing to move to other towns, but 292 families wishing to move to Wolverhampton.

Rent arrears have always been extremely low in Wolverhampton. It has been noted how municipal rent collectors improved the situation. In 1949 rent arrears were at a record low of £236. In 1955 there were 10 court orders for rent arrears but no evictions. In 1959 net arrears were £1,312. In 1963 they were higher, but this was said to be due to the exceptionally cold weather and large fuel bills and was still only 0.2% of the rent roll.

Housing Finance

The two most explosive issues of housing finance apart from the availability of dwellings have always been rents and repairs. The eroding of Labour Party support in those wards consisting mainly of Council houses reached the point where in Bushbury a Conservative was actually elected. This was largely due to rising interest rates engineered by the Tory Government which led to the imposition of higher rents and lower standards of maintenance of properties. These developments were not vigorously enough resisted by Labour councillors and exasperated tenants tended to stay at home rather than go to the polls and vote Labour.

The first permanent post-war Council house at 25 Cavendish Gardens was opened on 2 March 1946. In the same month the Housing Committee presented a report on rents. It was stated that if the rents of new houses were fixed in relation to the much higher post-war costs of building, then rents would be much higher than for existing accommodation. The purpose of the Committee was to both avoid rent increases in old property and fix rents for new houses at a reasonable level. In the Housing Revenue Account was a sum accumulated mainly during the war of £18,000 and the Committee therefore proposed to use this to fix rents of post-war houses at 12/-d to 12/6d a week and to leave the rents of pre-war houses unchanged. A detailed analysis by the Borough Treasurer annexed to the Report suggested a very different course. The accounts for 1945 showed that housing finance was raised as follows:

Rent	57%
Exchequer contribution	32%
Rates	11%

The surplus, nearly £23,000 in 1945, had already been whittled down to £18,000 in 1946. Annual charges on the cheaper of the 2 types of post-war house being built were as follows;

Loan charges at 3.1/8%	£50.10.4d
Repairs	£ 5.10.0d
Management	£ 2.0.0d
Total	£58.0.4d

Less Exchequer Subsidy	(16.10.0)	
Less Rate Charge	(5.10.0)	£22.0.0
Net annual charge		£36.0.4.

The net rent necessary to cover these charges was 13/10d a week, which together with 5/-d rates and water would make a weekly rent of 18/10d. The implication was that rents should be much higher than 12/-d and he also proposed that pre-war Council house rents be raised by 6d a week with more for H to M houses. The Treasurer concluded that the Council should be cautious fixing rents so that they could be lowered in the future rather than raised. Such reasoning, of course, did not appeal to the new Labour controlled Council and the Treasurer's recommendations were ignored. Post-war rents were fixed at 12/-d and 12/6d with unchanged rents for pre-war houses.

By 1948 the rent situation had to be reconsidered. The surplus of 1946 had become a deficit of £5,336 in 1947/8. Rents of WK1 and DK1, the 2 types of post-war houses, were raised to 15/3³/₄d and 15/10³/₄d per week respectively. Pre-war rents were also raised 1/-d for 2 bedrooms, 1/6d to 2/-d for 3 bedrooms and 1/9d to 3/6d for 4 bedrooms and larger houses. Pre-fab rents were to rise from 10/-d to 11/-d. In July 1953 rents for newly completed houses at Tettenhall, Wednesfield and Rough Hills were fixed at a considerably higher level than for previous houses:

1 bed flats	13/6d to 14/-d
2 bed flats and maisonette	19/-d
2 bed houses	16/6d to 18/-d
3 bed houses	19/6d to 20/6d
4 bed houses	21/6d to 22/-d

In June 1957 rents were raised an average of 5/-d a week for pre-war houses and 1/8d for post-war houses with lodger charges up to 4/-d. A year later it was resolved to continue post-war rents at the 1954 level.

From the election of a Conservative Government in 1951 the Labour council was under considerable pressure from the Government both to institute a rent rebate scheme and also to sell Council houses. In October 1952 the Housing Committee considered the effect of the 1952 Housing Act in "facilitating" the sale of Council houses, but came to the conclusion that the "present was not opportune". Again in 1960 the Housing Committee considered a Ministry of Housing and Local Government circular giving "guidance" on the sale and leasing of Council houses. The existing policy of not selling Council houses, was, however, affirmed. It was not until the Conservatives gained control of the Council in 1967 that Council houses were sold in Wolverhampton. The other way held out by the Government for the Council to help solve its increasing housing finance problems was to institute a rent rebate scheme. This the Labour Party resolutely set its face against, characterising such schemes as an attempt to make better off Council house tenants, subsidise other tenants instead of the whole community subsidising those who could not afford "economic rents". The Council did subsidise the rents of old age pensioners, however. In 1962, under extreme pressure as their majority shrunk, the Labour Council ended all rate contributions to housing, then at 3d to the £. Rent concessions to old-age pensioners at that time amounted to nearly £16,000 or a 1½d rate. A differential rent scheme was adopted for the aged, disabled and the needy.

The other source of exasperation to tenants was a progressive deterioration of Council estates, particularly pre-war estates, as financial difficulties made proper repairing and maintenance impossible. In March 1946, the repairs allowance per house was raised from £5.0d. to £5.10.0d. per annum. Expenditure rose sharply until in 1951 it was £12.14.3d. per house against the £9 contribution to the repairs fund. By November 1959 the repairs contribution had to be raised from £12 to £15. The scale of repairs possible at these rates can be followed through the Housing Manager's report:

	Houses Painted Externally	Houses Painted Internally
1949	1595	1061
1951	2013	1104
1955	2068	2718
1959	3638	2274
1963	2300	1900

In the best year the Council was within its target of external painting of all houses every 7 years, but in 1963 less than 8% of houses were painted. Internal decoration is always a problem and gradually became de facto the responsibility of the tenant. Minor repairs, also, both in time taken and quality deteriorated considerably.

	Rents as at 31 March					
	Pre-War Council Houses (average)		Post-War Council Houses (average)		Average for all Council Houses	
	Net Rent	Gross Rent (Inc. rates)	Net	Gross	Net	Gross
1955	8s.5d.	13s.10d.	16s.0d.	23s.0d.	11s.7d.	17s.8d.
1958	13s.5d.	21s.7d.	18s.2d.	27s.3d.	15s.8d.	24s.3d.
1962	17s.7d.	26s.10d.	23s.1d.	33s.5d.	20s.5d.	30s.3d.
1964	20s.8d.	30s.0d.	25s.10d.	36s.9d.	23s.5d.	33s.11d.
1966	21s.8d.	33s.5d.	32s.2d.	44s.10d.	27s.5d.	39s.8d.

Average net rents rose by 137% between 1956 and 1966. Pre-war tenants bore the brunt of these increases, their rents rising by 157%. The financial hardship and political strain produced by such unprecedented (at the time) rent increases over so short a period can be gauged by the fact that weekly wage rates from January 1956 to June 1966 rose only by 53.7%. The extent to which the "economic rent" of houses had been pushed on to the tenants can be judged from the following:

	Contribution to Housing Charges		
	Rent	Exchequer Contribution	Rates Contribution
1945	57%	32%	11%
1955	59%	26%	9%
1960	65%	23%	8%
1965	77%	20%	2%

In addition to meeting an increased percentage of housing costs, interest charges escalated disastrously as the average rate of interest on all Corporation borrowing rose from 3.5.7d. in 1955 to 5.9.9d in 1965 and new loans were being made at 8%. The interest burden on tenants rose as follows:

	Loan Charges	Rents paid by all Wolverhampton Council Tenants
1954 – 55	£509,287	£439,670
1959 – 60	£779,199	£748,285
1964 – 65	£1,141,455	£1,218,929

Thus by 1965 rents had been screwed up to cover interest charges and capital repayment. In 1954-55 interest repayment was £350,000 out of rents of £440,000 and out of every £1 of net rent paid 80p went in interest charges. This percentage increased even more in the next 10 years.

Private Housing 1945-66

After 1945 the most important trend in the private housing sector was the decline of the number of houses rented from private landlords. Another trend was the price inflation of the war years of at least 300% as *Express & Star* advertisements confirm:

January 1945	-	Pinfold Lane 3 bedroomed house	£1700
	-	Linton Road, 3 bedrooms and attic	£2000
August 1945	-	Windsor Avenue 3 bedrooms and garage	£1500
	-	Finchfield	£1850

Before the Japanese surrender in August 1945 the house market was slow. Sometimes there were more advertisements for building societies than for houses in the *Express & Star*. In January, the Leeds Permanent Building Society was offering 90% loans and the Wolverhampton & District Building Society was assuring war workers that those needing homes could secure loans. In February the Halifax Building Society was asking tenants to consult their landlords if they wanted to buy their houses and the Society would offer loans on special terms. Even the second mortgage men were operating at this time.

The figures for private house building in Wolverhampton for the first years after the war were:

1945	1946	1947	1948
15	137	189	196

New semi-detached 3 bedroomed houses were selling for about £1,750. From 1948 there was a prolonged slump in private house building and it was not until 1954 that the total reached 100 again.

1949	1950	1951	1952	1953
78	69	33	74	89

From the 1951 Census it is possible to assess to what extent the Wolverhampton people still lacked elementary sanitary services:

Households in Wolverhampton having exclusive use of piped water, Cooking stove, kitchen sink, w.c. and fixed bath	59%
Households either without, or sharing, piped water	18%
“ “ “ “ “ w.c.	13%
“ “ “ “ “ fixed bath	39%

In the 5,584 households (12% of all households) sharing the figures were:

Without exclusive use of piped water	80%
“ “ “ “ w.c.	78%
“ “ “ “ fixed bath	87%

The 1954 private house building figure proved to be exceptional and it was not until 1959 that the total reached 200 houses:

1954	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959
185	129	133	119	160	224

Housing mobility continued low as measured by advertisements in the Express & Star, there being only one and a half columns of such advertisements on some evenings. It was not until 1959 that large, display advertisements began to appear for new private housing estates. One of the first was by Joseph Webb for 3 bedroomed houses at Gospel End Road for £2,384. By 1964 the housing inflation was well under way and the same type of house was being offered for resale at £3,400. From 1960 private house building moved as follows:

1960	1961	1962	1963	1964	1965
206	237	316	398	330	345

These figures are for houses built within the Borough where land was short and the trend continued strongly of Wolverhampton people moving out of the Borough when buying houses. However, figures for private house building within the Borough correlate fairly well with national building trends.

The 1961 Census was the first to differentiate housing by tenure. The total reflected the fall in population despite a heavy influx of immigrants and 47,192 households in 1951 was compared with 46,108 “household spaces” in 1961:

Owner-occupied	18,290
Held by virtue of employment	987
Rented together with farm or business premises	331
Rented for local authority	15,746
Rented unfurnished	9,432
Rented furnished	1,331
	46,108

The low number of Council houses is accounted for by the large numbers built outside the Borough and by overspill authorities. With regard to overcrowding, there were 1,388 such households representing 0.3% of all households but 0.8% of the population. Thus considerable progress had been made in solving this problem.

Finally, the 1966 sample Census surveyed amenities:

Wolverhampton households with no hot water	9.5%
“ “ “ “ “ fixed bath	10.5%
“ “ “ “ “ outside lavatory only	19.4%

Compared with 1951 a considerably large number of households possess the civilised amenities. But still nearly 20% of households, which must cater for nearly a quarter of our population, use an outside toilet.

Conclusions: Housing 1750 – 1966

For vast numbers of working people in Wolverhampton over several generations the new society of the Industrial Revolution was an unmitigated disaster. Permanent insecurity, low wages, long hours of work, child labour, and daily murder or mutilation in the mines, such was the common lot. Above all, however, it was the mass unemployment and the utter destitution which accompanied it over long spans of a normal working life which perpetuated the grinding poverty of this long period. The unprecedented growth of population led to vast problems of public health. For a scattered population to manage with earth privies represented little danger to public health; but for vast masses of people huddled in courts and alleys to use communal middens and privies was to court disaster. In addition, the pollution of waterways and water supplies, the mountains of pit waste, the smoke and soot from thousands of chimneys of factories, pit engines and iron works which quite literally turned day into night meant that Wolverhampton and other Black Country towns came close to destroying themselves. A key factor mitigating against this was the provision from about 1860 onwards of a relatively pure supply of water to a large section of the community.

With regard to the eventual improvement of housing, a most important factor was the promulgation and enforcement of housing bye-laws, again from the 1860s. The great scandal of Wolverhampton housing was the indiscriminate building of courts and alleys, facing each other, squeezed into any spare space, built so that neither light nor air could penetrate their noisome depths. These courts were tucked away from sight in such a way that in the 1930s the Medical Officer of Health could opine that many people had no idea of the maze of courts and streets lying behind the main thoroughfares of the Borough. When building bye-laws were passed is not known, but they were incorporated into the Wolverhampton Improvement Act of 1869. The two vital points were (a) that houses should be built at a minimum distance facing each other of eight yards and (b) that ground floor rooms should be at least 8½ feet in height and other rooms 8 feet. In addition it was ordered that plans of new buildings had to be deposited with and approved by the local authority, standards of ventilation and drainage were laid down, the use of thatch was finally forbidden and penalties were laid down for the infringement of these bye-laws. Testimony to these bye-laws are the terraced houses of the 1880s and 1890s which are the oldest groups of dwellings in Wolverhampton today. Despite their lack of modern amenities, these houses are more spacious than many modern houses. Clauses

such as those relating to ceiling heights have now been incorporated into national legislation and these are greatly inferior to the old Wolverhampton bye-laws.

Such measures, however, affected only the housing of the higher-paid artisan and real housing improvement began only at the end of the 1st World War. The filthy, stinking slums characteristic of Wolverhampton and other large towns were a product of low incomes. A slum rent was an “economic rent”;; if it could have been raised it would. Existing levels of rent did not provide slum landlords with a “normal” profit unless they neglected the repair of the fabric. This they did, with the result that roofs leaked, sanitation became fouled, broken windows were stuffed with rag to preserve heat and the characteristic, foetid slum appeared. The years of the 1st World War were a period of full employment during which tenants could afford to stay the neglect of many decades. With the return of slump conditions in 1922 the slum was the abode of the old, the low-paid, the unemployed and the sick. This lasted until the mid-1930s when employment improved somewhat and slum clearance gave some slum dwellers the opportunity to live in Council houses.

Full employment since 1939 has abolished the slum, either by clearance or the purchase of the potential slum from the private landlord. It is in these old terraced houses that most of our black immigrant population lives. It is ironic that while the racist accuses the immigrant of creating slums, he has, in fact done exactly the reverse and prevented these houses from becoming slums.

The new slums tend to be the Council houses built between the wars. With outside lavatories, no personal washing facilities except the kitchen sink, faulty roofs, porous brickwork, poor maintenance and a general air of neglect of house and environment, the pre-war estates are becoming increasingly less attractive. This, despite the prime advantage of having been spaciouly laid out, often with wide roads and avenues in times when the cost of land was not the limiting factor in housing finance. Other areas of deteriorating housing are those waiting to be demolished and the high rise development (now admitted to be a housing disaster) containing large numbers of unemployed, disadvantaged families and elderly people.

This comparative survey of housing in Wolverhampton has been taken to 1966 when the Borough was enlarged. At that time it might plausibly have been maintained that housing conditions were constantly improving and it was only a matter of time before the problem was completely solved. In the decade since 1966, however, steeply rising interest rates, inflation, high unemployment rates, government economies, difficulties in obtaining mortgages and steadily rising Council house lists have brought a salutary reminder that at certain periods housing conditions may deteriorate.

If one compares housing in Wolverhampton in 1700 with that of 1975 it is by no means certain that there has been a vast improvement if one takes account the total environment. Compared, however, with the conditions created by the Industrial Revolution from 1750 and up to 1914, progress has been very considerable. The housing problem has always consisted of two parts. The first is the physical provision of adequate houses. It is this problem in which progress has been greatest and it can only be a matter for rejoicing that the lower-paid, the disadvantaged and the elderly now live in civilised conditions under roofs that do not leak. The second problem is, however, more intractable. It is how to provide these dwellings at what is called “economic rents”. This problem is no nearer

solution today than it was two hundred years ago. The elements of an “economic rent” are:

1. The ever-spiralling cost of land brought about by increasing population with a static supply of land
2. The borrowing of money at high rates of interest increased today to rates unknown since the middle ages.
3. The purchase of building materials, much of which are produced under monopoly conditions.
4. The provision of a profit for the builder.

It has never been possible for the majority of working people to afford a rent which would cover all these charges. The result in the past was that workers lived in sub-standard housing. Today it leads to the charge that Council house tenants are being subsidised by the ratepayers. In fact the ratepayer subsidises not the Council house tenant by the moneylender and tenants pay exorbitant rents and rates to cover all these charges.

Against this concept of providing houses at “economic rents” is the idea of housing as a social service. No individual whether moneylender, landowner or builder, should profit from basic necessities such as housing. Not only is such conduct immoral, it is claimed, but it stands condemned at the bar of history as the great obstacle to the final solution of the housing problem.

SOURCES

I have tried to indicate sources in the text without burdening the reader with footnotes. The main sources are indicated below, together with the location of the material.

Much of the nineteenth century material is covered in my *Social Conditions in the Black Country in the Nineteenth Century* (Unpublished Ph.D thesis Birmingham University 1969). Available at Birmingham University Library or a copy can be borrowed from the author.

Wolverhampton Town Commissioners Minutes 1778-1848 Board of Health & Local Government Board material, Particularly Report on Sanitary Conditions 1874 Reports of Committees of Wolverhampton Town Council (a) Reports 1860-1880 including Gas, Watch, Public Works, Sewerage, Sanitation, Streets, Markets, Finance, General Purposes, Team and Artisans' Dwellings. (b) Minutes of Committees 1848 to date	Wolverhampton Town Hall Wolverhampton Central Reference Library. In Medical Officer of Health's office, Wolverhampton
Annual Reports Wolverhampton Medical Officer of Health 1853 to date.	Wolverhampton Town Hall, Central Reference Library, MoH Office Town Hall, Central Reference Library.
Annual Reports of Local Building Societies	Some in Central Reference Library. Some in offices of Local Societies. Many have to be picked up by reading the local press.
Epitome of the Accounts of Wolverhampton Borough Produced annually since the war and now called Vital Statistics Local Press – mainly Wolverhampton Chronicle and Express & Star	Borough Treasurer's Office, Central Reference Library. Central Reference Library, Express & Star offices.