

# Housing in Britain



# General characteristics

- housing in Britain – a class-related issue > reflects social position, education, lifestyle
- big division > between those who own their houses and those who don't
- the attitude of the British to housing reflects some of the core national attitudes > desire of privacy, love of nature, individualism
- most typical expression – their dislike of living in flats, preference for houses
- the advantages of a house > private property is clearly defined

# Living for the privileged I



- A stately home > traditional dwelling of the aristocracy
- Nowadays, many stately homes are turned into museums or theme parks, or at least partly made accessible to visitors by the owners > very popular with the public



# Living for the privileged II



- Country cottages (mostly thatched) > very expensive (going for about 1 mil. pounds) and much-demanded by the wealthy
- They are a symbol of „Merrie England“

*There'll always be an England  
While there's a country lane,  
Wherever there's a cottage small  
Beside a field of grain.*

(a patriotic poem)



# Living for the privileged III

- Luxury flats (often part of the phenomenon of *gentrification*)



- Townhouses and mews (former stables converted into dwellings – now prestigious)





# Detached house – middle-class dream



# Semi-detached house – middle-class reality





# Terraced house – originally working-class, but becoming fashionable



sch.uk



# For the “have-nots“ - council housing



# Council housing

- the idea by post-war governments > to clear the slums > areas of poor housing standards, bad sanitation, lack of hygienic facilities etc.
- modern buildings, often high-rise, modern equipment (kitchens, flushing toilet, etc.)
- However, an unexpected outcome > people didn't like living there, they felt cut off from communal life
- the anonymous, ugly concrete areas – encouraged vandalism, gang life, violence
- it gave rise to some of the subcultures of the postwar era (punks, chavs, etc.)

# However, not all council houses were the same!

First post-war housing projects  
> under Labour government of 1945-1951

Chief campaigner: minister **Nye Bevan**

His aim = decent housing for workers > quality over quantity, ample space

Preference for houses with gardens, not flats > the housing estates often resemble middle-class suburbs

Inspiration: pre-war „garden cities“





# Letchworth garden city and Bevanite council estates



# New wave of council house building

- Under Tory government led by **Harold Macmillan** (+ onwards)
- Chief factors
  - persisting housing shortage
  - lack of land
  - new trends in architecture

Result – high-rise flats instead of houses, their modernistic design clashes with aesthetic preferences of the British (their taste remains Victorian and homely, whilst the city planners are very technocratic and futuristic)

The public – not consulted about where they would like to live > planning elitism

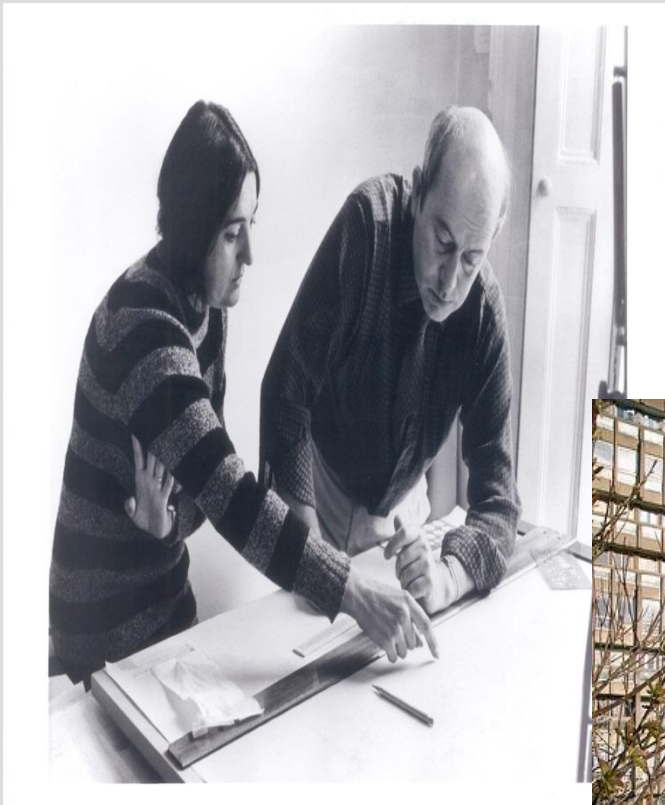


# Inspiration: Le Corbusier + Unité d'Habitation





# Peter and Alison Smithson & Brutalism



# Park Hill and Ronan Point





# Some crazy council estates and related buildings





# Living on a council estate

*“I stood at the window looking down on the scene below, noticing how people scuttled in and out of their blocks, hurrying to their front door [...] Everyone here walked fast and purposefully across no-man’s land. No-one sauntered through these unwelcoming public spaces, no-one looked much to right or left, avoiding eye-contact for fear of some unwelcome encounter. There were not even clumps of kids hanging about. The only place to be was the safe, familiar, private space of your own flat. That’s how it felt; safe up there looking out, but with a desert down below to cross to get to the streets and bus stops of the outside world. Estates are curious places, locking the people out of sight.”* (Polly

Toynbee: Hard Work 17 )



# House versus home

- the British are relatively unattached to their houses (the actual buildings) > to them, the abstract concept of “home “ is more important
- the idea of “home” - often stressed by the personalized interior
- the house itself – seen as an investment > the British follow very closely the housing market and the house prices to sell their house when the opportunity is favourable
- buying and selling houses – almost a national obsession > many TV programmes about it (*Location, location, location*)
- new trend – moving house abroad (France, Spain) > mass emigration from Britain



# Individuality versus conformity

- British houses – can be quite uniform (material – mostly brick, semi-detached, detached and terraced houses look Victorian, etc.) but there is a tendency of the British to “personalize them” > expression of individualism
- **interior** > the importance of cosiness at the expense of good taste > the houses are often cluttered with non-matching furniture and decorative objects
- names of rooms > reflect class divisions (drawing room/sitting room vs. lounge)
- an alternative way of living > “New Age Travellers” > converted buses, vans, barges
- Britain – has a high rate of **homelessness** > often caused not only by a problematic way of life but also by the fluctuating property market > easy for a house to be repossessed > loss of home

# Inside a typical English home





# Generation Rent

The economic crisis > forces non-affluent people into sub-standard housing  
No prospect of home ownership  
Precarity of renting – short-term rent contracts, frequent relocation  
Worry over rent payment – one of the biggest concerns (up to 60% of take-home pay; a single day of missed work means risk of falling into arrears)  
Some landlords – unwilling to rent to people on housing benefits (No DSS signs in windows)  
This discrimination against benefit claimants – throwback to the 1950s signs “No blacks, no dogs, no Irish”.  
The impermanence of rented housing - prevents the creation of meaningful community life (picture No DSS)

*For some tenants, renting is a constant source of joy. Just one, vast panorama of happiness. A gorgeous extemporanea full of glee. For others, mostly the impoverished renter, whose work is precarious or those crammed in and insecure where demand is impossible high, it's horrible.*

(Penny Anderson – Rentergirl)

