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# London's Aylesbury Estate

An Oral History of the 'Concrete Jungle'

Michael Romyn



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Brighton, UK

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ISBN 978-3-030-51476-1

ISBN 978-3-030-51477-8 (eBook)

<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-51477-8>

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The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

*For Katherine*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In late 2012 I began speaking to some of the former residents and last remaining residents of south London's Heygate Estate—a time when its demolition, in the name of 'regeneration', was already underway. My objectives were simple: to understand what it had been like to live on the Heygate, and to tell this story in the residents' own words. The resulting piece appeared in *History Workshop Journal* in 2016. A study of community life in a context of change, the piece, for me at least, raised as many questions as it answered—about the forces behind the decline of mass housing in inner-city London, and about the place of working-class residents within this often deracinating process.

This book—an examination of Heygate's sister estate, the Aylesbury—is an attempt to answer those questions; I hope, above all else, it does the experience of the Aylesbury's residents justice. Certainly, I owe an immense debt to a number of those residents and ex-residents, whose kindness and hospitality will always stay with me, and whose insights made the writing of this book possible. This sentiment extends to all the non-residents with whom I either spoke or corresponded.

The cast of people who have aided me does not end there: I am immeasurably grateful to Professor Jerry White, whose book, *Rothschild Buildings*, first set me on the path of oral history, and who guided me on the Heygate project, and then throughout this larger endeavour. His generosity, encouragement and advice have been truly invaluable.

The preparation of the manuscript was helped by the comments and criticisms of Dr Alana Harris and Professor Selina Todd, both of whom

have been incredibly supportive. For his kind words and suggestions I wish to thank Professor Matt Cook; my thanks also to Professor Joanna Bourke for her comments on early draft chapters, and to the readers at Palgrave Macmillan.

Thanks to Virginia Wynn-Jones at Southwark Council for her considerable assistance, and to Steven Potter, Lisa Soverall, Patricia Dark and all the team at Southwark Local History Library and Archive for their help and guidance. Many thanks also to Palgrave Macmillan, especially my editors Megan Laddusaw and Joseph Johnson.

This project began as a doctoral thesis, for which I was fortunate enough to receive funding. For this, I am grateful to Professor Nikolaus Wachsmann and the Birkbeck Research Committee, and to the Arts and Humanities Research Council.

A big thank you to my family for their support, and, finally, for all the proofreading, patience, and encouragement, my love and deepest thanks go to Katherine Cooper.

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## ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AAAP	Aylesbury Area Action Plan
APCF	Aylesbury Plus Community Forum
ATLF	Aylesbury Tenants and Leaseholders First
CABE	Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment
DCH	Defend Council Housing
ERCF	Estates Renewal Challenge Fund
GLC	Greater London Council
HALAG	Heygate and Aylesbury Leaseholders Action Group
ILEA	Inner London Education Authority
LBS	London Borough of Southwark
LCC	London County Council
LDDC	London Docklands Development Corporation
LSVT	Large-Scale Voluntary Transfer
NDC	New Deal for Communities
RSL	Registered Social Landlord
SCHC	Southwark Council Housing Committee
SCREC	Southwark Council Race Equality Committee
SCSC	Southwark Council Service Committees
<i>SELKM</i>	<i>South East London &amp; Kentish Mercury</i>
SEU	Social Exclusion Unit
<i>SLP</i>	<i>South London Press</i>
<i>SN</i>	<i>Southwark News</i>
<i>SS</i>	<i>Southwark Sparrow</i>
<i>ST</i>	<i>Southwark Tenant</i>
UDC	Urban Development Corporation
WACAT	Walworth and Aylesbury Community Arts Trust
WATT	Working Against Tenant Transfer
<i>WI</i>	<i>Walworth Inprint</i>

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## CHAPTER 1

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# Introduction

On the afternoon of 7 September 1976, at the topping-out ceremony of the Aylesbury Estate—the largest of London’s system-built estates—Southwark’s then housing chief, Alderman Charles Sawyer, declared an end to developments of its kind in the borough. ‘We have learnt from our mistakes,’ he said.<sup>1</sup> The event saw glasses raised and smiles for the camera (see Fig. 1.1), but there was no disguising the cynical tenor. Covering the proceedings for the *South East London Mercury*, reporter Roy Cooper called the Aylesbury the ‘greatest housing disaster in the country’; he went on to describe the estate as a ‘nightmare,’ an ‘atrocious,’ and a ‘monstrous hell.’<sup>2</sup> This was nothing new. Nearly a decade in the making, the Aylesbury had been in the crosshairs almost from the start. ‘Massive and dehumanizing,’ stated *The Times* in 1970; ‘It’s almost as if creatures from another world had come down and built their own environment,’ added architectural theorist, Oscar Newman, four years later.<sup>3</sup> Even amid the soft-pedalled festivities of the opening ceremony in October 1970, the naysayers found voice. Conservative councillor for Dulwich, Ian Andrews, reportedly ‘walked out ... in disgust.’ The ‘showpiece estate’ was, he said, a ‘concrete jungle not fit for people to live in.’<sup>4</sup> A reputation is usually earned; in the Aylesbury’s case it was born.

Alderman Sawyer stayed true to his word. Following the completion of the Aylesbury, and other concurrent, large-scale developments in Peckham and Elephant and Castle, the borough drew a line under the prefabricated construction of council housing. Southwark was not alone in this. By the



**Fig. 1.1** Councillors, planners and building professionals at the topping-out ceremony of the Aylesbury Estate, 1976. Alderman Charles Sawyer stands third from the left. *South East London and Kentish Mercury*, 9 September 1976. (Courtesy of the *South London Press*.)

mid-1960s, the trend to build high and fast was falling from favour; by the early 1970s the ‘systems building boom’ was theoretically dead.<sup>5</sup> Marred by the partial collapse of Ronan Point, a 22-storey system-built block in east London, in 1968, and by accusations of environmental determinism, the belief that mass, flatted housing was inherently flawed became normative. Once viewed optimistically as a modern, expedient and transformative solution to the post-war housing problem, large municipal estates had come to symbolise the mistakes of the budding welfare state. As design flaws emerged, and as maintenance programmes were hobbled by a lack of financial planning, and by central government parsimoniousness, the critics’ catcalls only grew more raucous.<sup>6</sup>

The Aylesbury and estates like it would be labelled forevermore with crude slogans and hoary adjectives: inhuman, monolithic, totalitarian, labyrinthine. These were the new slums, the ‘Slums of the Seventies,’ the ‘concrete jungles,’ the ‘High Rise Horrors.’<sup>7</sup> It was a language that organised a distorting impression, generated hellish meaning, and, for those looking in from the outside, rendered the council block mythic. Conspicuously missing from these narratives were the voices and opinions

of residents themselves. Like the faceless figures of the architects' maquette, council tenants were drawn one and the same; an undifferentiated mass—mute, hapless, or stamped with cheap social stereotypes, such as Thomas L. Blair's 'welfstate' man.<sup>8</sup> As Patrick Wright pointed out, the bevy of architectural pundits and post-war conservationists appeared 'remarkably unconcerned about the people for whom mass housing was designed.'<sup>9</sup> Much of this writing was bound up in a kind of sophistic nostalgia for the shoddy tenements and crumbling terraces that the residents' new homes replaced. Simon Jenkins, for one, lamented the loss of 'acre upon acre' of clearance housing, and, singling out Aylesbury's 'towering cliffs and harsh concrete passages,' looked forward to a time when the towers and slab blocks were consigned to the rubble heap of history: 'One day we will have the courage and the resources to pull them down and start again.'<sup>10</sup> And this in 1975, when Aylesbury's builders were still raising them up.

Jenkins would eventually see his wish. Serving as visual grist for the ideological abandonment of municipal housing in Britain after 1979, large-scale, down-at-heel estates were increasingly razed, many under private sector-led renewal schemes, and especially in millennial London.<sup>11</sup> Paralleled by a growing portrayal and perception of council housing as an unwholesome tenure of last resort, the act and spectacle of demolition often contained a 'festive' dimension, in the words of Ruth Glass.<sup>12</sup> It was as though the piece-by-piece dismantling of the welfare state was cause for celebration, both publicly and politically. Under the guise of regeneration, the Aylesbury is itself creeping along a timeline of its own demise. By 2020, several of its blocks had been torn down; the final phase of demolition is scheduled to begin in 2023.

This book attempts to make sense of the Aylesbury's fleeting trajectory, which, at first glance, appears wholly dismal. From the contested exigency of its existence, to its inauspicious beginnings, to the marginalisation and steady spiral towards dereliction that outwardly characterised its lifespan, the estate has been pointed up as an example of failed planning, and as an emblem of urban decay. It is the sort of narrative that elides the complexities and diversities of life in a local place, and thrusts working-class districts into conceptual exile. Tony Parker's brilliant *The People of Providence*—a collection of oral history interviews with the residents of south London's Brandon Estate, compiled in the 1980s—demonstrated the fatuousness of general depictions and definitions by showing the reader just how varied, complex and, ultimately, human, estate-life can be.<sup>13</sup> It reinforced the importance of viewing estates like the Aylesbury as sites of diversity, where

people lead different lives, have different stories to tell, experience different degrees of success, happiness and hardship, and have different ways of coping. Council estates are just homes after all. For most residents, they are not media props or architectural crimes or political rationales, but places of family, tradition, ritual and refuge, possessing a social value that—now more than ever—dwarfs the price of the land they are sited on. While necessary to understand the many ways in which the Aylesbury has been presented and perceived by external actors (for these are its histories, too—histories that interacted with one another, and had influence over the estate’s direction), ultimately it is up to those who really knew the estate to have the final say.

Community life on the Aylesbury is the main arena of this study. Whether forged through a commonality of interests, or rooted in shared hardships and interdependences, community on the estate has taken on various forms and iterations since the first flats were occupied in 1969. Even when the population could be broadly characterised by homogeneity and accord, the estate’s size, sprawl and structure fitted it out with a fragmentary dimension; an inbuilt tendency toward separation and difference. Conversely, at its lowest ebb, when the deprivation indicators flashed red, and when certain cultural trenches had been dug, the substance of community life was still present. In order to make sense of this often knotty communal morphology, the estate must be viewed within a context of change. As Jerry White noted, understanding change over time ‘helps illuminate the dynamics—and thus the very nature—of communities.’<sup>14</sup> Behind each shift, each realignment, each twist of Aylesbury’s social kaleidoscope, there were forces at work, internal pressures and paroxysms, as well as outside decisions and transformative trends. This book seeks to identify these forces, delineate them, and chart their impact upon the estate and its residents. Within the community, change could be sited numerously. In participation, for instance, or in the face of social disorder. Or in more inaudible processes, such as the gradual leaking away of original tenants. In certain cases, these sites of change—whether rooted in cooperation or conflict—were symbiotic, with each informing, driving or expediting the other. The same can also be said of those direct and metamorphic forces that buffeted the estate from the outside, such as management practices, housing policies, and successive waves of regeneration. Indeed, the not insignificant fallout of externally made decisions and representations was received with more than just sufferance. As we shall see, inequity could provide a cynosure for tenant discourse; a polestar that

engendered communicative processes, social participation and, at the very least, varying degrees of commonality founded on a single shared cause.

Behind this tightly focussed portrait of change and its immediate drivers lies broader and multifarious contexts in which the estate must be situated. The shifting sands of Southwark's—and indeed London's—political, economic, and demographic landscape from the 1960s onwards produced a ripple-effect, a series of long-term and far-reaching consequences that fed down to its tenants and housing estates. To take one example, the steady erosion of Southwark's traditional manufacturing and riverside industries after 1965 saw a steep decline in jobs and, subsequently, a haemorrhaging of skilled and semi-skilled (and predominantly white) manual workers from the borough. Exacerbated by the Thatcher government's championing of home ownership—which served to grease the wheels of this inner-city exodus—Southwark's estates were increasingly peopled by the poorest and most vulnerable sections of the working class. This, on the Aylesbury at least, poked enough holes in its social fabric to render a once familiar world strange. The rituals and traditions of local life that were deeply connected to the industrial workplace disappeared alongside it, leaving a void that, with successive waves of immigration, was progressively filled with a new and at times disorientating cultural collage.<sup>15</sup>

In limiting the scale of observation to a single estate, we can explore a specific unity of place and action over time, while eschewing the generalities and reductions common to many broader housing histories. And yet the trajectory of the Aylesbury will, of course, share parallels with other large inner-city estates, and thus should be viewed—like all good micro-histories—as a single unit reflecting a greater whole, or as a microcosm through which we can trace larger trends and developments in the provision of state housing.<sup>16</sup> Exploring the ground-level impact of Right to Buy and Southwark's lettings strategy, for example, helps us sketch out the association between housing policies and patterns of social residualisation. Similarly, by investigating the lead-up to the estate's demise, we can better parse the political abandonment of public provision after 1979, and the zeal with which the privatisation of council housing has been adopted. The fatal fire at Grenfell Tower in North Kensington in June 2017 did much to expose the disdain with which council housing and its tenants have been treated. Citing the violent effects of disinvestment, cost-cutting, stigmatisation, 'regeneration,' and urban inequality more broadly, the community and anti-gentrification collective Southwark Notes Archive

Group (SNAG), which has long campaigned side-by-side with tenants and residents of the Aylesbury, called Grenfell the ‘final potent symbol of all that has been brought down on our heads in the last 30+ years.’<sup>17</sup> Like Grenfell, the Aylesbury was beset by numerous challenges, failures, and injustices that were bound up with, and reflective of, the fate of many municipal housing estates from the mid-twentieth century onwards. This book charts when and why these difficulties arose and, consequently, serves as a corrective to the lazy broadsides and sideswipes aimed at public housing generally, and to cataclysmic portrayals of large-scale urban estates in particular.

While the Aylesbury’s constructional principles were firmly grounded in cost and efficiency—a technocratic vision that left little room for styling—its size and sprawl suggested a degree of architectural hubris. Arresting, often imposing, and unabashedly urban, the estate, then, lifted easily into monolithic axioms of the ‘dangerous’ inner city, and quickly became a staple of sensationalist media narratives, and a warning cum rationale for various political projects. Like its younger—but shorter-lived—sister estate, the Heygate, it was also used as a recurring backdrop in film and television, invariably depicting fictions of violence, drugs and depravity.<sup>18</sup> Ultimately, the crafting of external representations loosed a double impact on the estate: first, it robbed it of its historicity. By casting a veil on historical processes, and by refashioning complex social conditions into quasi-eternal natural laws, the propagation of simplistic and hyperbolic depictions belied the realities of life specific to the Aylesbury. Latterly they possessed no memory of how the estate was made or how it changed over time—they did away with ‘any going back beyond what is immediately visible,’ in the words of Roland Barthes.<sup>19</sup> Second, it gave rise to myths and clichés of urban deprivation, which consistently painted the estate as a fearful place, sinister and slab-sided, a relentless incubator of poverty and crime. The Aylesbury was no outlier in this regard. Over time, a narrative of hopelessness, violence and blight seeped into the political and popular discourse surrounding council housing until it hardened into orthodoxy. As Suzanne Hall argued, public housing and its tenants have been reduced to stereotypes and caricatures, and have become barnaced with an ‘estate stigma’ that has proved difficult to alter. When, in 1997, Tony Blair used the Aylesbury as a backdrop (and visual aid) to announce Labour’s pledge to relinquish the nation’s ‘forgotten’ people from a stranglehold of poverty, not only did it reinforce the social differentiation that confined and relegated the estate’s inhabitants, it also, through

broadcasting the ‘broken’ Aylesbury narrative to a wider audience, served to perpetuate its native reputation.<sup>20</sup>

## COMMUNITY AND ITS USES

Critics of post-war urban renewal often framed comprehensive redevelopment as an irreparable rupture in the fabric of ‘traditional’ working-class communities. Slum clearance, they argued, was an act of cultural vandalism, disrupting time-honoured patterns of social life, and extinguishing any sense of community spirit.<sup>21</sup> Perhaps most famously, Michael Young and Peter Willmott’s classic sociological study, *Family and Kinship in East London* (1957), argued that mass relocations shrank the social reach of the old neighbourhood network to the bounds of the family unit. They wrote of the prevalence of loneliness and malaise on the new estates, particularly among women, who, in many cases, relied upon husbands and, far too often, the television, to spell their isolation.<sup>22</sup> As both Lise Butler and Jon Lawrence have shown, however, the field of post-war ‘community studies’ often presented an idealised portrait of ‘traditional’ communal relations; a political project first and foremost, Young and Willmott’s mythologised account of old, working-class districts ‘provided a devastating critique of urban planners’ indifference to the lived environments that their policies promised to obliterate.’<sup>23</sup> For those opposed to the ‘brutal’ imposition of mass housing, such theorising over the existence or non-existence of ‘community’ in working-class districts—theorising that would never happen in relation to middle-class lives—would remain a preoccupation.<sup>24</sup>

With sights set squarely and uncompromisingly on the high-rises, slab-blocks and elevated walkways of the Modernist estate, Oscar Newman’s *Defensible Space*, a study of high-rise public housing in New York in the 1970s, argued that a trinity of design factors—‘anonymity,’ ‘lack of surveillance’ and prevalence of ‘alternative escape routes’—seen as common in much mass housing, conjured criminality and delinquency among residents, and positively attracted intruders, addicts and other unwanted outsiders.<sup>25</sup> In 1974, Newman lent his assured voice and knowing mien to a BBC documentary on large-scale Modernist housing, in which the Aylesbury featured heavily. The overall impression he conveys of the estate is one of menace and imminent danger. Set against a backdrop of children at play on an unidentified English estate, Newman’s closing remarks, spoken as a lament, imply in no uncertain terms that architecture has the capacity to undermine the processes of socialisation:

It's very difficult to believe that children who grow up here will grow up feeling any sense of responsibility, any sense of a role in society, any sense of a contribution they can make ... one wonders, will these children grow up to become the criminals that we seem to have so much of in America, in such abundance.<sup>26</sup>

With the publication of her 1985 survey, *Utopia on Trial*, Alice Coleman emerged as the UK's standard-bearer for Newman's provocative cause. While her central focus was on 'forms of social malaise'—vandalism, graffiti, litter, excrement—rather than crime, Coleman maintained that there was a strong correlation between mass housing estates ('human disasters,' in her language), criminal activity, and the diminishment—or strangulation—of community spirit.<sup>27</sup> Thanks to the lubricant of inner-city regeneration—which was swiftly gathering momentum at the time—Coleman's thesis soon found a political home: in 1986, Margaret Thatcher made her an advisor to the Department of the Environment, and in 1991, a five-year, £50 m project, DICE (Design Improvement Controlled Experiment), was implemented to test the ideas she put forth.<sup>28</sup> Even now, more than 30 years after its release, *Utopia on Trial's* influence abides; a 2013 report by the Conservative Party think tank, *Policy Exchange*, which proposed the wide-scale razing of high rise social housing in London, leaned heavily on Coleman's findings. Its authors, in a masterly flaying of today's multistorey estates, imported her graying statistics as if they were shiny and new.<sup>29</sup>

Like the Conservative government before it, New Labour's approach to urban regeneration bore the spectre of the 'failed' estate and the shibboleth of 'strong communities.' Neo-utopias of 'mixed' and 'sustainable' communities, developed through schemes of tenant 'inclusion' and 'participation,' such as the 1998-launched 'New Deal for Communities,' would—by attracting better-off residents (i.e. the middle-classes) to improving neighbourhoods—supposedly raise the economic base of an area and interrupt patterns of 'social exclusion': looking specifically at NDC partnerships in London, Bennington et al. stated that local authorities and NDC officers saw the creation of a greater social mix as an explicit objective of the programme.<sup>30</sup> Such efforts at 'socially mixed' regeneration (usually encompassing at least an element of rebuild) were invariably carried along by a moral rationale and economic logic for the diversification of tenure. But as Watt and others have noted, the creation of 'mixed' communities has often precipitated the displacement of working-class tenants, particularly on estates coveted for their exorbitant land values.<sup>31</sup>

Whether framed by the myopic determinism of Newman or Coleman—which emphasised form at the expense of far more telling variables, such as deindustrialisation and unemployment—or by the moralistic rationale of New Labour—which problematised council tenants as feckless and lacking in aspiration—representations of mass housing estates have routinely neglected the perspectives of working-class residents. Reflecting this marginal treatment experienced at the hands of ‘experts’ and higher-ups, it is rare that the voices of council residents resound from the housing literature. This, as Alison Ravetz pointed out, is especially true of working-class mothers and grandmothers, whose catalytic role on estates was ‘too frequent to be overlooked.’<sup>32</sup> At least part of this vacuum has been filled in recent years by the strain of research centred on what is broadly termed the ‘tenants’ movement,’ that is, the collective action of tenants in the state housing sector.<sup>33</sup> Even so, tenant mobilisation is a tight focus, concerned with specific issues and a specific group of actors, and, like many studies of housing policy, can only tell us so much—a point underscored by Ravetz in her 2001 study, *Council Housing and Culture*, in which she appealed for a broad and historically nuanced treatment of council housing. Ravetz’ own analysis marries an account of domestic culture and working-class life at the tenant level with that of policy and decision-making at the municipal level, and examines the many tensions and contradictions contained therein. Detailing the myriad political, economic, and social circumstances of state housing’s rise and slide, Ravetz, like John Boughton’s excellent *Municipal Dreams* (2018) more latterly, provides a multifaceted history and reference point for further housing research.<sup>34</sup> The application of a roaming lens to such expansive subject matter will, however, lead to inevitable blurs and distortions, and a shortfall in fine-grain detail. Ravetz’ single sentence summary of the Aylesbury—an ‘instant failure’<sup>35</sup>—for example, is at odds with her prescribed approach of ‘seeing the past through ever shifting perspectives.’<sup>36</sup>

It is here, then, that the study of a single estate or community is of use. Works by Lynn Abrams and Linda Fleming, Ben Jones, Mark Clapson, Seán Damer, and Ben Rogaly and Becky Taylor, among others, have utilised oral history to describe working-class communities shaped by changes beyond their control, but which, upon closer inspection, were a far cry from the desperate reputations ascribed to them.<sup>37</sup> Alongside Lisa McKenzie’s *Getting By*, an ethnography of community life in St Ann’s, a post-war estate in Nottingham, these studies provide useful points of comparison when considering the way in which housing policies and changes

in employment were experienced by residents of council estates of different ages, forms, and locations, whether in London or the provinces.<sup>38</sup> They also emphasise the importance of understanding ‘community’ as variously diverse, changeable, resilient, fluid, and adaptive to the structural and material forces that shape both places themselves and people’s understanding of them. It is in this sense that residents of the Aylesbury found ways to articulate collective experiences, give voice to personal identities, overcome an absence of recognition, and raise political consciousness within the context of an increasingly insecure and socially fragmented world, and regardless of the ‘broken,’ ‘corrupting’ or ‘failing’ labels reflexively assigned to large-scale estates from the 1960s onwards.

### METHOD, VOICE AND MEMORY

This book is steeped in the voices of those who either lived or worked on the Aylesbury, or who had a hand in its trajectory. It is based on the interviews and correspondence of residents and former residents, but also youth and community workers, borough councillors, officials, police officers, and architects. Most respondents knew the Aylesbury intimately and, for the largest part, had a stake in the community at some point in its history. The resident respondents encompass a somewhat characteristic sample of the Aylesbury’s historic population: factors of age, gender and ethnicity were all considered when searching for respondents, as was striking a proportional balance between well-established members of the community and those who were more marginal. Participants were sourced in various ways, including an advert in a magazine, through a contact at a local newspaper, through Creation Trust,<sup>39</sup> a trawl of Facebook groups, word of mouth and some door-knocking.<sup>40</sup> Newspapers, local history archives, housing committee records, police statistics, census data, and literature produced by community groups were all explored alongside the oral testimony, so as to substantiate it, build social context, and to investigate the processes that shaped changes on the estate. Community generated websites such as SNAG, the Elephant Amenity Network, and [35percent.org](http://35percent.org), were a similarly valuable trove of information. When evaluated together, the oral and documentary sources presented fresh lines of questioning to ask of the other—a synergy that proved especially useful when comparing media treatments with residents’ perceptions of the estate.

By giving predominantly working-class residents free rein to tell their own story, in their own words—an ideal at the heart of the politics and

practice of oral history—we are able to inject traditionally myopic accounts of council estate life with a more democratic view, and thus facilitate a more realistic and fair reconstruction of the past.<sup>41</sup> While a critical reading of both the spoken testimony and autobiographical material was necessary to stay vigilant of potential narrative pitfalls (such as exaggeration or overly twinkling remembrances), this is not to imply that the subjectivities inherent to the testimony in this book are misleading—this would be disingenuous to the respondents whose memories are very real, and whose memories, for the largest part, provide a reliable account of the estate over the period in question. (Here, we do well to remember Anna Green’s call for oral historians to ‘re-assert the value of individual remembering, and the capacity of the conscious self to contest and critique cultural scripts or discourses.’)<sup>42</sup> But looking beyond face value, the interviews also suggest how tenants came to interpret the past, and how the past was often utilised to make sense of the world around them. The invoking of nostalgic narratives, for example, might ‘be seen as a critique of contemporary stigmatising representations of working-class people, cultures and communities as deficient,’ in the words of Ben Jones.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, the interviews reveal some of the human consequences of certain structural and economic shifts (processes that passed through the estate like a current: quiet, often unobserved, but ultimately transformative)—as well as more overt cultural changes—by helping join up individual experience with the broader social context. Demonstrating how policy decisions, collective forces and economic pressures interacted at an individual level—a decision to leave the estate, perhaps, or to exercise one’s right to buy—may help illuminate the way in which people understood their situation and bestowed meaning upon their actions.<sup>44</sup>

### SPACE, PLACE AND THE URBAN LANDSCAPE

Examinations of space and spatiality can highlight the impact of culture, capital, and power structures on the built environment.<sup>45</sup> An analysis of space—as the medium in which we live—can also help us understand more about social injustice, and the ways in which urban exclusion and inclusion are materially expressed. In his 1974 work, *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre, like Edward Soja after him, established a tripartite conception of space in order to advance the notion that space is socially produced (and to disabuse the idea that space is absolute): first, material spatial practices—the everyday routines and physical interactions that occur in and

across space within a particular society. Second, representations of space—which include the symbols, codifications and signs that allow material spatial practices to be acknowledged and understood. And third, spaces of representation—the counter spaces and symbolic structures that imagine new possibilities for spatial practices, or that challenge or subvert dominant spatial practices.<sup>46</sup>

This threefold definition of space is useful when thinking about the ways in which urban environments are constructed, experienced and represented, and how, in some cases, these spaces have come to be used as symbols. The Aylesbury, for example—a place of material spatial practices, social rhythms and collective patterns of movement—was overwhelmingly depicted in media and official discourses as a space of danger, wickedness, and social relegation. As this went on, however, residents organised and took part in various community projects and campaigns, and, at the same time still, the estate became a cynosure for problematic regeneration projects. David Harvey made clear that the spatial dimensions of experience, perception and imagination are, in quite complex ways, related internally and dialectically.<sup>47</sup> On the Aylesbury, this interplay between spatial representation (perception) and resistance (imagination) was evident in a televisual representation of the estate, and the response it elicited among tenants: until 2016, a short logo film—or ‘ident’—regularly shown on Channel 4 as an upcoming broadcast was introduced, depicted a scenographically begrimed stretch of walkway on the Aylesbury.<sup>48</sup> This one-shot slalom through some of the clichéd toxicities of estate life, including heaped bin bags, discarded shopping trolleys, strewn litter, graffiti bedizen walls, and lines of tatty washing strung between blocks and balconies—all embellishments added in post-production—unsurprisingly proved unpopular with residents, aware as they were, as one tenant explained, of the impression it created:

Have you seen that advert on Channel 4? It does make it look bad, it does make it look bad, and I think that was a terrible advert, a really bad advert, and it didn’t do us any favours at all.<sup>49</sup>

Following an unsuccessful community campaign for Channel 4 to discontinue the film, a group of estate residents, along with the Creation Trust and filmmaker, Nick Street, produced an alternative, ‘home-made’ version of the ident.<sup>50</sup> Embellished all the same with an improbably high number of residents happily rubbing shoulders on the walkway, it was,

nevertheless, a more representative depiction of the space. With sustained pressure, Channel 4 agreed to showcase the resident-produced film—albeit once. The original ident aired for more than ten years.

Here, then, we see a space at once produced and reproduced, represented and opposed. We see an everyday space, normally occupied by individuals and homes, now dominated by those in a position of power, embedded with drama and ideology and overheated tropes, and, lastly, proliferated widely through mass communication. And then we see a new imagining, a space appropriated (or re-appropriated) with an alternative imagery, a symbolic construction designed to resist and oppose. Played out on film, this is a neat example of how a space is constituted and contested, and how it is given meaning through human endeavour.

While interesting to view space in this way, and particularly in a context of urban regeneration, ‘spatial trialectics’ (Lefebvre’s words) reveal little about the lived experience, as historian Katrina Navickas argued. ‘There’s still something of the simulacra about the spatial turn,’ she wrote. ‘Spatial practices and representational spaces feel a little too 2-D.’<sup>51</sup> This is where the concept of ‘place’ fits in. A particular form of space, place emerges through acts of naming; by providing a geographical locus for belonging and identity. Whereas space helps explain the links and frictions between physical and symbolic environments and historical actors, place puts meat on these analytical bones, adding history and meaning, feelings and experiences. The 1970s saw humanistic geographers such as Edward Relph and Yi-Fu Tuan begin to examine the experiential properties of place in this way.<sup>52</sup> Rejecting regional and quantitative definitions of place (a gathering of people in a single bounded locale), they felt place should be defined according to emotional dimensions: places mean different things for different people, and are associated with specific fears, attachments and desires. Place, Tuan stated, is a ‘reality to be clarified and understood from the perspectives of the people who have given it meaning.’<sup>53</sup>

With this in mind, the book seeks to understand what the Aylesbury meant to different people, how they experienced it as a physical place, and how these feelings and experiences altered with the passage of time. When carrying out interviews, it was quickly apparent that the mental maps respondents created within themselves differed from person to person. Indeed, the way in which they saw and interacted with the estate was dependent on a gallimaufry of factors—the block they lived in, the neighbours they had, the period they lived on the estate, their age, and so on. (More so than others, elderly residents could be guided by ‘cartographies

of aversion'<sup>54</sup>—where not to walk, when not to go out, etc. On the other hand, those who grew up on the Aylesbury—especially in its early days—remembered a looser and wider-ranging relationship with the estate, governed as they were at that time by play, friends and adventure.) For those who had not seen or set foot on the estate in years, these mental maps were perhaps faded or missing large pieces. But there was always, in Tuan's terminology, a 'sense of place'—a feeling or a quality—that the Aylesbury continued to evoke.<sup>55</sup>

The size of the estate was a significant experiential factor, and a crucial determinant in a resident's sense of place. Borrowing from Tuan once more, all-encompassing labels given by planners to residential areas (such as 'neighbourhoods' or 'estates') did not always mean much to the people who inhabited them: 'The parts with which they identify may be much smaller, for instance, a single street or an intersection.'<sup>56</sup> Certainly, on an estate the size of the Aylesbury, trisected by two main thoroughways and fragmented by various other spatial delineations, it is easy to understand how it was experienced in different ways and imparted with different meanings. Loss of place, or the threat of loss of place, however, did much to fortify the estate's sharply drawn boundaries: in the face of regeneration, residents often developed a wider sense of place (the estate as a whole), and a more acute sense of collective identity, knowing as they did that any strength they had resided in numbers.

## STRUCTURE

The book continues in Chap. 2 by exploring the landscape out of which the Aylesbury arose. From the end of the Second World War up until the beginnings of the estate's construction, we look at the scale of the 'housing problem' in Southwark, and the steps that were taken to solve it. Following the implementation of the 1963 London Government Act, the newly formed borough of Southwark (1965) embarked on an aggressive site-acquisition programme and production drive, which put the overlapping efforts of the old metropolitan borough and London County Council (LCC) to shame by comparison. We examine, under this new and resolute steerage, the advent of mass building in Southwark and the creation of the Aylesbury.

Advancing chronologically, Chap. 3 offers a portrait of life on the estate up until the beginning of the Thatcher regime, and encompassing the enactment of the 1977 Housing (Homeless Persons) Act, which, by

shifting the provision for homelessness away from welfare and towards housing, significantly extended the liabilities of local authority housing departments—a pivotal moment in the trajectory of state housing. Before this point, the early Aylesbury community can be broadly characterised by its whiteness, its homogeneity, and its links to the local labour movement. Insular and ‘tribe’-like in some respects—as demonstrated by the somewhat closed-wall tenant bodies—its sociological construction was in lock step with a housing department that was paternalistic by creed. We investigate how residents ‘bedded in’ during the Aylesbury’s first decade, how the community built up and sustained itself, and how tenants adapted to the challenges presented by the estate’s design. We also examine how ongoing demographic and economic shifts—the exodus of manufacturing, for one—impacted residents lives and transformed their local environment.

Chapter 4 traces these shifts as they wended their way through the estate’s middle years. It details how, over time, various factors, including spending cuts, changing welfare arrangements, the rise in private consumption, and the outward migration of tenants, radically altered the composition of the estate. Dogged and fierce, these processes chewed through many of the social bonds established in the Aylesbury’s formative stages, but also gave rise to new, more tenuous, less well-defined expressions of community. We look at the intensifying problems of homelessness, crime, and unemployment in the area, how these served to widen any interstitial social cracks, and how they were paralleled by a rise in need, and thus a growing demand for social provision. This chapter also explores how a decline in the estate’s physical environment quickly took hold. Hampered by poor management, a limited budget, and a burgeoning housing stock (Southwark acquired 20,000 additional council properties with the abolition of the Greater London Council—GLC), the borough became increasingly dilatory over repairs and improvements. Housing management itself managed to shed many of its outdated practices, rigid customs and overbearing personalities over the course of this period, while also helping to establish a number of tenant-based participation schemes.

The urge toward neoliberal solutions to the problems of urban blight—whether real or imaginary—could be witnessed in Southwark well before 1997. But as Chap. 5 demonstrates, the coordinates of Aylesbury’s so-called ‘regeneration’ were most accurately plotted by New Labour. Beginning with the New Deal for Communities (NDC) programme in 1998 (a £56 m cash injection intended to revitalise the estate’s fortunes

over a ten-year span), and including a push for stock transfer, the zeal for urban renewal continued, having been inherited by successive governments. Here we explore the impact of the NDC on the Aylesbury and its residents, and on regeneration developments in its wake. Further, we delineate the twists and turns of the stock transfer proposal—an agitated and uncertain period for the estate, in which the council was pitted against a vociferous tenant-led campaign.

Woven throughout the book is an examination of how the estate has been depicted publicly, and how, if at all, we reconcile these representations with tenants' own accounts. As we shall see, press-peddled images and invidious fictional gloss belied the realities of community life specific to the Aylesbury, and long perpetuated the message that the residents themselves were somehow different, lesser. We examine how this anathematising dimension masked the unpalatable realities of economic restructuring and political neglect, and how stereotypes and sensationalism dovetailed neatly with Southwark's scheme of regeneration.

## NOTES

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2. Cooper, 'flops'.
3. Tony Aldous, *The Times*, 3 November, 1970; Oscar Newman, *The Listener*, 7 March 1974.
4. *South London Press*, 10 January 1975.
5. Miles Glendinning and Stefan Muthesius, *Tower Block: Modern Public Housing in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 5.
6. See for example: Oscar Newman, *Defensible Space: Crime Prevention through Urban Design*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1972); Simon Jenkins, *Landlords to London: The story of a Capital and its growth*, (London: Constable and Company, 1975).
7. *Time Out*, 7–13 June 1974.
8. Thomas L. Blair, *The Poverty of Planning: Crisis in the Urban Environment*, (London: Macdonald, 1973), 86.
9. Patrick Wright, *A Journey Through Ruins: The Way We Live Now*, (London: Radius, 1991), 91.
10. Jenkins, *Landlords*, 264–5.
11. In 1979, council houses and flats accounted for nearly a third of Britain's total housing stock. Now, less than a fifth of all homes are council owned,

- largely as a result of the Right to Buy. See Peter Malpass, *Housing and the Welfare State: The Development of Housing Policy in Britain*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 3.
12. Ruth Glass, *Clichés of Urban Doom*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), x.
  13. Tony Parker, *The People of Providence: A Housing Estate and Some of Its Inhabitants*, (London, Hutchinson, 1983).
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  15. Suzanne Hall, *City, Street and Citizen: The measure of the ordinary*, (London: Routledge, 2012), 132–33; David N. Thomas, *Organising for Social Change: A Study in the Theory and Practice of Community Work*, (London: Allen & Unwin, 1976), 37–43; Jerry White, *London in the Twentieth Century: A City and Its People*, (London: Vintage, 2008), 73.
  16. Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon and István M. Szijártó, *What is Microhistory?: Theory and Practice*, (London: Routledge, 2013), 149.
  17. *Southwark Notes*, (19 June 2017), <https://southwarknotes.wordpress.com/2017/06/19/the-luxury-of-not-being-burned-to-death/>, accessed 5 May 2020.
  18. Roughly half a mile north of the Aylesbury, the Heygate was opened in 1974 and demolished by 2014. Smaller at 1194 units compared to the Aylesbury's 2700, more organised in its arrangement, and in some ways more successful, the story of the Heygate nevertheless shares a great deal in common with that of the Aylesbury. See: Michael Romyn, 'The Heygate: Community Life in an Inner-City Estate, 1974–2011', *History Workshop Journal*, vol. 81 (2016).
  19. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, (London: Vintage, 2000), 143.
  20. Quoted in Donald Macintyre, 'Poverty's the problem, work is the solution', *The Independent*, 3 June 1997.
  21. Chris Waters, 'Representations of Everyday Life: L. S. Lowry and the Landscape of Memory in Postwar Britain', *Representations*, no. 65 (1999), 134–37.
  22. Michael Young and Peter Willmott, *Family and Kinship in East London* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957), 149.
  23. Lise Butler, 'Michael Young, the Institute of Community Studies and the politics of kinship', *Twentieth-Century British History*, vol. 26 (2015); Jon Lawrence, 'Inventing the "Traditional Working Class": A Re-Analysis of Interview Notes from Young and Willmott's Family and Kinship in East London,' *Historical Journal*, vol. 59, (2016), 592.
  24. Ben Rogaly and Becky Taylor, *Moving Histories of Class and Community: Identity, Place and Belonging in Contemporary England*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 21.

25. *Defensible Space* was in many ways a muscular advance on Jane Jacobs' 1961 work, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, which lamented the hollowing out of many ageing, inner-city cores. Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, (New York: Random House, 1961).
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32. Ravetz, *Council Housing*, 6.
33. See, for example, Peter Somerville, 'Resident and Neighbourhood Movements', in *International Encyclopaedia of Housing and Home*, (London: Elsevier Press, 2012); John Grayson, 'Campaigning Tenants: A Pre-History of Tenant Involvement to 1979', in Charlie Cooper and Murray Hawtin (eds.), *Housing, Community and Conflict: Understanding Resident Involvement*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1997); Quintin Bradley, *The Tenants' Movement: Resident Involvement, Community Action and the Contentious Politics of Housing*, (London: Routledge, 2014).
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38. Lisa McKenzie, *Getting By: Estates, Class and Culture in Austerity Britain*, (Bristol: Policy Press, 2015).
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## CHAPTER 2

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# ‘The End of Slums’ and the Rise of a ‘Housing Disaster,’ 1945–1970

*Walworth, as an old suburb of industrial London, grew up haphazard on an old village site, with no thought of town planning in the modern sense of the term, so that many evils exist today which it is our duty to try to avoid in planning for the future.*

—The Book of Walworth, 1925 (E. J. Orford (ed.), *The Book of Walworth: Being the Report of the Scheme of Study for the Year 1925* (London: Browning Hall Adult School, 1925), 48)

In his memoir and polemic, *The Likes of Us*, author Michael Collins presents the Walworth of his childhood as teetering on the threshold of a transformation. This was the early 1960s—for Collins a disorientating, interstitial period—in which the world he knew was poised to make way for a new one: ‘The past persisted within the landscape, and, like the memories, stories and superstitions of its human relics, it was fragmented and incomplete ... shops, tenements, houses and streets would be removed crudely and rapidly, in the willy-nilly manner in which the older generation had teeth extracted.’<sup>1</sup> The planners cleared what was old and outworn, and the future reared its concrete head, lancing up into existence under the zealous steerage of the LCC: to the north of the district, at the Elephant and Castle, Collins recalls the arrival of office blocks, the eponymous shopping centre, and, on a scrap of land within the newly built gyratory, an 80-foot-wide, 20-foot-high, stainless steel cube—a modern monument to an eminent past (commemorating scientist and local boy,

Michael Faraday). The new Elephant was derided quickly and widely. In 1963, the *South London Press* labelled the half-finished venture a ‘white elephant’ (not for the last time)<sup>2</sup>—while in 1967, journalist Oliver Marriott called it a ‘major and uncomfortably visible blunder, born of overconfidence.’<sup>3</sup> It did, at any rate, capture the attention of locals, many of whom looked upon it with more intrigue than ire: in the insular, self-contained Walworth of Collins’ descriptions, where the journey from ‘Walworth to the West End was from exile to inclusion,’<sup>4</sup> and where the streets, pubs and markets remained the social staples of day-to-day life, the project felt—for a brief moment at least—like an exoticism:

Up at the Elephant? I don’t remember going up there much until they built the shopping centre. And then we went up there to look at this new-fangled shopping centre ... all of a sudden there was something called a supermarket with music playing and all the stuff on the shelves and you had to help yourself, and it was the very first one I’ve ever seen ... lots of notices on the window explaining how it worked. Nobody had heard of them!<sup>5</sup>

But the Elephant scheme represented much more than a swaggering, macro-engineered curiosity. In an area historically neglected, and largely untouched since the war, it was the concretisation of a renewal long-promised (the redevelopment of the Elephant had been discussed as early as 1930).<sup>6</sup> It hinted at the prospect of a step up in life, of progress, and, if one dared to think it, of the comforts modernity might afford. Transformation, then, encompassed an emancipatory dimension, and a mass-produced, technological utopianism particular to the 1960s.<sup>7</sup> This was especially true of the redevelopment of Walworth’s housing stock, where the scale of change would be unparalleled in Southwark—new and ‘dramatic’ Elephant and Castle included.<sup>8</sup> While Collins and others would later deplore these developments as the destruction of an old and halloved way of doing things (‘homes, heritage, homogeneity, the holy trinity of the neighbourhood and the wider community’), cold, dark, damp and overcrowded housing was a difficult thing to mourn.<sup>9</sup> For many living in Walworth, the metamorphic housing drive undertaken by Southwark from the mid-1960s could not have come sooner. As one newly housed Walworth resident told *Crossroads*, a community newspaper, in 1974: ‘We could have done with a place like this 20 years ago.’<sup>10</sup>

## ‘THESE MEANISH STREETS’: A WALWORTH OF BRICK AND BOMBSITES

Born of a ‘jest,’ for there was ‘no tradition for the writing of books among Walworthites born and bred,’ a team of students and researchers from the Browning Hall Adult School in Walworth undertook a social survey of the district in 1925<sup>11</sup> (Fig. 2.1). More a sketch than a data-led work in the tradition of Booth, the resulting *Book of Walworth* does, nevertheless, present a valuable impression of housing in the area at that time—an

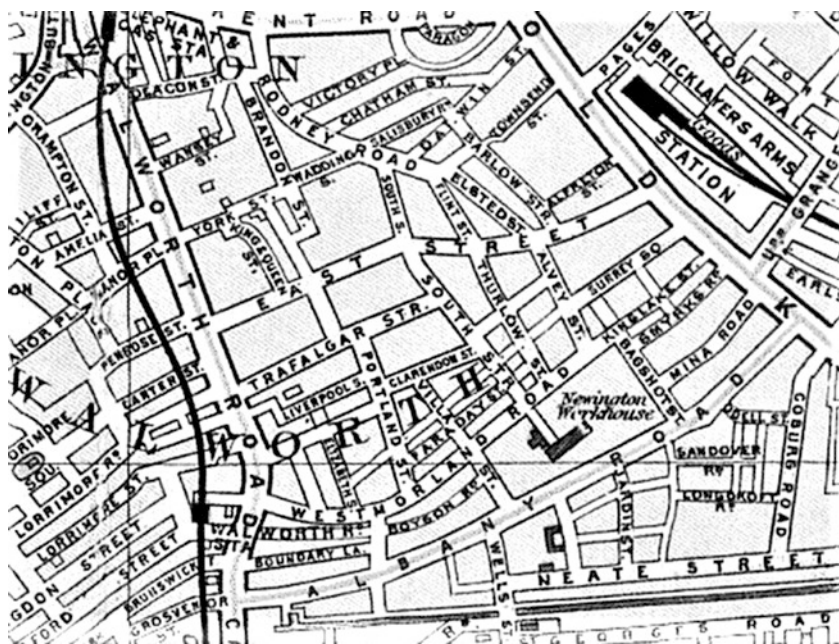


Fig. 2.1 The area in question: ‘The Walworth Square Mile,’ c.1900. J. G. Bartholomew, *The Pocket Atlas and Guide to London* (London: John Walker & Co., 1899). The area known as the ‘Walworth Square Mile’ is bounded by Walworth Road to the west, Albany Road to the south, Old Kent Road to the east, and New Kent Road to the north. As *The Book of Walworth* describes, Walworth is not marked off from the surrounding areas by any clear-cut borders, but extends a considerable distance westward of Walworth Road and the area shown, towards Kennington. See: Orford (ed.), *Book of Walworth*, ix–x

impression that, had it been produced 35 years later, on the eve of modernisation, would not have looked remarkably dissimilar (ravages of time and neglect notwithstanding). Characteristic of many poor, inner-city neighbourhoods in the first half of the twentieth century, Walworth was described as cramped and dishevelled; a bad arrangement of often narrow streets, some ‘little more than gullies,’ where ‘slums ... had developed, blocks and tenement houses piled its people on top of one another, and every square yard was built over.’<sup>12</sup> Older, larger houses, originally intended for the occupancy of single families, were either divided or subdivided and invariably congested, while the smaller, more prevalent four-room cottages in the district were similarly shared and overrun. A dearth of open space<sup>13</sup> and an interminable maze of hastily erected terraces and tenements,<sup>14</sup> stamped this brick-choked pocket of Southwark with a confined and unsanitary aspect, particularly in the streets and blocks flanking the western side of the New Kent Road: ‘Here ... when their narrow width is compared with the great height of the buildings, live hundreds of people with no outlook in front except the gully, and none in the rear except a still narrower gully, into which ... inconsiderate tenants threw their rubbish to the general inconvenience.’<sup>15</sup>

There were, however, at least a few favourable stabs at sprucing up the face of this rapidly sagging infrastructure. In the 1860s, the Walworth Common Estate (the boundaries of which corresponded almost exactly to those of the southern portion of the Aylesbury; see Fig. 2.2) was cleared of a ‘planless slum area’<sup>16</sup> and rebuilt with ‘wide, straight streets crossing at right angles,’<sup>17</sup> and, what the *South London Chronicle* described as ‘hundreds of modern-built houses.’<sup>18</sup> Reconstruction was urged on by the passing of the Walworth Common Inclosure Amendment Act in 1851, and the Inclosure Act of 1859, which, in addressing the amelioration of substandard housing, can be viewed as an early embodiment of future town planning acts.<sup>19</sup> Later, in the first years of the twentieth century, a 22-acre stretch of shoddy, age-worn housing was remodelled by its landlords—the Ecclesiastical Commissioners—and their renowned consultant, Octavia Hill, who visited the site in 1905:

I had a wonderful day yesterday. The LCC opened the garden given by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners at Walworth. The whole place gay; a platform at one end was enclosed, but in front of us was the whole space crowded with people, the garden being open to all. In front and around were all new houses, with large bow-windows overlooking the garden, wider streets, the whole 22 acres either rebuilt or rebuilding.<sup>20</sup>

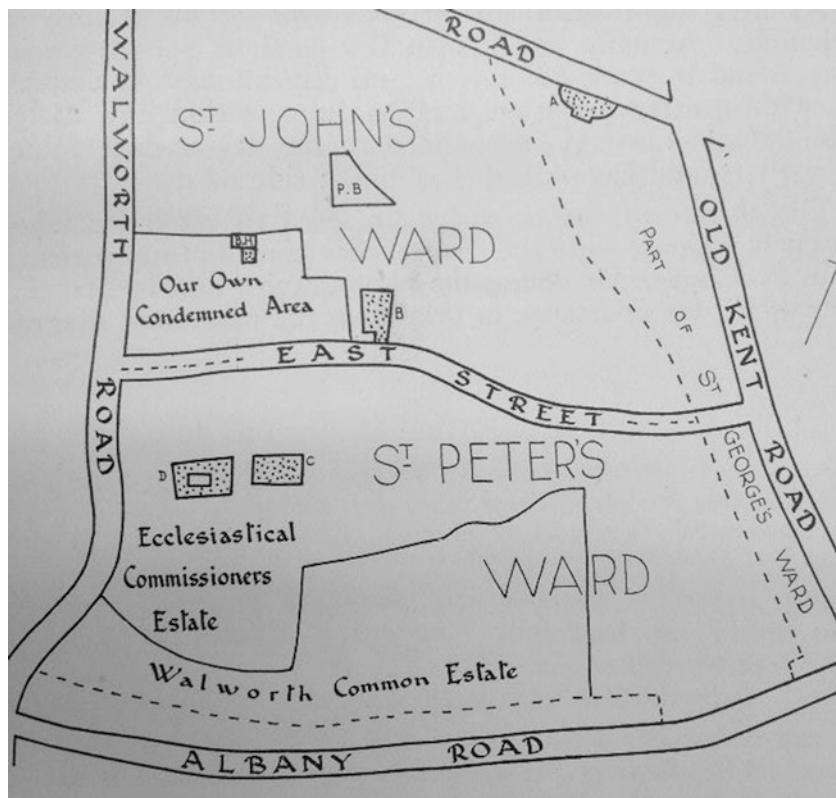


Fig. 2.2 Bounds of the Walworth Common Estate, c.1925. Orford (ed.), *Book of Walworth*

Finished in 1907, the Ecclesiastical Commissioners' Estate—known colloquially as the Walworth Estate—could accommodate up to 790 families in cottages (with individual rear gardens) or in relatively spacious, low-slung tenement blocks (two apartments per floor; a maximum height of three storeys). A radiant patch on a dismal landscape, the scheme set aside space for recreation, widened existing roads, and, at the behest of the Commissioners, forwent the inclusion of public houses. In 1947, a young Richard Mann moved onto the estate along with his mother, father and grandmother, leaving behind a flat that was small and dark and bereft of even the simplest amenities:

‘They’ve got a place on the Estate’ was a sign of recognition and achievement ... a journey to total fulfilment ... We shared a toilet and scullery cum laundry room with the other family on the top floor and our tin bath hung on its wall, ready for our weekly bath!<sup>21</sup>

Renewal of this kind was the exception, however; poor and decrepit housing was the rule: according to historian and one-time Walworth resident, L.J. Carter, a quarter of all dwellings in the district in 1938 were unfit for human habitation.<sup>22</sup> And as Stephen Humphrey pointed out, the war by itself did little to alter, or add to, this sallow, pockmarked complexion, despite the bombing it endured. When examining the first set of Ordnance Survey maps produced after the war, Humphrey identified just a handful of sites that were significantly bomb-damaged; unlike the Elephant and Castle, where a great clutch of old buildings was disproportionately eradicated, the better part of Walworth’s housing stock survived.<sup>23</sup> This is not to say that the damage sustained failed to impress upon the lives of local residents. Certainly, for those families who were left with a hole instead of a home, this impression was direct. And as for children in the area, the German shells and rockets gifted them the playgrounds and open spaces that the planning department had not:

In and out of bombed rooms and basements, up stairs and through doors that led nowhere we re-enacted the battles of our fathers, grandfathers and uncles. Sometimes ‘Blackie’ the Labrador joined in, complete with tin helmet, but I’ve no idea who he belonged to. The bombed remains of St Mark’s at the top of East Street brought a reverence that was disregarded when we scrambled over and through the ruins of Lytham Street, Arnside Street and Albany Road, but best of all was the network of air-raid shelters at the Elephant & Castle.<sup>24</sup>

But leaving the bounds of Walworth for a moment, to take in the scarred panorama of post-war London, the scale of destruction was such that people needed to believe that what had been destroyed would be replaced quickly, and replaced by something better, particularly when it came to their homes. It was an aspiration witnessed at the *Daily Herald* Post-War Homes Exhibition at Dorland Hall, Regent Street, in 1946, where Londoners converged to see what the future might hold in store. ‘It was the kitchenette ... all the cupboard room,’ said one working-class wife. ‘I’ve wanted that for years and we’ve never had it.’ ‘Honestly I liked

it *all*,' said another, a young married woman. 'I'm so desperate for a house I'd like anything.'<sup>25</sup> Even for those who had not suffered directly, many Londoners emerged from the war with a spirit of betterment, of renewal, and with clear enthusiasm for a large-scale housing drive.<sup>26</sup> This was almost certainly a sentiment felt keenly in Walworth, where, indifferent to the war or its passing, the majority of homes were still cold, damp and overcrowded (Fig. 2.3). That the domestic drudgery lingered longer than those early wishes for a transformative future was perhaps unsurprising. As one, more sober-minded Southwark resident told the *South London Press* in 1945: 'What hope have we that conditions will be better for us in the post-war period? We have learned from past experience that the misery, unemployment and hardships remain with us.'<sup>27</sup>



**Fig. 2.3** The terraces of Hard Street, Walworth, c. 1925. 'Hope is not eternal in Hard Street, Walworth ... Every day we see children's characters spoiled, their natures stunted by the depressing circumstances in which they live'. For illustration, see: Orford (ed.), *Book of Walworth*, 9. Quote in John Burns MP, in RIBA, *The Transactions of The Royal Institute of British Architects Town Planning Conference, London, 10–15 October, 1910* (London: Routledge, 2011), 65

## CREEPING TOWARDS PROMISE

By the time the war in Europe had drawn to a close, public demand for more and better housing was matched by the Government's resolve to provide it. Years of wartime planning and preparation (even when peace seemed a distant prospect) crystallised in the housing White Paper of March 1945—a big, bold statement of intent that envisaged the construction of 300,000 permanent homes by 1947, and 1.25 million by 1951.<sup>28</sup> For the newly elected Labour Party (who won the election 'in part because of an expressed determination to impart new vigour to the campaign for housing,' said *The Times*), this number, and future targets would be achieved not through private enterprise—which had been relied upon in the past, especially pre-1914—but through a re-inspired programme of local authority homebuilding.<sup>29</sup> Vigorously championed by socialist and minister in charge of housing, Aneurin Bevan, the policy effectively marked the dawn of an era of council housing, which, at its peak in the late 1970s, saw municipally owned homes account for one-third of the national housing stock. At the time, however, in the years immediately following the war, this was an ascendancy that would have been hard to predict. Economic constraints and a paucity of labour and building materials conspired to whittle the Government's lofty projections down to a more pedestrian size: at the end of 1946, just 58,414 permanent houses had been raised; in 1947, the number stood at 198,104 (well short of the desired 300,000). By 1951, after roughly five years of peace, only a million new homes had been built.<sup>30</sup> In London, the pace of new housebuilding was correspondingly slow. The LCC managed just 19,171 permanent new homes by December 1949 but did succeed in outshining the Metropolitan Boroughs who, between them, built a total of 8819 dwellings over the same period.<sup>31</sup> All in all, the phoenix that rose from the wartime ashes was, in the words of Jerry White, a 'phoenix with wings permanently clipped.'<sup>32</sup>

Unsurprisingly, such desultory progress on an issue as raw and elemental as housing sparked a wave of popular protest. (As Nick Bullock pointed out, this simmering pot was further heated by newspaper photographs of bricklayers in states of repose for want of bricks to lay, and of homeless people being moved on by policemen from empty squatted flats.)<sup>33</sup> In Southwark (137 new dwellings under construction by April 1947), as elsewhere in the country, one of the ways in which protest took form was through deputation.<sup>34</sup> In her study of local politics in the borough, Sue Goss (a former Southwark councillor) described how, often roused by the

local Communist Party, scores of Walworth tenement dwellers led numerous deputations to Southwark Council demanding, essentially, that their homes be pulled down and replaced with something better: 'There were a series of conflicts during council meetings throughout the 1950s and 1960s; the public gallery would be packed, the tenants would stamp and shout, and the police would be called.'<sup>35</sup> Burdened with a waiting list more than 4000 strong, and threatened with cuts to housebuilding allocations, the Council itself delivered a deputation to Harold Macmillan (then minister of housing for the recently elected Tory government) in January 1952.<sup>36</sup> Southwark argued that the halving of its allocations from 150 to 75 in the year would delay several proposed developments: 'This cruel cut,' said Councillor Albert Gates, 'comes at a time when we are prepared to commence new and ambitious schemes for the benefit of those on the housing list.'<sup>37</sup> At least two of these 'new and ambitious schemes' were earmarked for Walworth—a 78-flat scheme in Faraday Street and 40-flat development in Doctor Street.<sup>38</sup>

As it happens, the borough deputation walked away 'silenced and astonished' when the Ministry of Housing—now its own department, divorced from matters of health—doubled the original allocation number to 300 homes.<sup>39</sup> It was a decision commensurate with the aggressive programme of housebuilding undertaken by the government at the time. Billed as Macmillan's 'Great Housing Crusade,' the 1950s saw a considerable ramping up of dwellings completed, first reaching the Government's 300,000 per year target then handily exceeding it, the numbers rising 'like cricket ... runs stacking up on the chalkboard,' in Macmillan's phrasing.<sup>40</sup> But while the quantities surged, the quality often struggled to keep pace. Macmillan's was a quota-driven, willy-nilly, 'pile-em high, build-em cheap' approach<sup>41</sup>—the type of pernicious cutting of corners that Bevan, in his stubborn commitment to standards (specifically those of the Dudley Report, 1944), thought he had banished to a less equitable past, and that Stephen Merrett would later describe as a 'brutal' downgrading.<sup>42</sup> Dwelling space decreased—the average three-bedroom council house was shorn of 15 square metres in ten years between 1949 and 1959—while the proportion of much smaller, two-bedroom houses and, more crucially, flats, began to rise.<sup>43</sup> As a relaunched slum clearance programme gathered momentum after 1955, this growing propensity for flats was most conspicuously realised in a new, controversial and quickly assembled addition to the urban landscape—the modern high rise, where the practicalities (or lack thereof) of everyday living were plainly obvious.<sup>44</sup>

Diminished space and standards withstanding, these were, finally, homes after all; modern, sorely needed homes with hitherto unattainable amenities, in which, for the moment at least, the walls were damp-free and the rooms undraughty. In 1950s Walworth, however, the pace of change was dragging, and the delivery of new dwellings was well out of step with the national picture. According to Goss, Southwark Council developed a reputation amongst the boroughs for ‘neglecting their duties and leaving housing development to the LCC’ during this period—sclerotic behaviour derided by MP for Bermondsey at that time, Bob Mellish: ‘We’ll do nothing, we’ll let the LCC do it!’<sup>45</sup> Those in the district who found themselves in receipt of a permanent new council home at this time could count themselves fortunate and few. Tony Newman, for instance, was four years old in 1952 when he moved with his mother and grandmother from a prefab in Phelp Street (his family’s terraced house in the same road was bombed in 1944—‘completely obliterated, but fortunately while they were out’) into a two-bedroom, first-floor flat in the just-constructed Michael Faraday House<sup>46</sup>:

This new block of flats ... was all-singing, all-dancing. It had part central-heating ... two radiators fired from the coal fire in the front ... each block had a laundry, laundry room, which was well fitted out, you know, two washing machines, a boiler to boil, a sink ... there was a workshop where you could do any repairs or things you want ... a pram shed ... a really nicely fenced off playground laid out for both football and netball ... nice little balcony ... the front wall of it had a built-in window box.<sup>47</sup>

Once finished (construction included a two-year hiatus), Faraday House comprised four parallel brick-built blocks of three and five storeys, which, considering its tender age and pristine condition, threw much of the surrounding terraced housing into sharp relief—as it later would the begrimed Aylesbury slab blocks that had been assembled around it.

The flat afforded Tony and his family a previously unknown level of material well-being, and this was by no means offset or outweighed by any deracination experienced upon leaving the street (‘homes, heritage, homogeneity’) and moving into a modern block, as Young, Willmott and others would suggest.<sup>48</sup> Of course, at 105 flats, Faraday House was hardly proto-Aylesbury, unfurling stolidly across the timeworn streetscape. Nevertheless, the stuff of community found within the block sounded not dissimilar

from the traditional, tightly wreathed social networks that the presence of such buildings was 'bound' to impinge on:

I think everybody knew everybody else, and not necessarily just because you lived next door to 'em, you know. We always knew a couple of people in the next block and a couple in the other one, probably initially from school ... the parents will get to know each other as well. I found out in later life that the father of the girl upstairs from me was having an affair with the mother of another one of my friends ... There was one women in our block who ... always had an open door. Her door was always, literally, open, and any of the kids could go in and she had a huge L-shape settee and it was just accepted that, you know, if the weather was bad we could go in Joan's and listen to the record player or whatever.<sup>49</sup>

As the aforementioned resident deputations suggest, council-built buildings like Faraday and Gaitskell House (66 homes; also later enveloped by the Aylesbury), or indeed any new housing schemes, were coveted. In 1952, Southwark Council called on LCC planners to raise the permitted residential density limits from 136 people per acre to 200, demonstrating an intention to 'build upwards,' despite its preference at the time for houses over flats.<sup>50</sup> Heading the borough charge was council leader Alderman Len Styles: 'I forecast there will be a swing to my ideas in the future. There is breathing space above as well as below—the LCC planners only think of spreading sideways instead of upwards.'<sup>51</sup> Alderman Styles—dubbed the 'sardine plan man' by his critics—singled out Walworth as an area that would benefit from such a proposal. 'Thousands live in the close-packed area between the Elephant and Castle and Camberwell,' he said. 'We believe these people could be happy and well-housed if we are allowed to build upwards and increase the density of the population.'<sup>52</sup> It also seems there was little in the way of aversion to building high among residents in the borough at this time. Goss, in fact, argued that many Southwark residents were in favour of high rise and industrial building techniques, insofar as they allowed for greater and faster redevelopment. She quotes one Southwark Communist Party tenant organiser as saying those in the borough were 'great enthusiasts of "to hell with the density—build", and if you have to build high to do it—build high!'<sup>53</sup>

Such ardour is less than surprising when considering the continued problem of overcrowding in the borough—an issue symptomatic of Southwark's 'perennial housing problem,' argued Collins, and one that

endured until the fruits of major redevelopment were borne.<sup>54</sup> According to the Medical Officer's annual health report for 1962, there were 297 overcrowded families (1149 persons) registered in Southwark, numbers that were likely well under-reported considering the 5000 houses in multiple occupation in the borough at this time (a figure that excluded tenement blocks). It was a situation that raised concern with the borough's Chief Public Health Inspector, Harold Archer, who 'stressed that immediate attention should be given to ensuring proper management, and ... that a strenuous drive should be made to provide adequate facilities and services and to control occupation.'<sup>55</sup> Collins himself lived with his parents and brother across two rooms on the first floor of a small Victorian House in Larcom Street, the four of them packed into the front room when they slept: 'There was no bathroom. There was a kitchen and a toilet along the landing. The family downstairs had the yard and the outside lav ... There was no partition separating these houses into flats, and so the strangers living in them for years became like one extended family.'<sup>56</sup> This, by now, was the mid-1960s, a period of relative affluence for many working-class people that—taking hold in the previous decade—full employment and a muscular welfare state had helped set in train. Yet, for many in Walworth, the brilliance of this prosperous new world, in which choice and consumer durables were no longer the preserve of the rich, was invariably sullied by their housing situation—by far the greatest indicator of material health. The comparative speed at which the neighbouring boroughs of Bermondsey and Camberwell were rebuilding might have been viewed as the proverbial salt in the wound: by 1963, a third of Bermondsey's housing stock was council owned—a 'source of pride for Bermondsey's citizens who spend a lot of time arranging their flats or sprucing up their homes,' according to John Turner.<sup>57</sup> Camberwell, meanwhile, boasted some of the highest housing construction figures among all London boroughs between 1945 and 1965.<sup>58</sup>

Dissatisfied with the ponderous weight of working-class living conditions, and lured by the prospect of modern, semi-detached housing in places such as Bromley, Bexley and Merton, many people who could afford to do so moved out of Walworth at this time.<sup>59</sup> Stephen Humphrey pointed out that the desire to leave was long-ingrained: 'It was written before the war, "the main ambition of everyone living in Walworth is to move elsewhere"', for in a poorer district, dreams of improvement almost automatically entail moving out.<sup>60</sup> But what began as a pre-war trickle turned into something more substantial during the 'you've never had it so

good' years and beyond. In the borough as a whole, the population fell from 97,221 to 86,249 between 1951 and 1961—a drop of more than 10,000 residents (and an inadvertent relief valve to the pressures of overcrowding).<sup>61</sup> As stated, those who left tended to occupy the higher rungs of the economic ladder; they were also likely to be in their early adulthood or middle-age (under 45), married, and have children: the sharpest decline in Southwark's population between 1951 and 1961 was seen in the 25–29 age range (from 9259 to 5774—an outward migration of 3485 men and women).<sup>62</sup> The municipal boroughs of Bromley and Bexley, meanwhile, saw population increases of 4073 (64,179 to 68,252) and 769 (88,781 to 89,550), respectively between 1951 and 1961.<sup>63</sup>

Whatever the bonds of kinship and community that existed in post-war Walworth—the bonds that memoirists and respondents in this study would later come to eulogise in semi-reverential tones—they offered little resistance to the pull of property ownership in more respectable surroundings, along with the concomitant perks of greater privacy and swish domestic comforts.<sup>64</sup> Of course, those residents left behind in Walworth were not necessarily lacking in aspiration, or somehow immune to the new consumerism that had ushered in these more domestic-minded, inward-looking priorities. But they were, presumably, less well-off—an assumption borne out in part by the borough's shifting age profile<sup>65</sup>—and thus firmly embedded into the morass of the rental market. This was especially true of migrants at the time, particularly those from the West Indies, who often found themselves stuck in the worst of the borough's housing stock, as was the case across all London. It was a disproportionality that bore little relation to pay: even when migrants held the same type of job or received a similar income to their English neighbours, there remained an appreciable gap in the quality of the property they occupied.<sup>66</sup>

Walworth in the 1950s and 1960s was by all accounts predominantly white. ('We had one little coloured boy, Sherman White, I remember his name to this day ... He was the only one I knew. Literally the only one I knew.')

<sup>67</sup> There are few examples and fewer statistics to help sketch even a rough portrait of housing inequality along ethnic lines in Walworth during this period.<sup>68</sup> In her novel, *A Sign of the Times*, Mary Jane Staples alluded to the cramped conditions in which migrant families in the district may have lived towards the end of the 1950s<sup>69</sup>:

Tim phoned Boots later.

‘Pa, old sport,’ he said, ‘thought I’d tell you that your old house in Walworth is now home to a large West Indian family of about eight or nine. The street kids weren’t sure of the exact number.’

‘Well, in a happy family of eight, what’s one more?’ said Boots.

‘No problem,’ said Tim. ‘Thought I’d also tell you that one of them, a girl name of Henrietta, made a point of informing us that there was no bathroom or shower.’

‘Was it a complaint?’ asked Boots.

‘More of a good-natured statement, I thought,’ said Tim.<sup>70</sup>

But this could have been any family in Walworth, where living cheek by jowl with your nearest and dearest was an indiscriminate feature of domestic life.<sup>71</sup> In nearby Peckham and Brixton, however, sizeable clusters of West Indian migrants *were* to be found. (In the minds of many Walworth residents, and those of other proximate districts, these areas were increasingly regarded as ‘black.’)<sup>72</sup> The accommodation here was largely poor-quality and low-cost, but often a step up from the dingy rooms and bedsits let at exploitative rents by discriminatory landlords in other parts of the capital.<sup>73</sup> But even the worst possible housing was out of reach for some. Certainly, it was not uncommon for West Indians in Peckham and Stockwell—especially those employed in shift work—to rent just a bed in what amounted to a kind of mattress timeshare, as explained by former Chair of the Race Equality Committee in Southwark, and one of the borough’s first black councillors, Aubyn Graham:

Caribbeans never had property, so they go to people who would rent to them, and they would get two or three to a bed in terms of one in the morning, one in the evening. Yeah, they used to rent the beds in shifts, is what used to happen ... What do you mean that’s crazy? It’s better than sleeping under a bridge or sleeping out in the cold. No, no, they used to rent the bed in shifts.<sup>74</sup>

Elsewhere, in the neighbouring borough of Lewisham, in August 1961, the *South London Press* reported on the case of a British Guianan family who lived seven to a single room. The tenant, Stephen Hermanstein, petitioned a rent tribunal to be spared eviction in the hope that his family would one day qualify for council housing. Chairman of the tribunal Phyllis Martin condemned the overcrowding, but was ‘more appalled’ that Hermanstein allowed a ‘young lady visitor’ to sleep in the room. ‘In this country this is considered to be quite disgusting,’ she said.<sup>75</sup>

This limited portrait of the precariousness and sometimes wretched conditions that many West Indians came up against in the housing market is not to imply that the community was defined by a vague, flattening pauperism. Like any working-class group of people, there were varying degrees of wealth and prosperity found within it (Aubyn Graham: 'One of my cousins ... bought a property down, I think it was 100 Crofton Road, and as soon as he bought the house 102 came up for sale and he bought that as well! He bought both of them! He came here with money!'),<sup>76</sup> and, of course, a mixed set of experiences at the hands of the rentier, positive as well as bad. Nevertheless, in a position disparate with many of their white, working-class counterparts, it would be years yet before local authorities presented migrants with the best or, indeed, any solution to unsatisfactory housing and private landlord exploitation. Racism for a long time hid behind the cold arbiter of the eligibility rulebook (more on this later); a racism that ran deep in the fabric of many borough councils, and reflected attitudes held within the districts they served. As Clare Ungerson's 1971 study of the redevelopment process in Southwark demonstrated, migrants were often doubly resented. First, for their mere presence ('I'm sorry, dear, I just don't like them and I don't see why I should put up with them'),<sup>77</sup> and second, for seeming to constitute unjust rivals in the bitter competition for housing: 'Well housing ought to be for us that's always lived here. It's all wrong isn't it? ... really we should come first—we belong don't we?'<sup>78</sup> Claims to living space based on generational ties and existing community membership may have seemed self-evidently fair and right to established residents, but were in effect prejudicial to newcomers and outsiders, and bluntly declarative of how things stood.<sup>79</sup>

By the first years of the 1960s, council housing in Southwark was still a scarce commodity for which there was stiff competition.<sup>80</sup> The 1956 Housing Act, which first reduced then abolished subsidies for local authority general-needs building, put a remarkable strain on metropolitan borough waiting lists—so much so that in Southwark, where the list tallied more than 3000 names, it was closed, and remained closed until the borough was reorganised in 1965 (by this point, through piecemeal development on the few small sites available, the list had been shaved down to some 500 families).<sup>81</sup> The message from Government was clear: house-building and improvement were to be left to the market, while local authorities should confine themselves to slum clearance and its redevelopment. It was a position neatly set out by Macmillan himself: 'Local authorities and local authorities alone can clear and rehouse the slums, while the

general housing need can be met, as it was to a great extent before the war, by private enterprise.’<sup>82</sup> But while the 1956 legislation did curtail the capacity of the metropolitan boroughs in this significant respect, it also baited them with subsidies to replace slum-cleared property with multistorey flats, despite their lofty (and well-advertised) construction costs.<sup>83</sup> This was the context in which Southwark announced, finally, in January 1963, the launch of its ‘biggest housing redevelopment scheme ever.’<sup>84</sup> Walworth, it appeared, had waited long enough.

### A TIME OF ‘REAL REBUILDING’

In the summer of 1969, Joyce MacDonald stood in her garden in Bagshot Street, Walworth, pegging out the washing, witnessing modernity grow up around her. The slab-blocks of the recently commissioned Aylesbury Estate were rising swiftly, one then the next, the storeys slotted on top of each other like Lego bricks. Looming over her terraced home was the biggest slab of all—the monolithic Wendover. At 12 storeys high and almost half a mile long, it laid claim to the somewhat obscure title of Europe’s largest system-built housing block.<sup>85</sup> Like many of her neighbours and residents in nearby streets, it left Joyce dumbfounded. She thought it inconceivable, a thing like that, a human mistake of inhuman proportions. She would stare at the walls driving up, the windows pressed into them, a thousand squares where the sky once was.<sup>86</sup>

This, to the consternation of Joyce, and many others, was the form the future had taken in Walworth. But the Aylesbury scheme had metastasised greatly since the original development was publicised in 1963. Not diminutive to begin with, the ‘Aylesbury Road site’ was to cover a 10-acre stretch to the south of East Street, absorbing about two-thirds of the Walworth Common Estate. It was to provide homes for 478 families, mostly in maisonettes and blocks of flats of four and five storeys, but also in two much larger point-blocks of 14 floors. The scheme would be ‘traffic free’ and built concurrently with a smaller development of 155 homes to the north of East Street, completing in 1968 and 1965, respectively.<sup>87</sup> This was a watershed moment for Southwark Council: the ‘first time we have ever had an opportunity of comprehensive redevelopment in the borough,’ said the borough’s chief architect, Charles Whatmore.<sup>88</sup> Such a vision of scale and reordering could only be achieved with great swathes of clearance, which the borough readily set about: the *South London Press*

reported that 600 homes would be demolished across both development sites, and would include the removal or rearrangement of several streets.<sup>89</sup>

The gusto with which Southwark pursued a clean-sweep approach to redevelopment in the mid-1960s was certainly a testament to the spirit of the times. But it was also a product of the council's sizeable ambition in housing matters—an ambition that grew to singular heights following the reorganisation of the borough in 1965. To no one's great surprise, rearranging the civic geography of the capital under the London Government Act of 1963 proved an awkward, problematic and sometimes acrimonious task. This is what comes of abolishing municipal authorities, amalgamating boroughs, and disseminating powers in short order. The newly formed London Borough of Southwark—the metropolitan boroughs of Southwark, Bermondsey and Camberwell smashed together—exhibited no happy deviation in this regard, with disagreements arising over the name of the new borough, its leadership, and the levelling out of council rents across all three districts. But the political divisions and distrust that ran along old borough lines, and that existed until well into the 1980s, according to Goss, were mere trifles in the broader picture of Southwark's new and prodigious commitment to public provision (particularly in health, maternity and child welfare, and social services, but no more so than in housing).<sup>90</sup> Vast and retooled, the emergent borough departments forfeited much of the accessibility and personal touch of their predecessors. But this was the trade-off for greater functionality and efficiency—outcomes central to the reorganisation process: 'Larger units would mean more work for each authority in all the personal services and so make specialization in staff and institutions more efficient and economical. In addition larger units would be stronger in resources and so better able to secure the major development which many boroughs now need.'<sup>91</sup>

In matters of planning, the 1963 Act saw to it that the Greater London Council—the LCC's rejigged successor—had little influence over borough schemes or allocations (there were, occasionally, and only in certain circumstances, considerations to be sought on location and building heights, and on developments that could prove traffic-generative).<sup>92</sup> The newly strengthened boroughs were, in theory at least, planning authorities in their own right, unbridled by top-down interference.<sup>93</sup> In a miscalculated and stakes-raising seesawing of numbers with the Conservative Party, the new Labour Government, in 1965, made a promise to build 500,000 homes per year by 1970.<sup>94</sup> Southwark's response to the call was immense. Within months of reorganisation, the council had earmarked 491 acres for

redevelopment—roughly 10 per cent of borough land—and set out to build between 14,000 new homes over seven years.<sup>95</sup> It was an ambitious figure, in line with the government's own improbable task, and one inexpertly arrived at by doubling the combined post-war building totals for the three former metropolitan boroughs.<sup>96</sup> But it was also a welcome one. In a borough beset with chronic housing problems and with a reputation for 'stinginess,' such a bold proclamation was a big step forward<sup>97</sup>:

It was an enormously courageous dedicated attitude to housing—we are not going to be put off by financial constraints or anything—we are going to house the people of Southwark. There was a sort of religious fervour about it—I know it sounds funny—but if you'd lived as people in Southwark had lived ... it arose out of people's experience of slums and slum landlords. No privacy ... Communal lavatories.<sup>98</sup>

With hindsight at their disposal, the authors of *Tower Block*, Miles Glendinning and Stefan Muthesius declared Southwark the 'capital's most forceful new borough' to emerge from reorganisation: 'In both design and production, Southwark pursued a breadth of scale unique in Greater London.'<sup>99</sup> Starts in the borough rocketed from just 62 in 1966 to 3573 a year later, and the council would soon complete 1750 homes per year on average—a rate unmatched by any authority except Birmingham and the GLC.<sup>100</sup> Of course, these gaudy numbers could only be achieved with a similarly aggressive programme of demolition. Then a junior minister at the Ministry of Housing, MP for Bermondsey, Bob Mellish, admitted that in order to reach the projected 14,000 starts, some 15,500 homes would have to make way.<sup>101</sup> Yes, the housing stock was to receive an unparalleled transformation, but the emphasis on numbers was, to some degree, a successful bit of legerdemain: many residents would remain languishing on the now reopened waiting list and, as the borough's rolling programme of clearance and construction unspooled, many more would be added.<sup>102</sup>

The language surrounding the task of slum clearance was apt to conjure a sorrowful mood, a wistful sense of unavoidable passing. For while 'the children of Walworth wept for their slums,' it was, with sober mind, regrettable but always inevitable that the older, ill-functioning neighbourhoods would one day recede before the mighty tide of rational city planning.<sup>103</sup> In the mind of Richard Crossman, Labour Minister of Housing, it was only right that he 'impose central leadership, large-scale state intervention, in these blighted areas of cities, the twilight areas, which were

once genteelly respectable and are now rotting away, where Commonwealth citizens settle and where there are racial problems.'<sup>104</sup> Urban decay was terminal and quasi-fated, and should be remedied apace with bold, sweeping, Utopian approaches: 'I am pretty clear what the long-term plan should be. I am pretty clear that the decision means comprehensive urban renewal.'<sup>105</sup> It was a decision inflated into salience by strong gusts of political enterprise. Labour, like the Tories, saw housing as central to its fortunes (as the aforementioned jockeying of construction numbers would suggest), and thus placed it accordingly. Having watched the steady rise in private home building and owner occupation over more than a decade in opposition, the Labour leadership was eager to get back to the business of council housing: of the half a million homes promised annually by the government's five-year housing plan, 250,000 were to be local authority built.<sup>106</sup> This was, undoubtedly, an unworkable projection, somewhat swollen with bluster.<sup>107</sup> But for Crossman and the Labour Party, a reinvigorated programme of municipal home building was necessary redress for an area long neglected: 'Whereas the private sector had increased output considerably, the public sector had sagged back, despite the desperate need of cheap houses to rent. So we were talking about a vital social service—the only social service the Tories had ruthlessly cut back.'<sup>108</sup>

With attention turned to the 'blighted' inner cities, local authorities were encouraged to forge ahead with slum clearance and to take full advantage of the ambiguities surrounding it. Peter Malpass argued that 'slum clearance' often went beyond what was strictly defined by the term. To be more accurate, however, there existed no strict definition in the first place: what constituted a property 'unfit for human habitation' was largely determined by a council's own discretion.<sup>109</sup> As Jim Yelling demonstrated, there was no direct line between the incidence of 'unfit' housing and the history or condition of the housing stock, and nor, moreover, was the incidence of clearance a straightforward reflection of the incidence of 'unfit' housing.<sup>110</sup> Such impenetrable logic no doubt augmented the scale of the process, which saw successive cohorts of 'unfit' housing parcelled up ready for the wrecking ball. This was most certainly the case in London, where the preponderance of demolition activity was encompassed by 'clearance area' schemes (not individual orders), in which all property was to be demolished and there was no option of repair. Between 1965 and 1974 (the peak period for clearance), 56,710 houses were pulled down in Greater London—more than in any other city in England or Wales (Manchester was next with 43,300 properties cleared).<sup>111</sup>

In Southwark, the council began to stockpile large land banks, some of which were acquired under a policy of ‘prior demolition’—the knocking down of houses before a development plan was in place. Large sites were routinely left dormant and blighted, some for as many as eight years: ‘when you got these empty sites they often got covered in ... waste from other building sites, you know, illegal dump, tipping, fly-tipping.’<sup>112</sup> In all, it was a process that can reasonably be described as rash and haphazard, if we are to go by Goss’s account:

Officers and councillors plotted the existing slum clearance areas on a map, and then drew wider and wider lines around them to define areas that could logically be extended to provide clearance areas, until they were large enough to produce the 1,200 homes a year that had been asked for. There was no attempt at detailed surveying.<sup>113</sup>

Add to this picture the much-told (and perhaps apocryphal) story of borough architect, Frank Hayes, and an indeterminate cast of characters (they differ, depending on the storyteller) divvying up Southwark from the back of a taxi, scratching out whole communities at the stroke of a pen:

The then borough architect and the planner and the property man sort of went round the borough in a sort of taxi owned by the council. Rumour has it that it was a misty day and they couldn’t see very well...and they sort of said this is a development area, this is a development area.<sup>114</sup>

They were Austin Princesses or something, these sort of limousines, in the carpool ... and it was alleged that in the back of one of these cars, yes, Hayes, the chief planner, a chap called Ian Lacey, and the borough surveyor, John O’Brien ... drove around and said ‘okay, we’ll go right down here and take that lot out and take that lot out’, so, I don’t know if it actually happened but yes, we all believed that story, yes.<sup>115</sup>

Needless to say, there was barely any meaningful consultation with residents, neither at this initial stage of redevelopment nor moving forward. A 1956 Ministry of Housing report, *Moving from the Slums*, acknowledged the difficulties living in a clearance area presented: ‘This uncertainty about the future creates obvious difficulties for the families and causes anxieties which should be set at rest as soon as possible.’<sup>116</sup> It went on, compelling local authorities to apply the necessary emollient: ‘we recommend that every effort should be made to give full and accurate

information as early as possible.<sup>117</sup> But in Southwark at least, information—accurate or otherwise—was something of a chimera. Ungerson described the process of clearance in the borough as marked, above all, by worry and confusion, coordinated as it was on such a vast scale. From the moment they became aware of clearance, up until the point of ‘decanting,’ families were typically starved of information, and thus suspended in a kind of debilitating present:

I think the council have been unfair—not telling people. Mother was ill for a fortnight when they told her she’d have to be moved. About three years ago they told her she’s have to be out in a month—she worried herself sick. We’ve never heard nothing more. Mum’s a heart case.<sup>118</sup>

We’ve been kept in the dark all the time—they said we would be moved towards the end of 1969 and that’s all we’ve been told—I don’t think the council’s been straightforward.<sup>119</sup>

The process often included house calls from any number of officers, valuers and inspectors. These ‘visitors,’ as Ungerson termed them, should have rightly been the flung rope between council and residents; the informed disseminators of a clearer picture. It seems they were anything but:

Somebody came and measured up the rooms—that’s all—he didn’t say anything. And a woman came to ask us questions—but she didn’t say anything either. She just said ‘ahem’ every time I asked her something.<sup>120</sup>

The first man said he was just looking the house over and wasn’t concerned in answering questions. The second one just wrote something down on a piece of paper and went away without saying anything. The same bloke did the third and fourth visits ... None of them told us anything; even when we asked them questions they said they didn’t know.<sup>121</sup>

To venture a filmic metaphor, Southwark assumed the role of auteur in the redevelopment process, exercising total control, impervious to outside input. The end result was the inevitable product of its perspective. Residents, meanwhile, milled impotently in the background, voiceless and ignored, little more than human scenery. Public meetings were unhelpful. They were either under-attended or overwrought with shouting, and more often than not residents were left none the wiser: while planners and

councillors were happy to set out mega schemes for the built future, placating anxious families with immediate and human concerns proved much trickier.<sup>122</sup> ‘Southwark’s housing manager thought meetings were a waste of time,’ reported Ungerson. ‘The planners convened them to explain the plans and the residents then asked him if they would be living in the new scheme and this he could never answer.’<sup>123</sup> The council did eventually produce an information brochure for residents, *Living in a Development Area*. But this was now 1969—a little late in the day on the redevelopment timeline.<sup>124</sup>

At least some of the borough’s loose treatment of residents during the redevelopment period could be attributed to practical thinking. It was in the interests of Southwark, for example, that people were kept in readiness for a move—even if no date was officially earmarked—in order to expedite site clearance when the architects demanded it.<sup>125</sup> But it also had a lot to do with the culture of paternalism that enveloped Southwark (and indeed local authorities generally) at this time—the sort of top-down manoeuvring of people’s lives that stifled concerns and aspirations, and hoarded decision-making into the hands of a dominant few. ‘We give as much information as we can,’ said one Southwark housing officer. ‘But not too much to commit ourselves or upset residents.’<sup>126</sup> A number of officers and councillors had themselves grown up in the streets and tenements that were soon to be demolished, and thus felt admirably qualified to speak on the local population’s behalf. As we shall see, this was an attitude that dictated the rules and practices of housing management until at least the mid-1970s, when, alongside other factors, emergent tenant groups began to negotiate a more favourable compact. But it is notable that prior to this, and in the 1960s especially, residents in cities across the country were largely quiet on matters of reconstruction. Peter Shapely explained this passivity in simple terms: families wanted what local authorities were building (council housing), so why carp and quibble over the way they went about it?<sup>127</sup> The story was similar in Southwark, where, a few boisterous public meetings aside, ‘the great majority of folk are prepared to just to sit back and wait,’ as the borough housing manager stated.<sup>128</sup> It was a most unequal relationship, certainly; a lopsided balance of power and compliance that invariably tipped to the council’s favour: ‘People didn’t protest then!’ said Tony Newman. ‘Oh no, no, not at all.’<sup>129</sup> ‘It was more or less “these are the plans, and this is what you’re gonna have,”’ added Aylesbury resident, Jean Bartlett. ‘There was not the consultation that regeneration schemes have today.’<sup>130</sup>

And so the clearance programme advanced, unfettered and unabated, and now significantly scaled-up following borough realignment. The 10-acre 'Aylesbury Road site' was quickly deemed staid and unadventurous by Hayes and his department, who, in 1966, drew up a new, 60-acre scheme in its stead—the 'Aylesbury Development Area.'<sup>131</sup> This would include more than 2000 homes, as well shops and other amenities for community use, and, crucially, it was to be system-built: the use of cost-effective, industrialised building methods on one large site, would allow planners to absorb the £65,000 in abortive fees that were incurred when the original Aylesbury contract was snuffed out.<sup>132</sup> In the capital's 'most forceful' new borough, this was its centrepiece project—'the largest of its kind ever put forward by a London borough,' in the estimation of Crossman's successor at the Ministry of Housing, Anthony Greenwood.<sup>133</sup> Clearance would stretch north to south from East Street to Albany Road, and east to west from Alvey Street to Portland Street, making up a considerable chunk of the 'Walworth Square Mile.'<sup>134</sup> But while the site was extensive, it was far from straightforward, being notably long, thin and shallow; shaped like a crudely drawn and inverted letter L (Fig. 2.4).

It was quite difficult ... it's got all these sort of arms sticking out in different directions so it kind of plays to the linear form but you haven't got a great



Fig. 2.4 The inverted L of the Aylesbury Redevelopment Area. SCHC, *Aylesbury Housing Scheme* (13 April 1966), Box 256, Folder 12/64–5/66

deal of, in some places anyway, you haven't got a great deal of depth ... So you had this sort of slightly funny figure.<sup>135</sup>

The planners were further hampered by a number of existing housing blocks that were to be retained.<sup>136</sup> These included Michael Faraday and Gaitskell Houses, as well as Arklow House (30 flats) and Brockley House (15 flats), which Southwark purchased from the GLC in 1969 (for £44,000 and £22,000 respectively).<sup>137</sup> The presence of these buildings added to the site's irregularity, and limited the architects' scope in ways that a blank slate would not:

Your mind was thinking ... 'the existing street pattern ... forget about all that,' but actually you realise you couldn't forget about it because ... you had existing dwellings that were being retained on one side so you had to keep the street for them, so that meant you got the street where it always was, so what are we actually doing differently?<sup>138</sup>

In any case, much of what remained within the boundaries of the site was torn out in phases—or areas—between 1966 and 1970. For example, one housing committee document identified four clearance areas to the south of the site, encompassing a total of 280 houses across a number of streets, many of which (Sedan Street, Lebanon Street, etc.) went the same way as the houses.<sup>139</sup> This, and further Aylesbury clearance phases, were carried out under Part III (Clearance and Redevelopment) of the 1957 Housing Act, a process that, from the council's point of view, was largely clear-cut, if not at times protracted.<sup>140</sup> Once clearance was initially mooted by some combination of the architects, planning and public health departments, surveys of individual houses were often undertaken, before the proposals were presented to the relevant council committees and then ratified by the whole council.<sup>141</sup> At this point the proposals were made available to the public in the minutes of the council meetings, and the suggested compulsory purchase orders were submitted to the Ministry of Housing for confirmation. If public objections were raised—which they were—the Minister initiated a public inquiry, where Southwark was called upon to defend its plans.<sup>142</sup> One such meeting took place on 18 May 1965, at Southwark Town Hall, where the borough surveyor, John O'Brien, told the inquiry that the properties in question were 'old, in poor condition and a bad state of repair.'<sup>143</sup> The *South London Press* reported just one objection, put forward by a Mr W. Rudd, of Albany Road, who owned a

sports and fishing equipment shop in the area and who 'did not want to move far.' It went on: 'Other objections were withdrawn after it had been explained that the owners would be paid full market value of their properties.'<sup>144</sup>

Houses, streets, shops, doctors' surgeries, pubs, chemist's shops, a public assistance institution, market stalls, a classroom block, semi-industrial sites, a lemonade factory—all deleted during clearance. Thirty traders' licenses were revoked, and their market stalls removed, when a section of Westmoreland Road was stopped up in 1968.<sup>145</sup> R. White's Mineral Works, producers of the eponymous lemonade and for many years a notable employer in Camberwell and Walworth, was pulled down in 1969, to create 6.5 acres for 340 new homes.<sup>146</sup> The demolition in 1970 of Newington Lodge, the public assistance institution and former workhouse in which Charlie Chaplin was briefly an inmate in 1896, freed up 3 acres for 141 dwellings<sup>147</sup>:

We found a place in the small crowd that had gathered to watch the first brick of the old workhouse being removed by the mayoress of Southwark for the cameras ... The silence of the crowd during the short ceremony was broken by an old man behind us, who seemed close to death, but was hanging on for this moment, simply so he could see the building crumble, and spit: 'Good job an' all.' Whatever else those present had to fear about the future of their neighbourhood, they now had one less reason to fear the past.<sup>148</sup>

Hundreds of houses disappeared, along with the street patterns they were arranged around—a disposal that wrung out both people and place, irrevocably altering the complexion of the area, and leaving only stumps and remnants of what had been before:

I remember walking in streets somewhere up here ... where people were still living and other people kind of wandering around with that kind of lost feeling, you know 'It's all changed, what's happened?'<sup>149</sup>

Propelled by the borough's boot, thousands of Walworth residents (1652 families, according to the *South London Press*) left the Aylesbury Development area during clearance, the majority dispatched to nearby and newly built estates, or elsewhere in Southwark<sup>150</sup>:

This is part of what I'm talking about with the rolling programme, they had these other schemes which were being used to take people—they had two quite big schemes ... Acorn Place [Peckham] I think ... and then Bonamy Estate [Rotherhithe] was another one. It may well be that quite a lot of Aylesbury people went down there.<sup>151</sup>

It is important to note that while a great many in the borough keenly anticipated a housing upgrade ('Thousand tenement dwellers gratefully get the order of the boot from Minister'), others were less enthusiastic about clearance.<sup>152</sup> For some, particularly landlords and owner-occupiers, their objections were calculable, worried as they were about losing out through compulsory purchase. It was a position set out with strained logic in a *South London Press* editorial: 'tenants are earnestly begging to be thrown out, on the understood condition they all get council flats ... but if you look through the files of this paper you will see that most demands on this subject come from people who oppose clearance plans, especially compulsory purchase.'<sup>153</sup> No surprise, then, that those whose material interests were most at risk shouted the loudest. But others, of course, had concerns—if not objections—that were emotionally or instinctively triggered. In December 1967, Donald Skinner, headmaster of Michael Faraday Primary School, sited at the heart of the redevelopment area, described the feelings of distress that demolition brought about in his pupils. 'It is an intense emotional experience—these children will never be the same again,' he said. 'The children feel insecure—as though something has been wrenched away from them. Their whole life changes when they move away from their old familiar surroundings.'<sup>154</sup> The children themselves composed poems about the changes they were seeing, some of them startlingly poignant. Ten-year-old Christine Isted wrote about the 'scramble of bricks which were once a beautiful house,' while Pauline Wilson, also ten, added: 'I looked at the houses and thought of the happiness that once reigned ... It was now deserted and full of sadness.'<sup>155</sup>

As Alison Ravetz pointed out, the clamour to condemn the wholesale clearance of the old inner cities was conspicuously absent when the actual gutting was being carried out. (Prodded into action by the partial collapse of Ronan Point in 1968, the torrent of scorn and lamentation only came later.) Indeed, the fleeting 'boom' in high-rise housing that occurred between the late 1950s and the end of the 1960s was treated with a kind of benign and unexacting approval by the media.<sup>156</sup> While always low-key, the case against clearance in London had long been around. As early as

1938, at a Royal Commission into the causes and consequences of growth in the capital, Bermondsey general practitioner, Dr Westlake, argued vociferously for the restoration of the city's Victorian terraces.<sup>157</sup> And in spite of the damage the bombs inflicted, this was a spirit that lasted the war and beyond: more traditional-minded architects and critics of comprehensive redevelopment saw demolition as rash, even callous (but not quite the act of ancestral vandalism as it was later portrayed), and called for a reinvigoration of the existing stock. It was hopeless. By the early 1960s, supporters of rehabilitation were swimming against a potent tide of utopianism; an almost millenarian-minded vision, imagined by the architects and planners, and taken up with gusto by a broad cast of agents, most crucially politicians. Comprehensive redevelopment meant speed, scale, motorisation, modernity, a chance to stamp one's mark. Borough architect, Tim Tinker, speaking in 1966 to the *South London Press*: 'The area used to be full of little terraced houses each with its own garden and front door. In some respects this sort of development was very desirable but today's pressure on space means that it has to be pulled down and replaced with something better.'<sup>158</sup> A Southwark housing officer, a year later: 'One of our main aims is to eradicate the old style terraced houses ... that sort of development is out.'<sup>159</sup> Aylesbury architect, John Nichols:

There was a great belief in those days in comprehensive redevelopment ... there certainly was bad housing down there, there was bad housing that needed to be replaced. But there was also plenty of housing that today you wouldn't think twice about putting up for the restoration of it. That wasn't part of the picture. It wasn't an option that was open to local authorities ... so the whole thing comes in quite a sort of straight jacket but at the same time were these enormously ambitious goals about quantity, you know, new world-ism, so there you are.<sup>160</sup>

Like the children of Michael Faraday, there were others in Walworth who felt lost in the shuffle, notably residents whose families had lived in the district for generations, and who saw little reason for the housing to come down. Like Henry and Margaret Quennell, for example, who were born and brought up in the area, and who in turn lived, worked and raised a family there. Married in 1958, they resided in Wooler Street, on the Ecclesiastical Commissioners' Estate, adjacent to the development area, and a stone's throw from the newer properties of the Walworth Common

Estate, which were appropriated for demolition through compulsory purchase in 1968.<sup>161</sup> The Quennells' remembered them well:

*Henry Quennell:* Yeah, yeah, all little houses. Villa Street, you could go right down to Albany Road, so, and all the turnings of Mann Street and all those.

*Margaret Quennell:* Mann Street, Faraday Street, which was right next to the Faraday School ... yeah that was lovely houses.

*Interviewer:* They called them slum housing...

*Henry Quennell:* They weren't, there were people living there, it was lovely, you know ... Myself, I really loved them. I mean, that's it, that was us like, you know, there was all small cottages there and it was absolutely wonderful, it was really, to me, it was shocking when they brought ... the houses that you could actually, that people were actually living in like, you know, there was nothing wrong with them whatsoever and they just downed them to build the monstrosity that they built there.<sup>162</sup>

On a similar note, Stephen Humphrey made the case that the houses of the Walworth Common Estate could easily have been 'renovated to form a distinct and smart quarter,' while Tony Newman remembered them as looking 'very normal'<sup>163</sup>:

They weren't quite erm, you mentioned the Church Estate [Ecclesiastical Commissioners' Estate] ... they were always the posher ones, they always looked absolutely pristine, whereas the others, weren't grubby but, you know, they were lived in.<sup>164</sup>

Lastly, Harry Cole, a policeman stationed at the now-defunct Carter Street Police Station in Walworth Road for 30 years until 1983, and who wrote a series of humorous memoirs about life on the Walworth beat, described the redevelopment of the borough in apocalyptic tones:

The closest call the old borough ever had was in the early 1960s. Those narrow streets, alleys and lanes that had miraculously survived the Nazi bombs were suddenly devastated by what appeared to be a rogue meteorite. The heart was practically torn out of the borough by swarming hordes of demo-

lition men and builders. It seemed that for years the architects and planners who had been so busy in other parts of London were just itching to get at Southwark. When they did, they hit it with the ferocity of Norseman.<sup>165</sup>

It is doubtless that people living in Walworth during this period felt aggrieved at the changes as they were happening. People who watched Southwark Council carry on in an autocratic, hidebound fashion, and who felt powerless to it, bound and dragged in the wake of larger forces. It is doubtless that—at a different time or within a different context, and issues of tenureship aside—some or much of the ageing stock could have been updated, saved from the wrecking ball and bulldozers. And it is also doubtless that the planners and architects changed the mould forever: redevelopment struck a final blow at much of what was traditional in Walworth—a way of life that was essentially pre-war in its make-up, but one that lingered on into the 1950s and 1960s. But at the same time we should be wary not to conflate these facts and feelings into a generalised impression that life was somehow golden in the terraces and tenements, or intrinsically better than when the Aylesbury blocks were plunked down in their place.<sup>166</sup> Writers such as Collins and to a lesser extent Cole are peddlers of irresistible wares. The pre-Aylesbury past they present is what Ruth Glass would term a 'rustic lost paradise,' a catch-all 'community' that was curative to any and all material shortcomings.<sup>167</sup> This is the dented mirror of nostalgia; the product of spurious voices speaking too readily into the past. Cole, for instance, was clearly repulsed by the architecture of the 'monstrous' new estates:

Pensioners and young toddlers found themselves marooned twenty storeys up in the sky. People no longer gossiped across the alleys and tenement windows. Unless they met in the lift, they would not even *see* their neighbours for weeks.<sup>168</sup>

A revulsion of the new, though, does not necessarily speak to the merits of what came before it. As we have seen, many Walworth residents at this time—like working-class Londoners across the capital—were ready to shake off the hooks of a drab and squalid past. In possession of a new set of priorities, a forward-thinking purview that prioritised higher standards of material well-being, they sought and were desirous of new and better housing, whether within the borough or without.

Cognizant of sifting through that ‘which was dross and which not,’ the historian L.J. Carter warned of the pitfalls of looking back at Walworth through ‘rose-coloured glasses’:

The people who actually lived through those times knew all too well ... Walworth was, as now, just a place name ... indistinguishable from surrounding districts. No great events happened there. It had no claim to fame. Its most distinguishable features were ignorance and poverty. Its populace lived humdrum lives in poor surroundings.<sup>169</sup>

This, again, feels simplistic—a brisk gulp of generality. But stacked up against fetishised accounts of working-class, inner-city communities, such a stark portrayal does help us realise a more complexly textured imagining of past and place, where received notions of tradition and mutuality were often balanced by real desperation. The changes that Joyce Macdonald watched rocket into existence from her garden in Bagshot Street may not have been pretty. But they were needed, certainly, and eventually embraced.

### SLABS, SPEED AND NUMBERS

It will exist as a relatively brief entry in the annals of architecture, a moment lasting not much more than ten years from start to end. But while short, the episode of modernist mass housing in Britain was turbulent, beginning with a flash of innovatory promise and concluding symbolically with a literal bang. Its rise and decline are clearly traceable in the statistics: based on tenders approved by central government, the proportion of homes in blocks of five storeys or more in England and Wales averaged 6.9 per cent annually from 1953 to 1959, climbed to an apex of 25.7 per cent in 1966 and then dropped back to 9.8 per cent by 1970, of which just 1.8 per cent comprised dwellings in very high buildings of at least 15 storeys (compared to 10.4 per cent in 1966). In terms of total numbers approved for local authority construction, the annual output for these types of homes peaked at 172,557 in 1966 and fell to 98,080 in 1970.<sup>170</sup> After 1969, all but London and a handful of the largest cities in Northern England virtually ceased to build high, and only Greater London was notable for significantly increasing its proportion of approvals between 1966 and 1971, from 44 per cent to 67 per cent.<sup>171</sup> (London, in fact, accounted for 46 per cent of all multi-storey flats built in England and Wales between 1966 and 1971—a figure likely unforeseen by Forshaw and Abercrombie, whose

1943 *County of London Plan* anticipated only a 'certain number of high blocks up to ten storeys.'<sup>172</sup>

London aside, then, the high-rise housing 'boom' wound up in spectacularly short order. And, as we shall see, this winding up was carried out under a cloud of bad repute, helped along as it was by Ronan Point and the wider public and architectural distaste for the form that the tower's collapse fed into—a final reality more or less remote from the original ideal. It was the Modern Movement of the inter-war years that sparked the programme into life; figures like Walter Gropius (founder of the Bauhaus School) and Le Corbusier, who loomed large in the minds of a generation of young British architects looking to stamp their imitated mark on post-war developments. Popularly at least, the lessons and images of Le Corbusier, more so than anyone, were viewed as the conceptual basis for the innovation of high-rise housing in Britain.<sup>173</sup> His unrealised *Ville Contemporaine* (1922) and *Ville Radieuse* (1924), of which Marseille's Unité d'habitation (1952) was a built fragment and an unwitting prototype of the Brutalist movement, were especially cited. Le Corbusier's 'architectural revolution' was to be a clean break with a cluttered past.<sup>174</sup> The antithesis of happenstance growth. It would see vertical, ordered cities set in ample open space; tower and apartment blocks raised on pilotis; roof-gardens; 'the free plan, the free facade.'<sup>175</sup> These were to be mass housing solutions for mass society, built with mass production methods:

We must create the mass production spirit.  
The spirit of constructing mass production houses.  
The spirit of living in mass production houses.<sup>176</sup>

Le Corbusier's vision was a heady one—a hypnotic blast of modernism that 'exerted a direct influence on virtually all contemporary architects,' according to Dunleavy.<sup>177</sup> A few high-rise developments were duly raised (more testaments to—than fulfilments of—the Corbusian ideal). These included the point blocks and high slabs of the LCC's Alton West estate at Roehampton (1958), described by Nikolaus Pevsner—then the doyen of architectural criticism—as 'vast, yet not inhuman,'<sup>178</sup> and the 'elegantly restrained'<sup>179</sup> Sceaux Gardens estate in Camberwell (1959), which was developed by Frank Hayes and Hans Peter Trenton, the duo later in charge of the Aylesbury.<sup>180</sup> The modernist aesthetic was all of a sudden in vogue. Both the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) and the *Architectural Review*—which would later tear strips off of system-built

design—came out in favour of high-rise, and soon larger, more uncompromising developments began to follow. Of these, the Park Hill estate in Sheffield, built between 1957 and 1961, was perhaps most notable. It first put into practice the deck-access, ‘streets in the sky’ design—a system of elevated (safe from the perils of traffic below) walkways, bridges and linkages between blocks, that was later employed on the Aylesbury and elsewhere.<sup>181</sup> Park Hill was the scion of Alison and Peter Smithson, disciples of Le Corbusier and leading lights of the ‘new Brutalism,’ who captured the tone of the times by declaring small, pre-war houses to be ‘spiritually dead.’<sup>182</sup> High-rise, it seemed, would thrust from the rubble of Britain’s jerry-built past, conferring prestige on its towns and cities, the ‘crowning glory of the new welfare state.’<sup>183</sup>

How, then, from this elevated position of general acceptance and professional esteem, did the high flat fall so fast? E.W. Cooney traces its decline back to the 1950s, broadly speaking, when its trajectory began to make contact with central and local government at the level of policy and construction. For Cooney, it was an issue of control, which was quickly passed (or wrested) from the aesthetically concerned architect to the coldly utilitarian politician and planner.<sup>184</sup> As a means of expediting slum clearance and inner-city renewal, and of limiting urban sprawl, high-rise presented an irresistible option to those in the business of building thousands of new homes. Certainly, if there was a current that hastened its popularity with authorities at the time, it had little to do with the ideals of Bauhaus or Le Corbusier (spirit of mass production aside). By the beginning of the 1960s, it was clear that a multistorey drive was imminent. Large-scale contractors, eager to involve themselves, increasingly turned to industrialised building and its attendant advantages of speed and standardisation to strengthen their lure.<sup>185</sup> Mindful of ambitious output targets, prefabrication proved similarly beneficial to both Tory and Labour Governments, who in turn heaped downward pressure on municipalities to adopt it, as one Southwark architect explained<sup>186</sup>:

Councils were required ... to do a proportion of their new build with industrialised building ... central government didn’t say what sort of industrialised building, but they said it must be industrialised building.<sup>187</sup>

Speed was the order of the day. Speed and numbers. Adrian Forty argued that in social democracies across the West, where the rise in living standards was matched by a rise in expectations, prefabricated concrete allowed governments to stay ahead of the curve: building homes,

hospitals, roads and schools very quickly, and with unskilled labour, meant they could keep the 'scenery moving,' so to speak, and thus maintain an electoral advantage.<sup>188</sup> (In 1965, Crossman said Labour's public-housing programme would see 'all the new houses ... put up by industrialized system-building which wouldn't put an undue strain on the construction industry.')189 System building, then, offered a technological shortcut to social transformation. This was achieved with speed—the ability to keep the housing scoreboard spinning—and through a greater capacity to provide a dramatic leap in dwelling standards (the official 1961 Parker Morris Report, *Homes for Today and Tomorrow*, proposed hitherto unseen standards of space and heating for individual homes).<sup>190</sup> But prefabrication was not cheap. While it did ease the bottleneck on skilled labour and was less costly than traditional high-rise building methods, which had always been expensive, predictions of its trailblazing economy proved hollow.<sup>191</sup> To offset the extra costs incurred by councils, and to stimulate take-up, a progressive multistorey subsidy was put in place by government in 1956, under the same legislation that dissolved subsidies for general-needs building. This granted local authorities more money per flat the higher it was from the ground. For instance, flats at six-storeys received more than double the subsidy paid on the basic house rate, while 15-storey flats netted almost three times as much.<sup>192</sup> Eventually scrapped in 1965, the subsidy nevertheless succeeded in triggering the proliferation of high-rise.

Between 1955 and 1975, nearly 440,000 flats in blocks of five or more storeys were constructed in Britain. Of these, roughly 90 per cent could be found in its inner cities and, extrapolating from partial statistics, something like half were in Greater London (Fig. 2.5). Southwark itself laid claim to the largest high-rise stock of all the London authorities with 9460 flats—more than the entirety of Sheffield's output (8360), and just a shade fewer than Manchester's (9530).<sup>193</sup> Needless to say, the slabs and towers that began to push up from the London clay into the borough's smoggy firmament were a striking revision of the landscape, at once alarming and exhilarating:

I think I remember saying, 'Look at that, there's another tower' and ... I just found it a little bit, I suppose a bit scary really 'cause it's my, it's like my territory, and it was being invaded by monstrous towers, so, coming out of the ground like that, and who was gonna be moving in there, you know? ... it was a big shock to have tower blocks come out of the back of your sort of back garden.<sup>194</sup>



**Fig. 2.5** London's brave new world—the blocks of Thamesmead South, London Borough of Bexley. (Michael Romy, 2018.)

As the 1960s wore on, the blocks—now churned out with all the remorseless efficiency of the assembly-line—were increasingly seen as banal, routine and ill-considered. Architects ‘stood appalled’ as the tower blocks multiplied, regarding them as a bad simulacrum of an inspired innovation, hastily slapped together.<sup>195</sup> With an increase in the size and scale of many industrialised schemes—itsself an agent and beneficiary of clean sweep clearance<sup>196</sup>—came a diminishment in detail and quality: problems with damp, mould, sound-proofing and heating soon began to emerge on a number of newly built estates.<sup>197</sup> At least some of these problems could be laid at the door of Labour’s ‘housing cost yardstick,’ introduced in 1967. Designed to keep local authority spending on housing in check (compliance was awarded with preferential loan rates), it had the unintended but not unsurprising consequence of downgraded specifications.<sup>198</sup> Standardisation had, of course, limited the scope of the architect at the point of conception. But on site, too, local authority architects usually found themselves yoked to the contractor and its strictly costed system, as was the case on the Aylesbury:

The price that was paid as I said was kind of ultra-simple, repetitive, kind of rigidity of the system, was very difficult to make changes, to deviate from it ... For example, on the tall blocks, at the south end in each case overlooking what was going to be and what now is Burgess Park, the dwellings are rotated to ninety degrees so it looks straight over the park, and that battle to achieve that within the budget just went on and on and on and Laing [the contractor, John Laing Construction Ltd] initially just wouldn't have it, it was too expensive, it was a variation. So there was a very, very strong discipline, both within that system and also on the part of Laing ... So this kind of straightjacket was quite powerful and very real.<sup>199</sup>

But it was not just architects who were held powerless under the builders' sway. Dunleavy argued that the tentacle-reach of the construction industry was all-pervading; that it wielded influence and control at almost every stage of the redevelopment process. Just as central government put pressure on municipalities to adopt prefabricated designs, whether they liked them or not, so too did big building companies cajole government to move in their favour. This saw councils buying up their system-built 'kits' and policy-makers advancing the multistorey subsidy, from which they thrived. Dunleavy also drew attention to the myriad links that existed between the building industry, politicians and civil servants during the years of Conservative government. While this was no cabal of cut-throat industrialists and grafting politicians, the interests of construction companies were nonetheless well represented in Parliament and elsewhere, as Dunleavy spelt out.<sup>200</sup>

Ronan Point would call into question the structural competence of high blocks, but as mentioned above, the critical backlash was already underway.<sup>201</sup> (Although high-rise would at no point account for any more than 10 per cent of all public housing in Britain, it was as if mass housing as a type had reached saturation point.)<sup>202</sup> Some pointed to issues of management and upkeep on the new estates—problems that, for the most part, existed separate from design, even if this was rarely acknowledged. Others, meanwhile, took aim from a broader stance of anti-Modernism. Here writers such as Simon Jenkins and Christopher Booker attacked the 'evils of high-rise living'<sup>203</sup> and the arrogant paternalism of planners, and who larded their criticisms with consecrations for the past: 'By the late sixties and early seventies, we encounter a new kind of journalist in housing matters ... who essentially offered one basic juxtaposition: Old and New. To put it into the most simple terms: that which already existed was almost

automatically good.’<sup>204</sup> In many ways mass housing had done the job asked of it: thousands of families had been favourably rehoused, and the political urgency (and public outcry) for production was to a good extent diminished. In the minds of many commentators, though, such transformative outcomes appeared to be of little significance, even for those who recognised the material step-up in life that the new blocks allowed. Nicholas Taylor, for example, in his 1967 article in *The Architectural Review*, ‘The Failure of Housing,’ wrote:

There is an almost surrealist contrast between the spacious irregularity of the dining-kitchens inside and the inflexible unhumanity of the scheme’s exterior, in which all hint of the single home is suppressed beneath a rigid uniform of 12M-Jespersen window bands and pre-cast units resembling a technical college or a flatted factory.<sup>205</sup>

The scheme he described was the St Mary’s estate in Oldham (now demolished, its 12 M-Jespersen system was the same one used on the Aylesbury). In spite of its generous, modern living spaces, to which he alluded, the estate, like all modern estates, was an alienating “neo-slum” that suppress(ed) individual freedom beneath the veneer of a generalized image of “urbanity.”<sup>206</sup> Taylor’s was the sort of rhetoric used to excuse the dismantling of Modernist-inspired estates for decades to come. Perhaps the first example of this was the inter-war built Quarry Hill flats in Leeds, which were optioned for demolition as early as 1973. (‘A couple of decades later the estate would surely have been listed,’ stated John Boughton, of the *Municipal Dreams* blog.)<sup>207</sup> For Charles Jencks, however, it was the dynamiting of a section of the Corbusian-inspired Pruitt-Igoe public housing complex in St Louis, Missouri, in 1972, that ‘marked the day Modern architecture died.’<sup>208</sup>

It was into this atmosphere of endorsed finality that the Aylesbury was eventually erected: like Park Hill, or the Smithson’s Robin Hood Gardens in Poplar, East London, it was seen as just another in a crop of badly thought-out monoliths that would help drive a nail in the form’s coffin. Not that this was of any short-term consequence to those living in or near the development site, whose concerns were more immediate than any architectural rebuke: in October 1969, council residents from Inville Road, Gaitskell and Michael Faraday Houses, among other proximal blocks and streets, requested that Southwark reduce their rent to help mitigate the disruption that building brought about. Blocked roads,

construction dust, and the constant rumble of trucks and lorries (often the most dispiriting agents of change) were among their many grievances: 'Complaints of all kinds were being received throughout 1968 and during 1969 they reached large numbers, resulting in numerous meetings with the Tenants' Association.'<sup>209</sup>

On 6 November 1967, John Laing Construction Ltd entered into a contract with Southwark Council to design and build the 2127-unit Aylesbury in accordance with its large panel 12 M-Jespersen system ('a welcome fillip for [its] ailing Jespersen campaign,' said Glendinning and Muthesius).<sup>210</sup> Work began just a few days later<sup>211</sup> (Fig. 2.6). Drawn up with optimism in 1966, Southwark's initial *Aylesbury Development Proposals* foresaw a scheme in which its industrialised methods would derive 'maximum economic advantage' and provide 'better standards of accommodation and finishes.'<sup>212</sup> In the event, however, much of the opposite came to pass. In the tight-fisted spirit of cost yardstick financing, the Ministry of Housing ordered borough architect, Hans Trenton, to reduce the as-yet unsigned contract by £1.5 m.<sup>213</sup> The price eventually agreed with Laing was £10,996,178, but, somewhat ironically, unplanned costs of £1.5 m accrued during construction, bringing the final figure up to £12.5 m—likely the tendered price to begin with.<sup>214</sup> (One estimate at the time suggested the estate could have been built to the same density and standards by traditional methods for roughly £7 m.)<sup>215</sup> Spiralling costs notwithstanding, the initial bite out of the budget resulted in the omission of certain design details and an admitted cheapening in the quality of the finish: 'If you are asked to cut £1.5 million in that time the finishes will suffer—and it is purely on finishes,' said Trenton.<sup>216</sup> So the 'better ... finishes' that the architects had envisioned were rendered bland and ersatz. Expanses of bare concrete, plain tarmac and cheap glass abounded—a 'depressing' sight, according to an *Observer* article hyperbolically titled: 'Cost cuts cause a concrete horror.'<sup>217</sup> But the problems posed by Ministry penny-pinching were not just aesthetic. An extensive—and, as it turned out, expensive to remedy—laundry list of issues and repairs quickly accumulated, which in many cases sullied the new residents' first impressions (described in the proceeding chapter).

Wide of the mark on money and standards, the aforementioned proposals did however get it right on speed: 'Proper planning and organization [would] ensure a completion date far in advance of any which would have been possible had the site been developed as a number of smaller contracts employing traditional methods.'<sup>218</sup> Work on the Aylesbury



**Fig. 2.6** Wendover block under construction, 1969. (Courtesy of the John Laing Photographic Collection.)

began later than it did on the nearby, 1384-home North Peckham project—built by the borough’s direct-labour force in a conventional manner—but, as envisaged, finished well beforehand.<sup>219</sup> Aylesbury was always a key piece in Southwark’s housing vision; a golden opportunity to cut a swathe through its waiting list. Prompt completion was given high priority: ‘If Laings built Aylesbury with the speed and efficiency that seemed promised, they reasoned, that people could be “decanted” into Aylesbury,

either to stay, or to wait until other big estates in the borough neared completion.<sup>220</sup> John Nichols was one of several young architects recently graduated from the Architectural Association who came to work at Southwark in the mid-1960s.<sup>221</sup> He recalled the way in which Laing went about its business—exacting and relentless, always eager to push on, to meet the borough's 'amazingly tight programme for delivering the thing':

[Laing] set up actually a pretty fierce programme of meetings, churning stuff through, everything was submitted to us for approval ... we'd comment, go back to them, they'd revise, then they'd come out again. So they were very diligent ... I mean the organisation of it was really remarkable, and actually as a ... constructional project it was very remarkable and Laing deserve most of the credit for that.<sup>222</sup>

And it was, to be sure, Laing's project. Southwark provided the brief, but it was Laing that carried much of the design and technical work forward: 'When I arrived ... there was the brief and you started to think, you know, "What the bloody hell, how do we go about this?" ... In that respect the decision to use Laing ... was a very good one because Laing actually, the whole of the production drawing, the working drawings as they were called, programme, was already done by Laing.'<sup>223</sup> Frank Hayes and Trenton were elusory figures, decidedly hands-off ('I don't think either of them were able to help very much with what we were doing to be frank'), while elsewhere in the architects' office, and in the departments of planning and housing, wisdom often appeared invisible: 'I don't think this is a libellous statement, but I do think that we in Southwark ... were very, what shall we say, lacking in experience and not really understanding what had been committed to.'<sup>224</sup>

Construction was carried out in two phases. The first comprised the lion's share of building, and was completed by 1972—two years after the estate opened. Work on the second phase, which included the Newington Lodge (141 dwellings) and R. White's factory (340 dwellings) extensions, as well as an annexe for the Michael Faraday School, wrapped up in 1977.<sup>225</sup> It was a rectilinear scheme, set down grid-like, the buildings arranged in long, straight runs to accommodate the lorries and 'skyscraping'<sup>226</sup> cranes that were necessary for construction: 'the way it was built ... you had these sort of railway tracks and the cranes just moved up and down, and they dropped the stuff as it came in on the lorries, picked it up and kind of dropped it in place.'<sup>227</sup> Four and five-storey low-rise blocks

extended east to west, near uninterrupted, while much taller slabs ran north to south ('so that both sides of them and their surrounding areas receive the sun').<sup>228</sup> The estate was arranged with a markedly horizontal stress, rather than vertical, 'echoing the form of an ocean liner.'<sup>229</sup> But this did nothing to detract from its monumental proportions, its sometimes imposing scale. The tallest blocks reached as high as 14 storeys.

Car parking was installed beneath the larger blocks, often over two storeys, meaning that in many cases the flats began on a building's third floor. These lower levels were built in situ, using poured concrete, which demanded a store of precision if the panels were going to fit: 'the Jespersen doesn't start until about three or four storeys up ... so the problem was once you made a decision you couldn't unmake it.'<sup>230</sup> Remember, this was a world of radical vision, of burgeoning mechanisation—of the formative Buchanan Report, bursting with prophetic nuggets. Anticipating a near future in which the motor car would dominate the city (coursing unobstructed on motorways and flyovers, ownership nudging 100 per cent), Southwark was zealous in its provision:

The brief called for hundred per cent parking, in other words every dwelling had to have a car parking space. In addition to that there was a one in three provision for visitor parking, so there was a hundred and thirty per cent ... I mean this notion arose of sticking all the parking, you know, a lot of the parking under the tall blocks ... And then there are all these garages, you know, at the bottom of the low-rise stuff.<sup>231</sup>

'Short loops' and culs-de-sac service roads were an attempt to design out rat runs and short cuts, while sections of Portland Street and Thurlow Street—the north-south running primary roads that trisected the estate—were widened to provide 'significant relief' to the encompassing Walworth Road-Albany Road-Old Kent Road circuit: 'the idea was to actually bring traffic in ... on this scheme.'<sup>232</sup> A further example of planning in thrall to the motor car was the 'great sort of sweeping bends that you could whizz round,' installed where Albany Road met Thurlow Street and Portland Street: 'they had guidelines laid down from upon high, which implied the ideal design of a road, in an urban area, was that you could drive at a constant thirty miles per hour. You get all these crazy sightlines that were applied at junctions ... because you were supposed to be able to drive around these corners at speed.'<sup>233</sup>

Pedestrians, meanwhile, were to be sequestered to the sky, fed along Aylesbury's extensive network of raised 'pedways,' ramps, lifts and stairs—13 miles of human track.<sup>234</sup> The deck-system operated at two elevations. At first-floor level, the 'local decks,' which provided access to dwellings in the lower blocks and nearby play spaces, but that could also be 'used for children's play and other amenities.'<sup>235</sup> And at second-floor level, the 'route decks,' for a 'direct path' to all corners of the estate, including its shopping areas, 'without danger from cars or service vehicles.'<sup>236</sup> It was thought that the pedways would one day straddle Albany Road, bridging the estate with the as-yet unbuilt Burgess Park—then referred to as the North Camberwell Open Space—but this never materialised. Of course, residents were also entitled to 'circulate at ground level,' on good old-fashioned pavements. These, however, were to be 'meandering routes intended rather for leisurely walks than for getting from place to place, the decks being reserved for that purpose.'<sup>237</sup> As we shall see, the pedway system ranked high on some respondents' list of complaints. And, in what became a well-worn narrative trope, concerning the Aylesbury as well as other 'streets in the sky' estates in Britain, it was later associated with violence and a lack of safety. Even at the outset, before the estate was populated, the walkways aroused concern. In 1969, for example, Councillor Greening argued that the ramps' slopes were too steep.<sup>238</sup> At the design stage, too, at least some of the architects considered them a dubious prospect, a 'very difficult problem to deal with':

I think that we all the time kind of plagued by this thought that it's slightly barmy to have to go up two floors to walk along a deck to go through a bridge to get down to the ground again, which is what happens in all the low-rise blocks.<sup>239</sup>

The estate's 36 blocks were named, like the estate itself, after villages and small towns in the county of Buckinghamshire—Taplow, Wolverton, Gayhurst and so forth—as if this might lend a bucolic aspect to such an explicitly urban form.<sup>240</sup> There were a few quibbles in the process. Members of the Housing Committee disliked the name 'Stokenchurch' and requested that 'Missenden' be used instead of 'Misbourne,' while the GLC rejected 'Denham' on grounds of duplication. All was approved and ready for signage in December 1968—a new set of coordinates for the postman to navigate.<sup>241</sup>

By the autumn of 1970, many of the blocks and amenities were nearing completion, and the flats, done up to Parker Morris standards, were ready to be lived in, despite Councillor Andrews' assertions to the contrary ('A concrete jungle not fit for people to live in.'). The carpets were plush, the walls freshly painted, the appliances shiny and new. The bathrooms were fitted, the toilets indoors, the district heating up and running. There were pram sheds, laundry rooms, meeting halls, club rooms. There was a nursery, a children's home, flats reserved for the elderly. There were playgrounds and open areas. Each flat had a private balcony and many of the maisonettes looked on to its own outdoor space. Some of the larger maisonettes had dining rooms. All that was missing were people. They would soon arrive in their hundreds.<sup>242</sup>

## NOTES

1. Michael Collins, *The Likes of Us: A Biography of the White Working Class* (London: Granta, 2004), 154.
2. *South London Press*, 28 June 1963; see also: *SLP*, 25 October, 1974 ('Southwark residents are getting used to seeing elephants, white or otherwise, in the northern part of the borough').
3. Oliver Marriott, *The Property Boom* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1967), 214.
4. Collins, *Likes of Us*, 145.
5. Tony Newman, 15 October 2015.
6. Stephen Humphrey, 'Walworth Since 1939: A Lecture Given at the Cuming Museum' (1 November 2011), <http://www.putitonthemap.org/history>, accessed 18 March, 2016. Discussions aside, plans to redevelop the Elephant and Castle area were incorporated in J.H. Forshaw's and Patrick Abercrombie's *County of London Plan, 1943* (London: Macmillan, 1943), 138.
7. Alison Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture* (London: Routledge, 2001), 104–108.
8. Quote in Sue Goss, *Local Labour and Local Government: A Study of Changing Interests, Politics, and Policy in Southwark, 1919 to 1982* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1988), 57. The 31-acre Elephant and Castle Comprehensive Redevelopment Area, as initially defined by the Administrative County of London Development Plan, 1951, did not encompass the Aylesbury Redevelopment Area or the Heygate Redevelopment Area, which would border the Elephant site. London County Council, *Administrative County of London Development*

- Plan, 1951: Areas of Comprehensive Redevelopment: No. 5—Elephant and Castle* (1951).
9. Collins, *Likes of Us*, 173.
  10. *Crossroads*, March 1974, 10.
  11. Orford (ed.), *Book of Walworth*, vii. Established in 1894, the Browning Hall Settlement—attached to the Congregational Chapel in Browning Street, Walworth—offered educational, social, and practical services to the local community. Like the neighbouring Pembroke House (established 1885), the settlement served the area's poor.
  12. Orford (ed.), *Book of Walworth*, 51, 12.
  13. At 1 acre for every 14,185 people, Southwark held the dubious distinction of having the least amount of open space per size of population of all the London boroughs in 1925; Walworth boasted 1 acre of open space for every 16,648 people. See: Orford (ed.), *Book of Walworth*, 34.
  14. Many of these tenements and rows of terraced houses were built to house the influx of workers and their families in the first half of the nineteenth century. See: Len J. Carter, *Walworth, 1929–1939* (London: L.J. Carter Services, 1984), 38.
  15. Orford (ed.), *Book of Walworth*, 51.
  16. Orford (ed.), *Book of Walworth*, 8.
  17. Orford (ed.), *Book of Walworth*, 8.
  18. *South London Chronicle*, 15 October 1887.
  19. Ida Darlington (ed.), 'The manor of Walworth and parish of St. Mary, Newington', *Survey of London: Volume 25, St George's Fields* (London: London County Council, 1955), 81–90, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/survey-london/vol25/pp81-90>, accessed 8 February 2016.
  20. Octavia Hill and Charles Edmund Maurice (ed.), *Life of Octavia Hill as Told in Her Letters* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1913), 562.
  21. Richard Mann, 'Memories of a Walworth Childhood 1945–1965' (Unpublished Memoir, 2013). Today, the estate stands as Aylesbury's older, much smaller and, paradoxically, much healthier neighbour, hugging its western edge. Even if its social underpinnings have been abandoned—it was sold to private landlord, Grainger plc, in 2011—the bricks and mortar will likely remain entrenched long after Aylesbury's concrete blocks have gone.
  22. Carter, *Walworth*, 38.
  23. Like the rest of London, the heaviest bombing in Walworth took place during the Blitz (between September 1940 and May 1941), and again from the summer of 1944 to spring 1945, when V-1s and V-2s were fired on the city. See: Humphrey, 'Walworth Since 1939' (1 November 2011). Humphrey's assessment of the comparatively modest damage sustained in Walworth is borne out by the LCC's own bomb damage maps:

- Ann Saunders (ed.), *The London County Council Bomb Damage Maps, 1939–1945* (London: London Topographical Society, 2005).
24. Mann (Unpublished Memoir, 2013).
  25. Quoted in David Kynaston, *Austerity Britain, 1945–51* (London: Bloomsbury, 2008), 72–3.
  26. Nick Bullock, 'Ideals, Priorities and Harsh Realities: Reconstruction and the LCC, 1945–51', *Planning Perspectives*, vol. 9 (1994), 88.
  27. *SLP*, 26 February 1945.
  28. Benjamin Higgins, 'Public Investment and Full Employment', in Robert W. Dimand (ed.), *The Origins of Macroeconomics: Volume 10* (London: Routledge, 2002), 260.
  29. *The Times*, 4 August 1945.
  30. Peter Malpass, *Housing and the Welfare State: The Development of Housing Policy in Britain*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 68.
  31. Bullock, 'Ideals', 89.
  32. Jerry White, *London in the Twentieth Century: A City and Its People* (London: Vintage, 2008), 43.
  33. Bullock, 'Ideals', 89.
  34. *SLP*, 9 April 1947.
  35. Sue Goss, *Local Labour*, 56.
  36. As the building industry became overstretched in the post-war years, the Ministry of Housing imposed strict controls on yearly local authority house building starts. See: Neil McIntosh, *Housing for the Poor? Council Housing in Southwark* (Southwark: Southwark Community Development Project, 1975), 11.
  37. *SLP*, 4 January 1952.
  38. *SLP*, 4 January 1952.
  39. *SLP*, 1 February 1952.
  40. In Lynsey Hanley, *Estates: An Intimate History* (London: Granta Books, 2007), 91. These numbers were achieved with the help of a greater reliance on private sector housebuilding from 1953, which increased in both absolute and proportionate terms in almost every year until 1964. Even so, the number of council homes was still rising at a steady rate throughout this period. See: Malpass, *Housing*, 83.
  41. Hanley, *Estates*, 91.
  42. Stephen Merrett, *State Housing in Britain* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), 246. The Dudley Report assessed the design and quality of council housing built before 1939 and, working from this context, recommended more living space, the latest fixtures and fittings, and a greater variety of dwellings in future construction. Despite pressure to substitute speed for standards, and thus compromise the report's recommendations, Bevan held firm: 'While we shall be judged for a year or two by the num-

ber of houses we build ... we shall be judged in ten years' time by the *type* of houses we build.' Quote in Michael Foot, *Aneurin Bevan: A Biography, Volume II: 1945–1960* (London: Davis-Poynter, 1973), 82.

43. Malpass, *Housing*, 84.
44. This is not to dismiss out of hand the ambition, quality and detail of many earlier, pre-subsidy examples of high-rise housing (such as Roehampton's Alton Estate, constructed in the early 1950s), where quality was often elevated at the expense of quantity—an approach poles apart from that of later years. Glendinning and Muthesius described the LCC housing programme of the mid-1950s as exhibiting an 'abhorrence of standardisation' and a 'lack of both production discipline and cost-consciousness.' Miles Glendinning and Stefan Muthesius, *Tower Block: Modern Public Housing in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 265.
45. Goss, *Local Labour*, 55. Mellish quoted in Glendinning and Muthesius, *Tower Block*, 267.
46. Newman, 15 October 2015.
47. Newman, 15 October 2015.
48. Michael Young and Peter Willmott, *Family and Kinship in East London* (New York: Routledge, 2011), xvi–xix. In his 1946 work, *Tenement Town*—a look at life in the LCC's inter-war-built Honor Oak Park Estate in Brockley, South London—L.E. White saw the new blocks as the slums' attenuated successors, lacking the community of the old neighbourhoods, and bereft of social provision. The Honor Oak estate was, he said, 'the true habitat for a rootless generation.' See: L.E. White, *Tenement Town* (London: Bedford Park Press, 1946). Quote in L.E. White, *Community or Chaos: New Housing Estates and Their Social Problems* (London: National Council of Social Service, 1950), 66.
49. Newman, 15 October 2015.
50. *SLP*, 3 March 1952.
51. *SLP*, 3 March 1952.
52. *SLP*, 3 March 1952.
53. Quoted in Goss, *Local Labour*, 56.
54. Collins, *Likes of Us*, 152.
55. A.D.C.S. Cameron, *Annual Report of the Medical Officer of Health for the Year 1962* (Metropolitan Borough of Southwark: Public Health Department, 1962), 63. The concept of management in council housing—'proper' or otherwise—was very much in its infancy at this point. Like the building of the homes themselves, management was left to the discretion of local authorities and, in most cases, was a matter of learning on the job. Central government guidance was minor at best. See: Ravetz, *Council Housing*, 111–24.

56. Collins, *Likes of Us*, 158.
57. Bermondsey Borough Council, *The Official Guide to the Borough of Bermondsey* (London: Pyramid Press, 1963), 29; quoted in John E. Turner, *Labour's Doorstep Politics in London* (Minnesota: Minnesota University Press, 1978), 97.
58. At 12,294 dwellings built, Camberwell was third only to Wandsworth (20,108) and Woolwich (13,371). Southwark lagged behind with just 5790 homes built. See: Greater London Council, *London Statistics, 1955–1964: New Series*, vol. 7 (1968), 101; Bridget Cherry and Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: London 2, South* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 562.
59. Evelyn Fernando and Barry Hedges, *Moving Out of Southwark* (London: Social and Community Planning Research Centre for Sample Surveys, 1976), 6; Humphrey, 'Walworth Since 1939' (1 November 2011).
60. Humphrey, 'Walworth Since 1939' (1 November 2011).
61. Great Britain Historical Geographical Information System, *A Vision of Britain Through Time: Southwark Metropolitan Borough* (Portsmouth, University of Portsmouth), [http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10039680/cube/TOT\\_POP](http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10039680/cube/TOT_POP), accessed 8 March 2016.
62. Cameron, *Annual Report*, 21–22; Fernando and Hedges, *Moving Out*, 6.
63. Great Britain Historical Geographical Information System, *A Vision of Britain Through Time: Bromley UD/MB* (Portsmouth, University of Portsmouth), [http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10041466/cube/TOT\\_POP](http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10041466/cube/TOT_POP), accessed 21 March, 2016; Great Britain Historical Geographical Information System, *A Vision of Britain Through Time: Bexley UD/MB* (Portsmouth, University of Portsmouth), [http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10107970/cube/TOT\\_POP](http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10107970/cube/TOT_POP), accessed 21 March 2016.
64. White, *London in the Twentieth Century*, 156–158.
65. A profile that, while hollowed out somewhat in the 20–45 age bracket, was by no means yet statistically bimodal. See: Cameron, *Annual Report*, 21–22.
66. David Clark, *Immigrant Responses to the British Housing Market: A Case Study in the West Midlands Conurbation: Working Paper in Ethnic Relations No. 7* (Bristol: University of Bristol, 1977).
67. Newman, 15 October 2015.
68. The 1991 Census was the first to ask how respondents identified themselves in terms of ethnicity.
69. Mary Jane Staples was a pseudonym used by Walworth-born Reginald Thomas Staples (1911–2005). Staples wrote a 29-book saga chronicling the life and times of a Walworth family.
70. Mary Jane Staples, *A Sign of the Times* (London: Corgi Books, 2006), 211.

71. A Trinidadian writer and immigrant, Donald Hinds described the discriminatory practices of an estate agency in Kennington, just west of Walworth, and further drew attention to a sign displayed in a newsagent's shop window in neighbouring Camberwell, which read: '1 LARGE DOUBLE ROOM, COOKING FACELITS, SUITABLE FOR MARRIED COUPLE, NO COULARS.' See: Hinds, *Journey to an Illusion: The West Indian in Britain* (London: Heinemann, 1966), 80–81.
72. Collins, *Likes of Us*, 185.
73. White, *London in the Twentieth Century*, 146–147.
74. Aubyn Graham, 4 March 2015.
75. *SLP*, 15 August 1961.
76. Graham, 4 March 2015.
77. Quoted in Clare Ungerson, *Moving Home: A Study of the Redevelopment Process in Two London Boroughs* (London: Occasional Papers on Social Administration No. 44, 1971), 42.
78. Quoted in Ungerson, *Moving Home*, 42.
79. Harold Carter, 'Collective Action and Social Exclusion in the British Post-War Housing Programme' (2006), <http://www.ehs.org.uk/dotAsset/adbf15f9-9523-4d14-9dd9-4d9fef57973e.pdf>, accessed 23 March 2016. There are a number of resources that deal with the West Indian experience of settling in London, including the disillusionment faced when it came to matters of housing. See: Ruth Glass and Harold Pollins, *Newcomers: The West Indians in London* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961); Wallace Collins, *Jamaican Migrant* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965); Derek Humphry and Gus John, *Because They're Black* (London: Penguin Books, 1972).
80. This was generally the case in London at the time. The Milner Holland Committee report of 1965 estimated that 190,000 families in the capital were in desperate need of re-housing, while 61,000 single people lived in rooms with no sink or stove—numbers that had risen since official figures were released in the early 1960s. Labour Minister for Housing, Richard Crossman, said in response to the report that these Londoners could not wait 'five or six years' for council housing. They were 'compelled to accept what the private landlord can provide in furnished or unfurnished accommodation. The one kind of housing which is in desperately short supply, outside the council estates, is just that accommodation which these lower paid families or migrants can afford.' Richard Crossman, quoted in Cathy Davis, *Finance for Housing: An Introduction* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2013), 180–81; Edward Milner Holland, *Report of the Committee on Housing in Greater London* (London: HMSO, 1965).
81. McIntosh, *Housing for the Poor?*, 15.

82. Harold Macmillan, 'Speech to the Urban District Councils Association', June 1954, quoted in Raphael Samuel, James Kincaid and Elizabeth Slater, 'But Nothing Happens', *New Left Review* (No. 13–14), 1954, 39.
83. Stuart Lowe, *The Housing Debate* (Bristol: The Policy Press, 2011), 92.
84. *SLP*, 8 January, 1963. The plans were seemingly unprompted by anything other than the steadily worsening housing situation. They did, however, coincide with the reimagining of the Elephant and Castle. See: Goss, *Local Labour*, 57.
85. McIntosh, *Housing for the Poor?*, 21.
86. Joyce McDonald, 5 November 2014.
87. *SLP*, 2 January 1963.
88. *SLP*, 2 January 1963.
89. *SLP*, 5 June 1963.
90. Goss, *Local Labour*, 70–71.
91. Ministry of Housing and Local Government, *London Government: Government Proposals for Reorganisation*, Cmnd. 1562 (London: H.M.S.O., 1961), 3.
92. Glendinning and Muthesius, *Tower Block*, 276.
93. Michael Hebbert, *London: More by Fortune Than Design* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 1998), 111. On matters of housing and planning, the balance of powers between the GLC and the London boroughs were never fully specified by the 1963 Act, and much had to be filled in later by ministerial regulations. On the whole, the relationships were tricky, bogged down as they were by intractable conflicts, bureaucratic sluggishness and the brevity of political office. It was a situation examined in close detail in Ken Young and John Kramer, *Strategy and Conflict in Metropolitan Housing: Suburbia versus the Greater London Council, 1965–75* (London: Heinemann, 1978).
94. The Conservatives subsequently promised 500,000 per annum by 1968. See: Malpass, *Housing*, 93.
95. Around 20 per cent of borough land at this time was owned by Dulwich College.
96. Community Development Project, *Whatever Happened to Council Housing? A Report Prepared by National Community Development Project Workers* (London: CDP Information and Intelligence Unit, 1976), 86; Goss, *Local Labour*, 71.
97. Goss, *Local Labour*, 70.
98. Unnamed Southwark councillor, quoted in Goss, *Local Labour*, 71.
99. Glendinning and Muthesius, *Tower Block*, 280.
100. Glendinning and Muthesius, *Tower Block*, 282; Goss, *Local Labour*, 72.
101. Community Development Project, *Whatever Happened to Council Housing?*, 86. Mellish, who had special responsibilities for London housing,

- was a key man in driving up construction numbers and, by keeping watch on CPOs and allocations, no doubt had a sizeable hand in the scale of Southwark's redevelopment programme.
102. Up to 9000 families, according to one local study. See: Community Development Project, *Whatever Happened to Council Housing?*, 86.
  103. SLP, 12 December 1967.
  104. Richard Crossman, *The Diaries of a Cabinet Minister: Volume One, Minister of Housing, 1964–66* (London: Book Club Associates, 1976), 44.
  105. Crossman, *Diaries*, 44; Nigel Taylor, *Urban Planning Theory Since 1945* (London: Sage Publications, 1998), 24.
  106. Labour had by this point come to accept the rise as inevitable, even desirable—many Labour voters either owned or aspired to own their own homes; *The Spectator*, 26 November 1965, 3.
  107. In 1964, 148,624 council homes were completed; in 1963, the figure was just 118,179. See: Malpass, *Housing*, 84.
  108. Crossman, *Diaries*, 169.
  109. Malpass, *Housing*, 94; Jim Yelling, 'The Incidence of Slum Clearance in England and Wales, 1955–85', *Urban History*, vol. 27 (2000), 243–254.
  110. Yelling, 'Slum Clearance', 244.
  111. Yelling, 'Slum Clearance', 242.
  112. David Biss, 7 September 2015.
  113. Goss, *Local Labour*, 71–72.
  114. Tim Tinker, 31 October 2012.
  115. John Nichols, 30 September 2014; see also: Ben Campkin, *Remaking London: Decline and Regeneration in Urban Culture* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013), 81.
  116. Ministry of Housing and Local Government, *Moving from the Slums: Seventh Report of the Housing Management Sub-Committee of the Central Housing Advisory Committee* (London: H.M.S.O., 1956), 3.
  117. Ministry of Housing and Local Government, *Moving from the Slums*, 3.
  118. Unnamed Southwark resident quoted in Ungerson, *Moving Home*, 36.
  119. Unnamed Southwark resident quoted in Ungerson, *Moving Home*, 37.
  120. Unnamed Southwark resident quoted in Ungerson, *Moving Home*, 15.
  121. Unnamed Southwark resident quoted in Ungerson, *Moving Home*, 15.
  122. Ungerson, *Moving Home*, 54–60; Goss, *Local Labour*, 73.
  123. Ungerson, *Moving Home*, 55.
  124. Southwark Council, *Living in a Development Area: A simple guide to a number of problems confronting owners and occupiers of properties in Development Areas* (London Borough of Southwark: Borough Development Department, 1969).
  125. Ungerson documents a handful of instances in which residents were kept hanging on, some of them very sad. One interviewer wrote of an elderly

- resident: "This was very worrying ... "I don't even know how much coal to get for the winter". She isn't buying a new dustpan and brush because she wants to have everything new when she moves. She is completely unaware that she may never move—she may well be dead (she's eighty now). She's very bewildered and worried.' See: Ungerson, *Moving Home*, 35.
126. Quoted in Ungerson, *Moving Home*, 46.
  127. Peter Shapely, *The Politics of Housing: Power, Consumers and Urban Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 72.
  128. Quoted in Ungerson, *Moving Home*, 46.
  129. Newman, 15 October 2015.
  130. Jean Bartlett, 19 September 2014.
  131. Southwark Council Housing Committee, *Aylesbury Development Area* (13 April 1966), Box 256, Folder 12/64–5/66.
  132. Community Development Project, *Whatever Happened to Council Housing?*, 87; McIntosh, *Housing for the Poor?*, 20–21; SCHC, *Aylesbury Development Area* (13 April 1966), Box 256, Folder 12/64–5/66.
  133. Greenwood quoted in Anon. 'Clear-slums drive gets under way' (undated, c.1967).
  134. Greenwood quoted in Anon. 'Clear-slums drive gets under way' (undated, c.1967).
  135. Nichols, 30 September 2014.
  136. London Borough of Southwark Department of Architecture and Planning, *Walworth Area Study: Aylesbury Redevelopment Proposals* (2 May 1966), Box 256, Folder 12/64–5/66.
  137. SCHC, *Aylesbury Development Area—Arklow and Brockley Houses* (9 June 1971), Box 260, Folder 6/71–4/72.
  138. Nichols, 30 September 2014.
  139. SCHC, *Aylesbury Clearance Areas Nos 1, 2, 3, 4* (10 November 1965), Box 256, Folder 12/64–5/66.
  140. SCHC, *Aylesbury Clearance Areas Nos 1, 2, 3, 4*.
  141. Nichols, 30 September 2014: 'You could only get the money to acquire the sites if you condemn the property as slum property. And they had a fairly simple checklist of things that the property had to have or didn't have and they would kind of go around and say, "right, that lot" or "this lot."'
  142. Ungerson, *Moving Home*, 10–11.
  143. *SLP*, 21 May 1965.
  144. *SLP*, 21 May 1965.
  145. SCHC, *Aylesbury Development Area—Road Closing Orders* (2 April 1968), Box 256, Folder 6/67–5/68.

146. SCHC, *Aylesbury Development—R. White's Factory Site* (12 April 1972), Box 260, Folder 6/71–4/72; David Cleverly, 17 June 2015: 'all along the Walworth Road and ... Albany Road, were all sort of business premises, warehouses, R. White's Lemonade factory, all sorts. In fact my sister worked there for quite a long time.'
147. SCHC, *Aylesbury Redevelopment Area—Newington Lodge* (21 January 1970), Box 259, Folder 6/69–4/70. Newington Lodge appeared in Jeremy Sandford's 1966 BBC television play, *Cathy Come Home*, directed by Ken Loach. Sandford began to campaign on issues of housing shortages and homelessness after a neighbour and her children were evicted and placed in Newington Lodge during the 1950s. Sandford wrote of the LCC-run institution: 'More than three families each day in London become homeless in the sense that there's nowhere to sleep but the street. Many of them are sent by the police or local authorities to Newington Lodge in Westmoreland Road, Southwark ... Well over 20,000 families have passed through this place since the war.' Jeremy Sandford, 'Families Without a Home', *Jeremy Sandford Fan Club Archives*, <http://www.jeremysandford.org.uk/jsarchive/warp-families-without-a-home.html>, accessed 26 May 2016.
148. Collins, *Likes of Us*, 176.
149. Nichols, 30 September 2014.
150. *SLP*, 21 May 1965; *SLP*, 4 February 1972.
151. Nichols, 30 September 2014.
152. *SLP*, 11 July 1969.
153. *SLP*, 24 May 1966.
154. *SLP*, 12 December 1967.
155. *SLP*, 12 December 1967.
156. Ravetz, *Council Housing*, 106.
157. Hebbert, *London: More by Fortune*, 77; known colloquially as the Barlow Commission, the Royal Commission on the Distribution of the Industrial Population was chaired by Sir Anderson Montague-Barlow, and its report was presented to Parliament in 1940.
158. *SLP*, 20 May 1966.
159. *SLP*, 30 June 1967.
160. Nichols, 30 September 2014.
161. SCHC, *Walworth Common Estate: Appropriation of Properties in the Aylesbury Development Area* (28 February 1968), Box 256, Folder 6/67–5/68.
162. Henry and Margaret Quennell, 6 March 2015.
163. Humphrey (1 November 2011).
164. Newman, 15 October 2015.

165. Harry Cole, *Policeman's Story: Hilarious Tales of Life on the Beat* (London: Fontana, 1985), 151.
166. It is perhaps telling that those respondents who spoke in defence of the Walworth Common Estate (even if it was, by all accounts, in better repair than much of the housing surrounding it) either lived in the 'posh estate' (the Quennell's) or in the 'all-singing, all-dancing' Faraday House (Tony Newman).
167. Ruth Glass, *Clichés of Urban Doom* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 28.
168. Cole, *Policeman's Story*, 151–52.
169. Carter, *Walworth*, 1.
170. E.W. Cooney, 'High Flats in Local Authority Housing in England and Wales since 1945', in Anthony Sutcliffe (ed.), *Multi-Storey Living: The British Working Class Experience* (London: Croom Helm, 1974), 151–52.
171. Patrick Dunleavy, *The Politics of Mass Housing in Britain, 1945–1975: A Study of Corporate Power and Professional Influence in the Welfare State* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 43.
172. Forshaw and Abercrombie, *County of London*, 78; Dunleavy, *Politics*, 43.
173. Ravetz, *Council Housing*, 105–7.
174. Le Corbusier, *Concerning Town Planning* (London: Architectural Press, 1947), 72.
175. Corbusier, *Concerning*, 72.
176. Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture* (London, Architectural Press, 1946), 210.
177. Dunleavy, *Politics*, 54.
178. Nikolaus Pevsner, Mathew Aitchison (ed.), *Visual Planning and the Picturesque* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2010), 198.
179. Cherry and Pevsner, *Buildings of England*, 562.
180. In 2009, a faulty television ignited a blaze in Sceaux Gardens' 14-storey Lakanal House, killing six people. Less than a week after the fire, *The Guardian's* Jonathan Glancey, under the headline 'Our Lethal Estates,' apportioned blame to the design of the building, and called for an 'audit of these and similar buildings.' In 2013, an inquest found the fire to be largely caused by 'botched and unsafe renovation work and [Southwark] council's failure to inspect the building.' See: Glancey, 'Our Lethal Estates', *The Guardian*, 9 July 2009; Peter Walker, 'Lakanal House tower block fire: deaths "could have been prevented"', *The Guardian*, 28 March 2013.
181. Deck-access received a significant fillip in the form of Colin Buchanan's 1963 report, *Traffic in Towns*, which argued for the separation of pedestrians and road traffic in urban reconstruction. See: Buchanan, *Traffic in Towns* (London: HMSO, 1963).

182. Alison and Peter Smithson quoted in Jane Darke and Roy Darke, *Who Needs Housing?* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1979), 125.
183. Hanley, *Estates*, 103.
184. Cooney, 'High Flats', 151–77.
185. Notable contactors included Wimpey, Taylor Woodrow, Wates, and John Laing Construction, which went on to build the Aylesbury.
186. Malpass, *Housing*, 84.
187. Tinker, 31 October 2012.
188. Adrian Forty, *Concrete and Culture: A Material History* (London: Reaktion Books, 2013), 163–64.
189. Crossman, *Diaries*, 169–70.
190. Local authorities were urged by the government to adopt the standards set out in the report, but they were only *required* to do so between 1969 and 1981. See: Malpass, *Housing*, 94.
191. Dunleavy, *Politics*, 84–88; Ravetz, *Council Housing*, 105.
192. Dunleavy, *Politics*, 162–163.
193. Dunleavy, *Politics*, 39–49.
194. Roger Carson, 6 October 2014.
195. Cooney, 'High Flats', 177.
196. Harold Carter, 'Building the Divided City: Race, Class and Social Housing in Southwark, 1945–1995, in *The London Journal: A Review of Metropolitan Society Past and Present*, vol. 33 (2008), 168.
197. Ravetz, *Council Housing*, 105.
198. Goss, *Local Labour*, 73.
199. Nichols, 30 September 2014.
200. Dunleavy, *Politics*, 20–22.
201. This is not to understate the catastrophic effect the explosion at Ronan Point had on the public's opinion of high rise, and of local authorities generally. Hanley, who wrote an account of the disaster, said: 'My mother's cousin did as she was told and went to live on the top floor of one of the thirty-two tower blocks that were being built ... at the same time that Ronan Point was falling down. She would hang on to the kitchen counter every time the wind got up.' Hanley, *Estates*, 110–11.
202. Malpass, *Housing*, 84–5.
203. Simon Jenkins, *Landlords to London: The Story of a Capital and its Growth* (London: Constable and Company, 1975), 262; Christopher Booker, *Goodbye London: An Illustrated Guide to Threatened Buildings* (London: HarperCollins, 1973).
204. Glendinning and Muthesius, *Tower Block*, 309.
205. Nicholas Taylor, 'The Failure of Housing', *Architectural Review*, November 1967, 341–58.
206. Taylor, 'Failure of Housing', 352.

207. John Boughton, 'Quarry Hill Flats, Leeds: 'They didn't get it wrong—well not for me anyway!'', *Municipal Dreams*, 26 February 2013, <https://municipaldreams.wordpress.com/2013/02/26/leeds-the-quarry-hill-flats/>, accessed 30 April 2016.
208. Charles Jencks, *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture* (New York: Rizzoli, 1984), 9.
209. SCHC, *Aylesbury Development—Reduction in Rents and Rates of Adjoining Properties* (31 October 1969), Box 259, Folder 6/69–4/70.
210. SCHC, *Aylesbury Housing Scheme* (10 November 1971), Box 260, Folder 6/71–4/72; Glendinning and Muthesius, *Tower Block*, 282.
211. SCHC, *Aylesbury Housing Scheme* (10 November 1971).
212. SCHC, *Aylesbury Housing Scheme* (13 April 1966), Box 256, Folder 12/64–5/66.
213. *SLP*, January 1975.
214. SCHC, *Aylesbury Housing Scheme* (10 November 1971); *SLP*, January 1975.
215. *The Architect*, April 1975, 30.
216. *SLP*, January 1975.
217. *The Observer*, 19 January 1975.
218. SCHC, *Aylesbury Housing Scheme* (13 April, 1966).
219. Goss, *Local Labour*, 72; *SLP*, January 1975.
220. *The Architect*, April 1975, 30.
221. In all, the borough's architects' department was made up of 18 officers and 5 clerks of work, each with an assistant. See: *SLP*, January 1975.
222. Nichols, 30 September 2014.
223. Nichols, 30 September 2014.
224. Nichols, 30 September 2014.
225. SCHC, *Aylesbury Redevelopment—Newington Lodge Site—Erection of 141 Dwellings* (5 October 1970), Box 259, Folder 6/70–4/7; SCHC, *Aylesbury Development—R. White's Factory Site*.
226. *The Observer*, 19 January 1975.
227. Nichols, 30 September 2014.
228. SCHC, *Aylesbury Redevelopment: London Borough of Southwark Department of Architecture and Planning* (25 October 1966).
229. Laura Barton, 'Death of an estate', *The Guardian*, 14 October 2005.
230. Tinker, 31 October 2012.
231. Nichols, 30 September, 2014. Parking and garaging was also provided for the existing housing on site. See: SCHC, *Aylesbury Redevelopment: London Borough of Southwark Department of Architecture and Planning* (25 October 1966).
232. *Aylesbury Redevelopment* (25 October 1966); Nichols, 30 September 2014.

233. Tinker, 31 October 2012.
234. *The Architect*, April 1975, 31.
235. SCHC, *Aylesbury Development Area* (13 April 1966).
236. SCHC, *Aylesbury Redevelopment* (25 October 1966).
237. SCHC, *Aylesbury Development Area* (13 April 1966).
238. SCHC, *Report of Building Contracts Joint Sub-Committee* (19 September 1969), Box 259, Folder 6/69–4/70.
239. Nichols, 30 September 2014.
240. Completed, the estate was 44 blocks. See: SCHC, *Aylesbury Plus Initiative* (18 June 1997), Box 625, Folder 5/97–7/97.
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## CHAPTER 3

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# Community, in All Its Complexity, 1970–1979

By our re-building we are determined to rejuvenate the Borough and steadily transform Southwark into a place where the community of people in the twentieth and twenty-first century can be happy and proud to live.

—*Aylesbury Development Area Opening Ceremony Brochure*, 11 April, 1970.<sup>1</sup>

There is a moment in *The Writing on the Wall*, the 1974 BBC documentary on the perceived shortcomings of Modernist housing, when architectural theorist and de facto presenter, Oscar Newman, walks along an empty stretch of landing on the Aylesbury estate, telling us what is wrong with it: ‘There are no windows from the dwelling unit that look out onto this space. A mother of a young child can’t really be asked to allow the child to play out here when she can’t see it.’<sup>2</sup> Newman pauses and invites us to gaze upon a child, lying on the ground in the dark recess behind him, small head and shoulders poking out of a doorway. ‘There isn’t even a window in the door of the unit so that the child could play immediately out the door with any degree of safety,’ he says. There is a punishing cut to Newman’s remarks, an avowedly blunt rejection of the estate, summoned from his own theoretical stance.<sup>3</sup> But it is perhaps the child’s glum face that tells it best; the boy’s listless eyes, unfazed by Newman or the camera, that seem to be saying: ‘I’d rather be anywhere but here.’<sup>4</sup>

The image is almost too perfect, too neat a correspondence with Newman’s grave commentary. The film transitions to a handful of man-on-the-street interviews with residents about the new estate. We hear

various gripes and grievances on issues ranging from privacy to noise, to a more general dislike of the lifts, walkways and stairwells. ('You never know who's on the stairs,' says a young mother. 'There have been a couple of incidents of err, men being on the stairs.')

But for all its ominous tenor, and its lingering shots of abundant concrete and harsh angularity, the film never truly gives a sense that there is something so wrong with the Aylesbury. Amid the dressing down, we see smiling faces, children scuttling eagerly along ramps, a girl playing with a baby on a walkway—a happy counterpoint to Newman's housebound child. The estate looks clean and modern, despite the grainy monochrome. One interviewee, included, presumably, as a nod to journalistic balance, says of her new home: 'Well it's heaven. Having a bathroom, having water, no up and down stairs with slop-pails and water. Kiddies can have a bath when they want it.' The narrator, John Mansfield, adds: 'Some think it's terrible, but many are grateful for their new homes.'

The 'Aylesbury Development Area' was declared open on the afternoon of the 11 April 1970. The ceremony was performed by Minister for Housing and Local Government, Anthony Greenwood, at the estate's Amersham Community Centre, and was followed by speeches by Sir Kirby Laing, Chairman of John Laing Construction Ltd, and Councillor John O'Grady, then leader of Southwark Council. Guests were invited to take a tour of the estate and to inspect a sample dwelling. Light refreshments were served.<sup>5</sup> A further opening ceremony took place just a few months later, in October 1970, to mark the arrival of the estate's first residents. It was here that Southwark councillor and early Aylesbury critic, Ian Andrews, tramped out in disgust. 'People should not be herded into confined spaces like cattle,' he remarked. 'The quality of life inevitably begins to suffer and social problems break out.'<sup>6</sup> He reserved the brunt of his criticism for the estate's supposed drabness and monotony. 'Variety is said to be the spice of life, but there is precious little of it at Aylesbury,' he stated.<sup>7</sup>

Like the Newman film, contemporary newspaper accounts of the estate's opening were tempered in some small part by the appearance of residents. At this early stage, Southwark was understandably bolshie in its defence of the Aylesbury. It was its creation after all. But it was the handful of tenant voices filtering up through the column inches that proved far more illuminating. Rita King, for example, told the *South London Press* in 1970: 'No. I don't think [the Aylesbury] is inhuman or bleak.' Mrs. King, her warehouseman husband, and their two young children moved to the

estate from tenements in an adjacent borough: ‘There we had an outside lavatory, no bath, and I had to boil every drop of hot water in kettles or pots.’<sup>8</sup> Another resident, cleaning supervisor Albert Ford, said: ‘When you’re putting up buildings like this, you have got to expect some inconvenience... I moved in three weeks ago. I think it is marvellous.’<sup>9</sup> This was the hidden crux of it, the crucial detail lost in the brouhaha: residents, it seemed, were generally happy with their new surroundings, in spite of the material problems that began to emerge (see below), and regardless of Newman’s doomsday shtick.

It was a point picked up by Tony Aldous of *The Times*, who, in delineating the various arguments lobbed against the estate, including those of Councillor Andrews (a legal executive living in Dulwich), wondered whether the criticism was simply ‘middle-class.’<sup>10</sup> But Aldous went further, arguing that the council had in fact ‘missed’ the detractors’ message, middle-class or otherwise: ‘The real question is not: “Is this better than they had before?”’, but: “Is this the best we can do for them within the constraints of a council housing budget?”’<sup>11</sup> This, however, seems like a different line of enquiry altogether, one estranged from the criticisms of which he is writing (and one, surely, that could be asked of any municipal development). David Gerrard, vicar at St Paul’s Church in Walworth, and Gerry Williams, a local social worker, warned that the Aylesbury, and estates like it, would transform Southwark into a ‘1984 nightmare ghetto.’<sup>12</sup> Williams added: ‘People are not happy cooped up in council flats and this kind of environment leads to many social problems.’<sup>13</sup> Such statements—published in the *South London Press* in September 1970, while the estate was still largely uninhabited<sup>14</sup>—like those of Andrews, had little to do with any question of what the council could have done differently within the parameters of a budget.<sup>15</sup> Instead, by foretelling misery, and by presuming to inhabit the psychic interior of tenants, they shaped and fed a harmful narrative. It was, as we shall see, a narrative that gathered steam over time, and one that proved impossible to shed. It was also largely at odds with the residents’ own outlook, many of whom ‘would laugh at such ... criticism,’ as one Southwark spokesman put it.<sup>16</sup>

What follows is an attempt at an audit of the Aylesbury in its first decade. It will consider how community on the estate grew up and arranged itself, in all its complexity, and with the insight of tenants and others who knew the estate well. Shining a light on the first intake of residents, it will look at how they embraced the estate; how they adapted to and coped with the difficulties it threw up; and how, as locals, they were

buoyed throughout by recognisable faces, and the still (for now at least) familiar landscape and institutions that remained close by. The concrete was one thing, but tenants, too, were agents of their own environment, importing with them attitudes and beliefs that were applied to those around them. And of course the council, itself grappling with the size of the project, loomed large: at this stage its housing policies and practices were imbued with a distinctly paternalistic tenor.

By the end of the decade, upwards of 12,000 people had been housed on the Aylesbury, each with their own experiences and opinions of the estate.<sup>17</sup> In listening to some of their voices, it becomes clear that these experiences and opinions diverged significantly with media treatments, in all their frenzied pitch. But the media was nevertheless crucial in shaping the Aylesbury's public image. As we shall see, it was also to some extent formative in the way residents thought about their new home.

### 'WE THOUGHT WE'D WON THE POOLS'

In December 1970, 37-year-old printer and warehouseman, Derek Way, moved with his wife and young son into a brand new flat on the tenth floor of Aylesbury's Chiltern block—the place he would call home for the next 41 years. 'It was like moving into a palace,' he said.<sup>18</sup> Meanwhile, on the other side of the estate, 24-year-old Carol Vincent and her mother (and their dog), had become proud occupants of a two-bedroom, eighth-floor flat in Taplow block, where, at the time of writing, she has stayed to this day: 'it was a beautiful flat, absolutely.'<sup>19</sup> Just four storeys above them, at 180 Taplow, postal worker Julia Lindmeyer, also 24, and her parents, were among the first residents to be housed in the building. 'I liked the spaciousness of the rooms,' she said. 'And the wonderful views we enjoyed from the twelfth floor.'<sup>20</sup> A year later, in November 1971, Donna Grant and her family moved into a three-bedroom maisonette in the low-rise Gayhurst block, two days before her tenth birthday:

We thought, 'Oh my God', we thought we was moving into Buckingham Palace or something like that because it was huge ... it was just me and my sister in this one room, my brother had the other room ... and then my Mum and Dad had the other room. What fascinated us most was the bath ... you just put the plug in the hole, turn on the taps and it fills up, and you don't have to pour buckets of water in ... it was like a miracle.<sup>21</sup>

Among other new faces on Gayhurst were 33-year-old dinner lady, Pat Davies, along with her husband, son and two daughters, who previously made do in a one-bedroom flat near Penrose Street, Walworth, until they moved in August 1972. ‘Oh, this was heaven, it was heaven,’ she said.<sup>22</sup> By this time, Billy ‘Jock’ Sinclair and his young family were already established in a three-bedroom flat on the first floor of Wendover—the largest of the blocks—where they had lived since 1970. ‘We thought we’d won the pools when we got a house on the Aylesbury Estate,’ he said. ‘I thought it was brilliant,’ added his wife, Cindy.<sup>23</sup>

The list could go on. Citing benefits of space, cleanliness, warmth, lift access, expansive views, abundant natural light and, most emphatically, indoor plumbing, resident after resident said they liked their new homes for the most part. Just as Southwark were ‘proud’ of their ‘showpiece’ estate, those residents who could claim a small piece of it as their own were similarly pleased.<sup>24</sup> This was at a time in Walworth when just one person in eight had a fixed bath, only 30 per cent had hot water, and an overwhelming 78 per cent of people believed the area was unfit for raising children.<sup>25</sup> In view of such a penniless landscape, likening the still-gleaming Aylesbury to ‘Buckingham Palace’ feels less than far-fetched. Certainly, residents had clear in their minds a past against which the present could be favourably measured (Fig. 3.1). Brother and sister Martin Gainsford and Lisa Baxter were aged seven and five when they moved a short distance across the Walworth Road, from Grosvenor Terrace to the smaller of the Chartridge blocks, in 1971:

*Lisa Baxter:* We were living in a very old terraced house ... we had no bathroom, we had a shared toilet that we used to share with the people upstairs, and there was a toilet outside, and we had no hot water ... it was just normal to us, and we used to have to drag in a tin bath from the backyard, and my Granddad would be happily sitting there having a bath while we were having our dinner. That was just life.

*Martin Gainsford:* And then we would have the next one, and the next one.

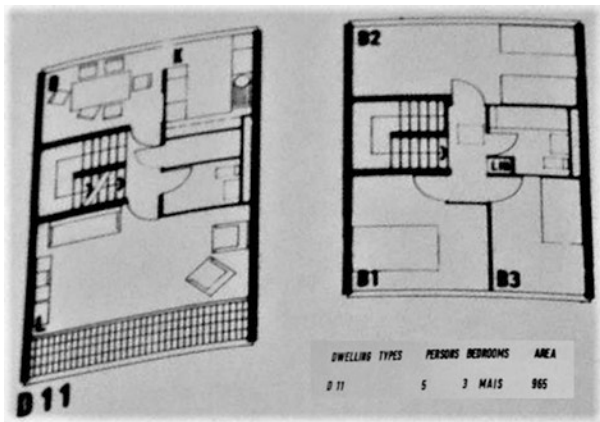
*Lisa Baxter:* And you’d share the water. And then when we got offered, my family got offered a place on the Aylesbury Estate, it was this lovely place with gardens and, you know, there was car parking for everybody, and we had two bathrooms, hot and cold running water, heating on tap, and it was, the rooms were huge, big windows, and we thought it was going to be like this utopian world, and it was, we weren’t unhappy there.<sup>26</sup>



**Fig. 3.1** Old against new, July 1976. (Courtesy of John David Hulchanski, University of Toronto.)

Here, then, was the ‘new way of living,’ the elusive ‘modernity’ arrived at long last.<sup>27</sup> Freed from some of the more stifling aspects of tenement life, many residents were suddenly in possession of an unfamiliar degree of privacy—from neighbours, but also within the home (more and separate areas for bathing, dressing and sleeping—see Fig. 3.2). Those who had the means to do so were now equipped with the space and scope to indulge their own domestic vision if they so wished: like a blank canvas, the flats were waiting to be filled—with possessions, adornments, the many material comforts that make a house a home. Linda Cleverly worked as a play-group and adult education leader on the Aylesbury in the 1970s and 1980s:

I mean one of the families that came to this group, I remember going into their flat one day, they had great big chandeliers hanging from the ceiling, you know they were sparkling inside. They took a lot of trouble with their little children, dressing them up. Smart furniture. You know they valued their flats I think.<sup>28</sup>



**Fig. 3.2** Floor plan for a sample three-bedroom, 965-square-foot Aylesbury flat, arranged over two floors. (SCHC, *Aylesbury Redevelopment*, 25 October 1966.)<sup>30</sup>

In 1974, eight-year-old Sandie Read and her family moved into 57 Chartridge—a four-bedroom flat—in which all the extra yardage actually posed somewhat of a problem, albeit a welcome one:

When we got moved here it was like, ‘Whoa’, you know, it was just like, no matter what you put out in it, it just looked empty, it really did ... we had a bathroom, toilet and another toilet and a massive front room ... Kitchen, diner, the bedrooms as well. Seriously, no one would ever want to move off there.<sup>29</sup>

Many residents were intensely proud of their new homes. They had been handed something decent, something secure (statutorily so as of 1980),<sup>31</sup> something they wanted to keep immaculate:

You could always see white net curtains up, you know. My mum, I can remember Mum hanging out—because we didn’t have a window cleaner then—hanging out the window like, everyone did, everyone cleaning their porch, it was spotless.<sup>32</sup>

Some people made their flats into little palaces inside, and you know you could close that front door and you could be anywhere.<sup>33</sup>

Here, for the briefest of moments, post-war council housing was somewhat unbound by the shackles of social ranking later fastened by the right to buy and the ensuing cult of homeownership.<sup>34</sup> Living on an estate was seen as perfectly normal. And renting from Southwark—or any municipality—was a much-prized way of life, better than most, and certainly as good as any other. On the Aylesbury, at least, the value residents placed on their homes was largely unaffected by notions attached to tenure type, if only for a short while.

This value did not immediately fall away at the front door. Up until 1975—when cleaners were employed by Southwark to supplement the duties of caretakers on estates<sup>35</sup>—the condition of Aylesbury's landings, corridors, stairwells, and other communal areas, hinged in no small part on the elbow grease of many women residents:

The pathways you keep clean, you take turn eaches [sic] because sometimes there's three to a porch or two to a porch, take turn eaches like cleaning the bins out, like put a bit of bleach in, and washing your patio bit, the doorway, you know, and that's how it was.<sup>36</sup>

Sandra Williams was 27 when she and her mother moved into Chiltern block in 1974. For years she and her neighbours kept their 12th-floor corridor spick and span: 'Of a Sunday morning ... I used to sweep all the way along, they used to wash, and then I would polish it, you know ... it looked like water, you know, because it was nice and polished.'<sup>37</sup> It was much the same at Gaitskell House, where residents drew up a weekly cleaning rota: 'people had to do the things themselves ... they used to have to wash the stairs down ... they used to scrub the stairs.'<sup>38</sup> In sweeping and scrubbing, residents revealed a depth of investment in the new estate. Normal was the desire for order and control, but so was the need to breathe life into the Aylesbury, to help stoke an atmosphere of commonality and accord.

Those cleaners eventually put to work in Southwark (50 full-time, 64 part-time) were, 'generally ladies living on the estates ... thus they have a very direct interest in the work being undertaken.'<sup>39</sup> One such woman was the mother of Sandie Read. She remembered her 'sweeping, you know, mainly the stairways ... making sure they were swept and washed down, disinfecting.'<sup>40</sup> 'There was always someone sweeping the walkways,' added Pat Davies. 'They was always kept clean.'<sup>41</sup> The resident caretakers had a hand in the cleaning, too. But they were also tasked by Southwark with a

great deal more. From seeing to repairs to carrying out nightly patrols to keeping an eye on the elderly and infirm, their responsibilities were many and varied, and occasionally far-fetched—somehow they were expected to oversee the ‘prevention of hooliganism.’<sup>42</sup> Of course, whether or not they fulfilled these duties was another matter. Some residents, for example, saw them as partial, unavailing figures:

*Martin Gainsford:* We had a resident caretaker.

*Lisa Baxter:* What did he actually do anyway?

*Martin Gainsford:* Well he would kind of mooch about with a dustcart.<sup>43</sup>

Others, like Martin and Lisa’s uncle, Robert Millward, viewed them predominantly as a ‘point of contact’—a bridge between residents and the council.<sup>44</sup> Certainly, by reporting voids, damage, and disputes between tenants, they were in many ways the frontline of housing management. Others still held their caretaker in much loftier regard:

If you dropped a wrapper, trust me, the caretaker’s behind ya ... you know, if we was chalking, he would come banging at our mums’ doors saying your daughter or your son had been doing this ... basically he was on call twenty-four seven, bless him, but nothing was too much trouble. He was strict. He knew every kid on that block. He knew exactly where you lived, you could give a false name but he knew exactly where you come from, trust me, ‘cause he’d drag you back there. It was the old school way, drag you by the collar, neck, like you were a dog.<sup>45</sup>

Here, the caretaker is positioned as a guardian or paladin of some sort, defending the fragile bonds of custom and practice; the official (and unofficial) arrangements that permitted the estate, or at least a section of it, to function well. But with responsibility came risk apparently. In 1974, a caretaker intervened when two girls, aged nine and ten, were found in a block’s laundry room, doing the family wash unsupervised. Later, when speaking to the girls’ parents, the father ‘assaulted the caretaker with the result that the caretaker had to go to hospital.’<sup>46</sup> The family were subsequently evicted and rehoused elsewhere in the borough.

Southwark’s reins were drawn tight on its tenants for much of the 1970s. A feature of estate management since the first forays into council housing under the 1919 Addison Act, paternalism—a ‘pragmatic’ credo of education, regulation, and control (and shorthand for ‘We Know

Best')—had flourished in the post-war years.<sup>47</sup> This was emphatically the case in Southwark, where the housing department, led by director, John O'Brien, enforced its rules and regulations with military exactitude, and with scant regard for resident input. As Alderman Sawyer, chairman of the Housing Committee, told the *Southwark Tenant* in 1972: 'There have to be times when we have to do things which all the tenants do not like ... We always have reasons for decisions, though you may not always accept them.'<sup>48</sup> John Synnuck, who succeeded O'Brien as Director of Housing in 1986, worked as an estates' officer in Southwark between 1970 and 1975:

It was very paternalistic ... and this is absolutely true, [tenants] weren't allowed to—we had washing areas, and if they hang their washing out on their balcony, if it was a ground floor balcony, we cut it down and gave it back to them. And they weren't allowed dogs in flats or maisonettes, but if they were slum-cleared, they were allowed to keep the dog that they had in the slum clearance. But we had a picture of the dog and every year we housing officers had to go round and check that was the same dog. And we evicted people who replaced the animals, physically evicted them ... This was throughout the borough, including the Aylesbury. Throughout the borough. That was 'We know best.'<sup>49</sup>

It seems the council's bite was the equal of its bark. Of the 15 dogs in Wolverton block in 1973, it was discovered that only 11 had been brought from clearance areas. Lacking the requisite permission to keep them, two residents disposed of their dogs, while another two were issued warning letters advising them that 'notice to quit will be served ... if they fail to comply with the council's request.'<sup>50</sup> But it was more than just slapped wrists and disciplinary fervour: at this stage housing management encouraged residents to take pride in their homes. For example, they staged yearly balcony and window box competitions<sup>51</sup>:

*Joyce McDonald*: I mean look at the building now, it's grey, but you imagine they had all window boxes ... They even put a Christmas tree over there once.<sup>52</sup>

They also undertook an 'internal decoration cycle'—a four-yearly upgrade of every flat on the estate<sup>53</sup>:

The council initially, free of charge, the council decorated your house ... you'd choose your wallpaper, choose your paint ... it was brilliant. Me nan

would be making them sandwiches, cups of tea, ‘Oh do you want the telly on? The cricket’s on today.’<sup>54</sup>

Clearly, this was a period in which Southwark was mindful of the habits and behaviour of its tenants—at times excessively so. The council demanded conformity, respect, a readiness to yield to its ways. Whether this was to do with an archaic and engrained assumption that tenants were the fortunate recipients of municipal generosity or a belief that the cultural gap between the swish new estates and those residents recently pulled from the ‘slums’ would prove problematic (as if they were wild animals, preternaturally domesticated), the borough’s outlook was decidedly patronising, top-down and rule-heavy. Such an approach was already out-moded, but as the size of the housing department continued to swell, and as the composition of the tenant body diversified, it would soon come to be seen as impractical and inappropriate. Many original tenants, however, are unlikely to have batted an eyelid at the council’s interventionist methods. And as Alison Ravetz pointed out, it ‘was not uncommon for [paternalism] to be fondly remembered by tenants ... when it contrasted unfavourably with the later and more impersonal style.’<sup>55</sup> Even Alan Crane, chair of the Housing Committee in the mid-1980s, who saw himself as responsible for ‘breaking up ... the fiefdom of Sawyer and O’Brien,’ believed the old-fashioned way had its merits: ‘you know, to be fair, although it was very one-sided and all the rest of it, to be fair, the housing stock in Southwark was pretty well looked after.’<sup>56</sup>

### GETTING TO KNOW YOU

‘We do not like to take a firm hand with people, but we shall have to with families who have chosen one particular spot and say they won’t go anywhere else.’<sup>57</sup> This was the message delivered by Alderman Sawyer to Southwark residents in 1967. If being cleared from their homes was not disorientating enough, their wish to be rehoused locally was framed by the council as a ‘problem’ to be dealt with. ‘People must not be reluctant to move across the old borough boundaries,’ Sawyer added.<sup>58</sup> Many tenants *were* asked to traverse these freshly scratched outlines (Harry Matthews, for one, moved to the Aylesbury from Peckham, in the old borough of Camberwell, in 1971, while Joan Amodio, social secretary [and later chair] of the estate’s inaugural tenants’ association (TA), was a ‘Bermondsey girl ... Aylesbury’s people are the people she grew up with—one parish

removed').<sup>59</sup> But many more, as it turned out, would only journey so far: from East Street, Congreve Street, Madron Street<sup>60</sup>; from in and around the Heygate redevelopment area and the Elephant and Castle—places like Gurney Street, Ash Street, Rodney Place, the Palatinate tenement buildings close to the New Kent Road<sup>61</sup>; from Kennington, Newington, Brook Drive, Collinson Street<sup>62</sup>; from the western side of Walworth Road and Camberwell Road—Manor Place, Penrose Street, Stopford Road, Sturgeon Road, Grosvenor Terrace.<sup>63</sup>

Residents of particular streets and blocks, such as those living in the 'mouldering slums'<sup>64</sup> of the Queen's Buildings in Scovell Road, were transplanted en masse.<sup>65</sup> This was more likely a logistical matter than a considered design to give long-standing communities a chance to re-establish themselves. Nevertheless, the fact that many neighbours moved together engendered a feeling of familiarity on the estate: 'Yeah, we all come out the same turnings, loads of us like, and even people you worked with from other parts of the borough come to the Aylesbury, so you knew 'em like.'<sup>66</sup>

Yet moving together did not necessarily mean staying together. Anne Lorraine was 15 when she left Brook Drive, Kennington, for the Aylesbury, in 1972:

A friend of mine ... she moved before me to Faraday House, so she moved maybe a year before me and then other friends that lived in the street, they moved around about the same time as us or just after ... they moved onto the Aylesbury but they were like just scattered, so we weren't all, like, all together or anything.<sup>67</sup>

Sandie Read had a similar story:

*Interviewer:* You said half of your road moved to the Aylesbury ...

*Sandie Read:* Yeah, a lot of them did ... but then you sort of, because you were in different blocks you lose that knit, if that makes sense, but you make another new knit 'cause everyone welcomes you, you know.<sup>68</sup>

It seems these 'new knits'—cohesions derived from (or at least helped along by) shared beginnings and circumstances—were woven easily and often:

In those days you knew who lived next door because they're over like, 'Hello Jean or June', or anything like that. We knew the whole of our landing.<sup>69</sup>

My Mum and Dad got on really, really well with all the neighbours ... and then my Mum and the women next door, Doris, they sort of became the News of the World on the estate, they knew everything that went on ... there used to be a spoon that used to sit on the window ledge, like a desert spoon, and Doris used to have one as well, and they used to just tap on the window, you know, and have a chat ... they'd be there for at least a couple of hours maybe. Instead of going into each other's homes or whatever ... they would just like lean and look out the window and see what's going on.<sup>70</sup>

Neighbourly interactions, new friends, passing encounters on the landings and walkways—all of this lent itself to a nascent spirit of togetherness, and quite often laid the groundwork for something more established:

I mean we weren't happy about moving there but my Mum was over the moon ... but once you got in the swing of things, yeah it was nice. And everyone that was there stayed for years ... there was the Murrays, the Upchurches, the Hughes, the Cleverlys, the Winstons—who else was there from that lot? Oh yeah, the Schultz. So we moved all on at the same time ... everyone was like, for each other, it was like a community.<sup>71</sup>

A sense of belonging was further girded by the presence of family on the estate. It is apparent that Southwark made efforts to rehouse clearance families in the same areas as their relatives, so as not to overly disturb established arrangements and, it seems, to bring together atomised parts.<sup>72</sup> Such an approach benefitted many, including Sandie Read and her family ('My Auntie moved on there as well ... so we was at 57 Chartridge, she was at 55'),<sup>73</sup> as well as Lisa Baxter and Martin Gainsford, whose uncle and grandmother were housed in the flat adjacent:

*Lisa Baxter:* So basically we had two flats together ... We were always a very close-knit family, and my nan and my mum were really close, and 'cause my granddad had just died as well, my mum wanted to be close to my nan, so it was like my mum and my dad and us two went into one flat, and my nan and Robert ... went into the other flat next door.

*Martin Gainsford:* Literally you had one entranceway, and then two doors that faced onto each other.

*Lisa Baxter:* It was like living in one big house. You had a little doorway ... we would go up and they would go down ... My nan would come huffing and puffing up the stairs to moan about one thing. We shared a phone, so if, if the phone rang in my Nan's house, she would come up the stairs, three rings for my dad, two rings for me, one ring for [Martin], and my mum never got phone calls ... we couldn't afford a phone ... so we just had a land line between two families, and that's how it was. And my dad ran a football team from my nan's phone, so he was always getting phone calls wasn't he?

*Martin Gainsford:* ... I think it's a working-class thing, you look out for your own, you look out for each other. My nan was very much the mother hen to the whole family ... she would take us to school, picked us up from school ... cook dinner for everybody.<sup>74</sup>

### THE LIKES OF US

The 'working class thing' that Martin Gainsford began to describe was a way of life typical to the Aylesbury in the 1970s:

When we grew up there the people that lived there weren't posh, they were working-class people that effed and blinded it, they go to Millwall, they're bus drivers, like our dad, a window cleaner and a lorry driver. People that worked down the market, cabbies ... generations of people went to the same school, had the same teachers ... parents drank in the same pub.<sup>75</sup>

The pub, the market, the match. Homes, heritage, homogeneity.<sup>76</sup> This was a community already diluted by a rise in materialism, industrial decline and the partial flattening of a landscape intricately bound to its history and traditions.<sup>77</sup> Now transplanted, pushed around the borough by the paternal hand of redevelopment, it was, however, a community still visible on the Aylesbury, melded thinly around its blocks and landings. It was recuperated in part by the physical mainstays of working-class life that surrounded the estate (the pubs and markets), as well as those built into its fabric, such as clubrooms, tenants' halls and even its laundry rooms. It was also sustained by the makeup of the estate's population, which, early on, was overwhelmingly white ('If you saw a black person you thought "oh my gosh", yeah, because it was very rare that you saw them'),<sup>78</sup> and, broadly speaking, as tribal and insular as ever:

The working class, now considered to be more ‘affluent’ than previous generations ... did not become middle-class and continued to have little contact with those from other classes ... They still expected to go into the same jobs as those of the previous generation, marry someone local.<sup>79</sup>

It is hard to overstate the centrality of East Street market to Walworth’s history and character. ‘Lifeblood’ would be an appropriate (if hackneyed) descriptor. Established in 1880—when the hawkers and costermongers of Walworth Road were confined to what was then East Lane—it thrived, by and large, as a site of tradition, interaction, excitement, entertainment and, yes, commerce, for at least the next hundred years.<sup>80</sup> Packed with more than 250 stalls at its post-war height, East Street, known locally as ‘The Lane,’ rivalled Brixton as south London’s largest and busiest market: ‘There is an eight-year waiting list for stalls,’ wrote Alec Forshaw and Theo Bergstrom in 1983. ‘Pitches are closely guarded and kept in the family. Immigrants can’t get a look in’<sup>81</sup> (Fig. 3.3). Inevitably, though, as the local population changed and diversified, so too did many of the market’s traders, and, indeed, the range of products sold:

Oh, about ten, fifteen years ago you see it, all the old costers had gone, you know, and the butchers, there was about three butchers, local butchers, they all went ... all there is down there now is halal butchers, stalls that sell loads of veg, all foreign veg, like, yams and stuff like that ... It ain’t the same. Fish, all that dried fish and all that, you know.<sup>82</sup>

Certainly, by the end of the century, much about the market that was once considered traditional, distinctive, or familiar, had disappeared, mopped up by new retail patterns and demographic shifts. But it appears the crashing arrival of the Aylesbury—which abuts the market at its Dawes Street end—did little to cramp its time-honoured style. John Wallington, a rare third-generation East Street trader, initially saw the estate as a mistake; as unsympathetic to anything around it (‘a chicken run sort of thing’), but quickly came to understand its value to the Lane: ‘As far as the traders are concerned, they were looking at, you know, input of *x* amount of new customers ... which happened, obviously it happened.’<sup>83</sup>

Along with Walworth Road and the smaller Westmoreland Road market (also re-sited in 1880), East Street formed, for many on the Aylesbury, a cheek-by-jowl nexus of commerce and interaction—a place to pause, to shop, to meet friends, to make new ones:



**Fig. 3.3** East Street Market, 1971. (Courtesy of the *South London Press*.)

And the big thing, really the big thing, was the market, East Street market, that was a reference point for everybody really. You'd go out, the women, you'd go out and do your shopping and go to the stalls along the market and meet people, you'd meet there.<sup>84</sup>

It was, moreover, a place steeped in meaning and history that sat squarely by a site in which all meaning and history had been palpably scrubbed. Here, past and present overlapped and interwove. Familiarity bordered the unfamiliar. Residents, spun and tumbled by the forces of change, maintained the rituals and allegiances they had counted on for years:

It was a ritual to go down every weekend, wasn't it? Every Sunday morning it was a ritual to walk down the Lane and say hello to all the stallholders and everything.<sup>85</sup>

*Martin Gainsford:* When we were kids in the summer holidays for example, when we was in our nan's care, me mum would be at work, and it would be up Westmoreland Road to the various shops and street market area, along Walworth Road, various shops, and me nan knew everyone ...

*Lisa Baxter:* So you'd end up spending ages, just waiting ...

*Martin Gainsford:* Yeah it was a chat with everyone, 'how you doing, darling?' blah blah blah, whether it be shopkeepers or people in the street, back down East Lane, ice cream sometimes ...

*Lisa Baxter:* Sometimes we used to get a Wimpy for lunch, didn't we?

*Martin Gainsford:* Or a Wimpy. And then back down the back way. So it was a square, you know what I mean? I think that would be a very typical story for anybody from Walworth.<sup>86</sup>

For tenants feeling overwhelmed or disorientated by the size of the estate—or, in the early days especially, deracinated by the move—the everyday routine performed in the surrounding streets and markets (frequenting the same shops and stalls, seeing the same faces etc.) supplied valuable coordinates of intimacy and belonging that perhaps shrunk the Aylesbury to a more relatable size. The estate, unlike some in London, was no terrarium, hived off against the world.<sup>87</sup> Detached from the street in form only, the slam of the city was always close by—a proximity that undoubtedly influenced the way in which residents thought about, experienced, and remembered the estate. Here is Anne Lorraine and Sandie Read, who both lived in Chartridge block, which ran parallel to Westmoreland Road:

*Interviewer:* Your Mum had a stall on Westmoreland Road?

*Anne Lorraine:* Yeah, a second-hand stall ... she had that down there for years. She used to get me up at five o'clock in the morning, go down there and help her set up.

*Sandie Read:* And you had a fish stall down there, didn't ya? Fresh fish, fresh eels, they were still crawling, swimming.

*Anne Lorraine:* Yeah, like the kids just used to stand there watching the eels go about and then they picked one up and chopped off its head.

*Sandie Read:* 'What eel do you want?', 'That one', topped and tailed it, that's it, chop chop chop, done. The only one still there's Dave, in he? Bless him. Simpson. He is one of the original, he has been there since I've been here.

*Anne Lorraine:* He's been there a hundred years.

*Sandie Read:* Yeah, his father had it before him, and he's the only one, accept for Arments<sup>88</sup> obviously ... you had the hairdressers before Arments

and if you walk further down there's a butchers, he's been there forever, erm, his name's Dave as well innit? He was the dearest butcher's down there ... he was the expensive one.

*Anne Lorraine:* But you couldn't fault his meat.<sup>89</sup>

And here is Pat Davies, speaking about the same stretch of road:

Just at the end of the ramp at Bradenham there was a little row of shops. There was a hairdresser's, barber's, there was a kids clothing shop, and there was a little supermarket that ... you could go and do your shopping in if you didn't want to go all the way down to Morrisons ... and the pie shop was on this side, Arments ... the greengrocer's always been there, there used to be a baker's there, and it was quite nice. And they used to have a little Sunday market, it was more like a flea market, but it was open every Sunday and sold rags and bits and pieces there ... my son even had a vegetable stall up there for a couple of years ... there was a flower stall on a Saturday, too.<sup>90</sup>

Like its streets and markets, Walworth's pubs had long occupied a central role in local life, and they would continue to do so after the Aylesbury was built. Residents on the new estate were never far from a drink: pubs were easily stumbled upon (and into) along East Street, Walworth Road, Westmoreland Road, Merrow Street, Bagshot Street, Old Kent Road, and there were several more on Albany Road, along the Aylesbury's southern limit:

What were the pubs on Albany Road? Alfred, William, Albany Tap, Albany Arms, Duke of Edinburgh, and the very end was Thomas A Beckett. So you had five or six pubs ran the length of Albany Road, which were independent of the Aylesbury, but certainly people from the Aylesbury, depending on how far down, they would have looked upon it as their drinker.<sup>91</sup>

The pubs were less homogenous than one might imagine, catering as they did to a broad manner of interests and ages. For Lisa Baxter and Martin Gainsford's father, the pub was the nerve centre for his Sunday League football team: 'He ran it out of pubs, always ... it wasn't an Aylesbury Estate football team, it was a pub team. It was a pub team, but we often had people from the estate playing because they were local and would drink in the pub.'<sup>92</sup> For TA representative, Joan Amodio, the pub doubled as an office. 'I used to meet with [Joan] in her pub actually, funnily enough, a lot of work in that place,' said Alex Jarosy, then District

Housing Officer for Walworth. '[S]he used to sit there with like three gins and this was like lunchtime, you know, and me with a paltry half a lager or something.'<sup>93</sup> Tony Newman and his friends, meanwhile, were typically in the mood for something livelier:

The main pub I used to use was in the Walworth Road, Temple Bar ... I mean most nights we went to a pub, but we went to where there was music. There was lots of live bands in the pubs, and this Temple Bar, I think four nights a week, always had a live band, and it was a huge great place ... and of course there were no drink drive laws then. One of the blokes had a car, so when we finished we'd pile in that and go up Oxford Street to the Golden Egg, have a hamburger.<sup>94</sup>

The Hour Glass, formerly of Faraday Street and incorporated into Michael Faraday House in Beaconsfield Road, is the lone pub sited within the footprint of the estate. In the 1970s it was considered by some an 'upmarket local pub ... more proud than the ones that were in the Albany Road.'<sup>95</sup> Early plans called for a further pub on the estate—tentatively dubbed the St Paul's Tavern—which was to be arranged over three floors in Chiltern block, at the junction of Westmoreland Road and Portland Street, and would incorporate a 'discotheque bar on the floor directly beneath deck level.'<sup>96</sup> Unsurprisingly, the scheme ran into a wall of tenant opposition. The potential for noise and nuisance (including the throwing of bottles from the bridge straddling Portland Street—already a problem, according to the TA)<sup>97</sup> raised hackles, and, galvanised by an active TA, residents roundly voiced their displeasure: of 176 tenants consulted, 152 were 'completely opposed' to the proposals.<sup>98</sup> Following a public meeting in March 1973, TA social secretary, Joan Amodio, wrote to the council: 'The Committee were [sic] instructed by the huge audience ... to convey to the councillors involved their strong objections ... and to express their disgust at the lack of interest or concern shown by the Council as a whole to this serious question affecting the well-being of the whole Aylesbury community.'<sup>99</sup> St Paul's Tavern, discotheque bar and all, was finished before it had started.

The episode is a useful one. Not so much in regard to its object and outcome, but for drawing attention to an existing level of solidarity and organisation necessary to agitate on a shared issue. Tenants, clearly invested in the success of the Aylesbury—in having a say in the kind of environment in which they wished to live—came together during this period over

a variety of circumstances and concerns: vandalism,<sup>100</sup> dog fouling,<sup>101</sup> parked cars causing an obstruction,<sup>102</sup> rent hikes,<sup>103</sup> the costly and often problematic gas-fuelled district heating system, which residents sometimes supplemented with electric heaters<sup>104</sup>:

*Su Braden*: The flats were centrally heated but there was no other way to heat but with electricity. If people couldn't pay their bills, and the electricity was cut off, they had no alternative way of heating. No fireplaces, which people had been used to having before they were re-housed. Electricity bills and getting cut-off was a big issue, and so we had a big protest on the estate about the heating bills, and that was, I think that was in seventy-five.

*Interviewer*: There was a protest on the estate?

*Su Braden*: We marched from the estate to Camberwell Town Hall, and we connected. We made fold-up prints of electric fires which we plugged into the Town Hall!<sup>105</sup>

Much of this sort of activity ran counter to assertions that community will inevitably wilt and die in such stark surroundings—that the street, and only the street, is where social cohesion will flourish.<sup>106</sup> Of course, the cohesion enjoyed by so many on the Aylesbury in the 1970s can be attributed in part to its make-up: solidly working class; overwhelmingly white; overwhelmingly Labour voting (despite a growing disengagement with local politics in Southwark from the 1950s onwards, of which more later); and, perhaps most importantly, overwhelmingly local—just as it was in the neighbourhoods from whence these tenants had been wrenched.

Alison Ravetz argued that the concept of working class 'respectability' was most clearly defined by housing standards: 'Linked very largely to place of residence and quality of homes, "respectability" was essentially a measure of distinction.'<sup>107</sup> It was this camp of 'respectability' with which many Aylesbury residents would have sought to align themselves. By sweeping the corridor, or opposing plans for a pub, or even becoming a member of the TA, residents were, perhaps, attempting to separate themselves from those on the estate they perceived to be non-traditional, 'rough' or undesirable<sup>108</sup>:

I know it sounds really snobby but there was a snobbery, because all our people were quite nice and even though it was like a council estate, nearly all the women along the block used to scrub the front each day. And like some of them were a bit scummy and they weren't very clean, but on our block it

always smelt of bleach and people were proud enough to like actually scrub the outside of the front.<sup>109</sup>

The Aylesbury Tenants' Association was in many ways an embodiment of this traditional outlook. Looking in from the outside, it could have appeared stodgy, cliquey, too white, too male<sup>110</sup>—a self-contained stronghold for antiquated ideas: 'in those days, tenants' associations, the whole diversity thing was really not there at all, you know, Joan Amodio's lot were virtually all white ... indeed far more of the tenants would have been white as well at that time.'<sup>111</sup> But there were certainly tenants on the estate who cleaved to its 'respectable' values. As of 1975, membership stood at 2337, approximately 50 per cent of all eligible tenants. Not as high as some Southwark estates (Heygate, for example, had an 80 per cent uptake), it was, nevertheless, a decent enough number, considering the ground the association had to cover (as we shall see, a further three Aylesbury TAs were set up in response to questions of representation).<sup>112</sup>

Originally formed by—and for—residents of Gaitskell House and Michael Faraday House, in 1968, the association opened its doors to the rest of the estate roughly two years later, as the flats began to fill.<sup>113</sup> 'Most of the tenants here now have been incorporated block by block as they arrived into the original association,' said Joan Amodio in 1974, 'this, psychologically has been a great strength.'<sup>114</sup> Its remit was manifold: to liaise with the council (initially with the estate officers, who reported on a range of issues, such as rent arrears, transfer applications and repairs)<sup>115</sup> over communal repairs and individual tenant complaints; to carry out surveys of tenant opinion; to (somehow) play a part in reducing vandalism; to attend meetings of the Tenants' Consultative Committee, then the 'final link'<sup>116</sup> between TAs and the council; and, most nebulously of all, to 'bolster up real community spirit.'<sup>117</sup>

Sifting through back issues of the Housing Committee's quarterly mouthpiece, the short-lived *Southwark Tenant*, it becomes quickly apparent that the installation of community on the borough's estates was a matter of some concern. The implication, it seems, was that community spirit would not occur naturally; that it would have to be manufactured in some way, pushed and pulled into being, especially on the largest of the newly built estates. Here is the borough Chief Executive in 1973:

Aylesbury is virtually a miniature town, and requires exceptional consideration if it is to retain an adequate environment. On Aylesbury, more, per-

haps than on any other estate, the environment is going to largely to dictate the overall quality of life of the families living there.<sup>118</sup>

It was a view shared by the tenants' association. 'It is not a natural environment,' said Joan Amodio. 'But if we are to live naturally we have to build a community spirit which serves as a counterbalance and helps to improve the quality of life on the estate.'<sup>119</sup> It appears that much of this building effort—the pushing and pulling—owed a debt to the sweat and iron steerage of Joan Amodio. Tough, 'sharp as a razor,' and with a famous reputation for drinking ('I shall never have a gin and tonic without thinking of Joan,' said Harriet Harman, MP for Camberwell and Peckham since 1982. 'I shared rather too many with her over the years'), Amodio was a revered figure on the Aylesbury for more than two decades.<sup>120</sup> As social secretary, she organised a weekly infants' tea party, dancing classes, a bingo night, and an afternoon club for the elderly. In 1974, she 'was able to book for Mother Goose at North Peckham Civic Centre for three successive evenings—750 children, coaches, ices and all.'<sup>121</sup> She also pioneered a 'Summer Programme' of children's activities (zoo, theatre and seaside trips, for instance), beginning in 1972. 'If you had been on the Aylesbury Estate one sunny morning in July,' said Amodio, 'you would have seen a small group of students marching a long way beating a big drum. They were "drumming up" the children for the first play-scheme ever to be run on Southwark's biggest estate.'<sup>122</sup> Other TA initiatives included the Aylesbury Festival of Art—'an action-packed programme of music, dancing, art and model-making, judo and poetry'<sup>123</sup>—a New Year's Eve dance, Christmas parties and parcels for pensioners, play schemes run in conjunction with Michael Faraday School, a drama club, and, from 1979, the Aylesbury Community Festival (Fig. 3.4). Of course, there would have been residents on the estate who had never heard of the TA, and countless others who never paid it any mind. But, however tangentially, it brought together hundreds, if not thousands more who, perhaps, felt its mere existence pointed to a culture of community. 'People can be difficult at some time or other and a few can be difficult all the time,' Amodio told the *Southwark Tenant*, 'but to be on the receiving end of a friendly nod from the majority of your neighbours, and to be hailed by the children with "Hi Joan!" is immensely rewarding.'<sup>124</sup>

The Amersham Community Centre was handed over to Southwark on the 1 September 1970. It was envisaged as a 'focal point and meeting place,'<sup>125</sup> a space to 'cater for community activities of tenants from

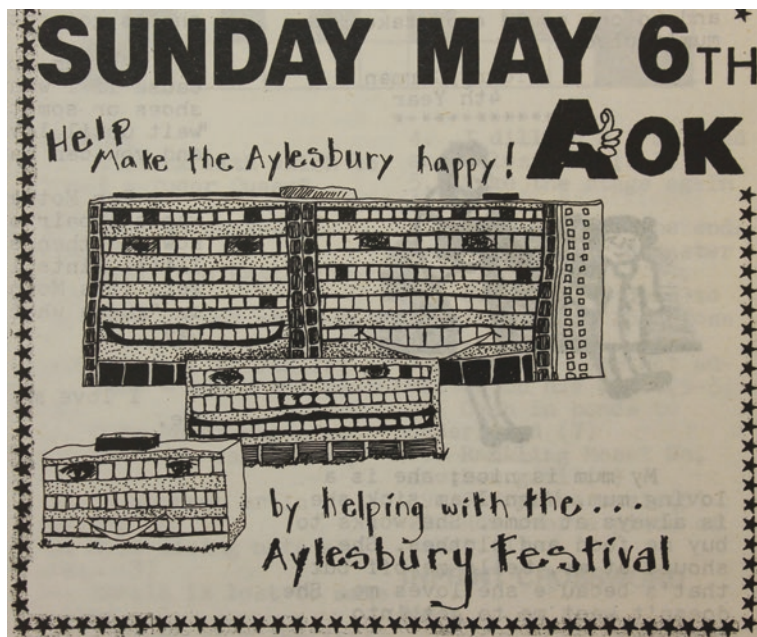


Fig. 3.4 Advert for the Aylesbury Festival, April 1979. (Courtesy of David Cleverly/*Walworth Inprint*, April 1979.)

Aylesbury and the surrounding areas.<sup>126</sup> Installed over three floors (including a mezzanine level) on a site equivalent in size to an international rugby field, Amersham was by far the largest community facility on the estate, and one of the largest in the borough. ‘It was huge,’ said Jean Bartlett, ‘state of the art.’<sup>127</sup> There were offices, a kitchen, six general-purpose rooms and a community hall, all on the top floor, while the ground and mezzanine levels comprised a gymnasium and ‘games deck.’<sup>128</sup> These lower levels, which were leased to the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) for a time, accommodated pre-school play groups and provided substitute premises for a displaced youth club.<sup>129</sup> Harry Matthews, who moved with his family from Peckham to Latimer block in 1971, initially attended the club as a 14-year-old schoolboy and then, just a few years later, as a youth worker:

I was playing table tennis and they kept goading me to do this, I didn't want to do it, I just loved playing table tennis, and they kept pushing me because I got to know the staff and everybody and they just liked the way I was.<sup>130</sup>

Matthews was employed by Southwark on a part-time basis, spending evenings at the club following days working for London Transport. Of the full-time Amersham staff, there was a clerical worker, a warden (responsible for the centre's day-to-day running), a youth leader, and detached youth worker, Sue Herrod: 'The brief was to cover the Aylesbury ... and pull in disaffected youth, or not disaffected youth, kids who were not using the youth club. And the idea was to kind of bring them into the youth club ... So I set about wandering around the estate.'<sup>131</sup> In May 1977, after several years of 'dissatisfaction' with the warden, the Aylesbury TA assumed operational control of the third-floor hall, with its 250-person seating capacity, and the adjoining spaces, allowing it to fully flex its community-building muscle<sup>132</sup>:

Oh, there was parties, there was New Year parties, there was discos, general discos, there was the Halloween and Christmas parties for the children. We used to do pension parties, there was all sorts of functions, you name it.<sup>133</sup>

The Amersham was about as central as it could be—roughly midway along Thurlow Street—but the estate was supplemented by a further two community halls: Thurlow Lodge, on the ground floor of Wendover, at the Albany Road end ('Thurlow Lodge ... we used to have dances and things, disco nights and things like that, New Year's Eve parties ... and that was all very nice'),<sup>134</sup> and the BACC (Bradenham, Arklow House, Chartridge and Chiltern) hall, which was converted from a vacant shop at the base of Bradenham in 1977.<sup>135</sup> Just a stone's throw from their flat in Chartridge, Lisa Baxter and her family would visit the hall weekly:

On a Tuesday evening all the kids used to congregate in the local community centre and do, you could do typing, you could do cooking, you could do art, and it was all volunteers ... and my mum used to do the typing class, and even though she'd been at work all day in a very stressful job, she still used to go to the local community centre and teach typing on a Tuesday evening.<sup>136</sup>

There were other rooms and spaces dotted across the estate that were designated for communal use. But as Tony Dowmunt, co-founder of the Walworth and Aylesbury Community Arts Trust (WACAT), remembered, these regularly lay empty: ‘Certainly there were a lot of community spaces ... I think in every block there was a designated community space ... but when we started working [1975] they weren’t used at all, I mean there was basically nothing happening in them at all.’<sup>137</sup> As we shall see, however, groups such as WACAT and others that began to pop up on the estate in the 1970s and 1980s would utilise these rooms in inclusive and often creative ways.

Less versatile, certainly, but every bit as communal as these underused spaces, the Aylesbury’s laundry rooms were more than just a place to wash your socks:

There could be another person down there, you know, doing their washing at the same time so like you’d probably have a chat, you know, you sit there while you waited for the washing to go through the cycle.<sup>138</sup>

There were eight laundries in all, distributed evenly among the estate’s largest blocks: one each in Bradenham, Chiltern, Gayhurst and Taplow; two at either end of Missenden and Wendover.<sup>139</sup> Generally speaking, laundry use was determined by a rota system, with each resident pencilled into a specific slot: ‘my Mum had a time that she could go down there, it was a Friday afternoon and she’d come home from work and go down there at that time and, you know, she’d do the washing.’<sup>140</sup> Tenants paid a weekly charge for the service (9p in 1974, 15p in 1979, 42p by 1986), inclusive in the rent, and in 1973, a team of six women laundry assistants were hired.<sup>141</sup> This, said Southwark, had a tremendous effect: usage went up, mechanical problems went down, and ‘a lot of nuisance’ was prevented.<sup>142</sup> Anne Lorraine’s mother was one such assistant:

She worked in there for years, she worked Bradenham, Chiltern, what’s this one over here? Gayhurst, and Wendover she used to work, used to go along all of them ... Yeah, she worked in there for years, and erm, I think she thought they were her laundries to be honest! ... I’d go in there and she’d be having a go at somebody and I’d be like ‘what’s your problem?’<sup>143</sup>

The laundries were just another shared space in which residents might come across a familiar face, forge a friendship, or indeed any link of the

most basic kind. In many ways, these spaces were necessary; the oil in the engine of the estate's success. They could help ease isolation, engender a sense of routine and order, act as a counterweight to neighbourhood problems. At a period when television was colonising leisure time, they were a place to go and be with people:

*Anne Lorraine:* And then the kids used to all sit in there didn't they? Especially in the winter because it was like nice and warm, so ...

*Sandie Read:* Smoking, talking, whatever.

*Anne Lorraine:* Yeah, my mum wouldn't allow 'em smoking in there ... If they were just sitting in there getting warm she used to say 'Go and sit over there out me way' ... Great big dryers weren't they? Some of the kids used to get in them and the other ones used to turn 'em on. My mum caught them, God help 'em.<sup>144</sup>

Though eventually closed for good in December 1986, amid cuts and vandalism, Aylesbury's laundry rooms were still going strong until at least the end of the decade.<sup>145</sup>

The same cannot be said of the dozen or so shops on the estate. The majority of these were on Merrow Walk—a parade of nine premises along the second-floor landing of Taplow. They included a fish shop; a butcher's; a health centre and chemist's; a supermarket; and a betting office, whose letting was subject to the 'business being situated as far as possible from a rent office.'<sup>146</sup> For those living in Taplow and the surrounding blocks, it is easy to imagine that the shops were convenient at least, and, at best, a source of communality:

When we moved onto the Aylesbury onto the Taplow there used to be shops down on the second floor, we had a butchers, we had all shops, we had a supermarket, a hairdressers, a laundry, it used to be lovely.<sup>147</sup>

Yet outside of their most immediate vicinity, it seems the shops were largely an afterthought (with the notable exception of the health centre: 'you only went there if you were at doctor's. That was it because everyone went to the doctor's there, everyone did').<sup>148</sup> Merrow Walk's failure had many traceable threads, not least of which was its strange positioning, as the council admitted in 1977: 'Too many shops, poorly located on second floor deck level. Adjacent East Street and close to Walworth Road shopping centre. Difficult to let even at rents below break-even level.'<sup>149</sup> It was

a blunt assessment, and one echoed four years later by Walworth's community newspaper:

As hundreds of shoppers pour along East Street, few notice the big sign on Taplow saying 'shops' almost begging you to come along. Few ever do and not surprisingly trade is very poor ... to residents it's just that dismal row of shops on the walkway of Taplow.<sup>150</sup>

By this time several of the premises had been boarded up—the fishmonger's and greengrocer's (which was briefly let as an amusement arcade) among them. Several more had been converted to offices. The supermarket and health centre had installed thousands of pounds' worth of steel shutters and grilles.<sup>151</sup>

But decline was hardly the preserve of Merrow Walk. Between 1971 and 1976, manufacturing employment in inner London had contracted by almost a third, while in eight years from 1966, Southwark recorded the highest rate of industrial decline in inner London, at 38 per cent.<sup>152</sup> The numbers make for stark reading: from 1961 to 1971, 52,000 manufacturing jobs disappeared in Southwark. Beverage production (37 per cent), metal engineering (25 per cent) and printing (22 per cent) were particularly hard hit.<sup>153</sup> In 1978, manufacturing and port-based jobs in the borough stood at just 29,996, a decline of 53 per cent from 1971, according to figures quoted by Goss.<sup>154</sup> What began in the early 1960s as an inaudible creep turned increasingly loud and sinister: by the end of the 1970s, north and mid-Southwark was an industrial graveyard, boarded-up and gathering rust. In 1966, the Crosse and Blackwell plant in Bermondsey moved from Crimscott Street to Scotland, taking with it 1200 jobs; in 1968, Dewrance, which employed 400 people, upped sticks to Lancashire; and in 1970, IPC Publishing shut their Southwark print works, making 758 workers redundant. This was just the tip of it. Dozens of factories and numerous small concerns either closed or moved from the area. Hays Wharf shut their six docks between London Bridge and Tower Bridge in 1969; two years later, it was the turn of Surrey Docks to close down.<sup>155</sup> Southwark, in a bid to thwart the downturn, launched a £3 m fund for the 'Development of Industry and Commerce,' in October 1977. Without so much as a nod to the rot, the accompanying press release breezily talked up the creation of new jobs and industrial premises, and the refurbishment of old ones. 'The fund is ... part of a concerted drive by the council to completely regenerate the industrial base of the borough,' stated

Councillor Watts.<sup>156</sup> It was the desperate flail of a beaten fighter. Population leakage—both a cause and symptom of economic decline—continued unabated (a 20 per cent fall between 1951 and 1971).<sup>157</sup> Unemployment, unknown in the 1950s, more than doubled from 6.3 per cent in 1971 to 13.1 per cent a decade later.<sup>158</sup>

The sixties there was a huge amount of work around, everywhere in any line ... and then that started to dry up in the seventies, so there was a lot of unemployment ... basically anyone who had a bit of money was moving down to Kent. We used to have jokes about it. You'd go down to places like Rochester and that. I still remember loads of people saying 'I've got to get out of Walworth, I can't stand it here', and now Rochester's like Walworth used to be, you know.<sup>159</sup>

As described later, this economic hollowing out—which only escalated in the 1980s—struck a telling blow to Southwark, Walworth, and the Aylesbury in turn. But if decline was the ominous leitmotif, there remained a resilient (for the time being) core of working-class residents employed in traditional industries during the period in question. In 1971, there were more than 80,000 economically active males residing in Southwark, of which 34 per cent were classified as skilled manual workers, and 29 per cent semi-skilled and unskilled<sup>160</sup>:

certainly all of our mates' mums and dads, they may have only been shop workers or bus drivers or mechanics or painter and decorators, salt of the earth working-class employment, but they all seemed to be doing it.<sup>161</sup>

The jobs offered more than just a wage. With links to trade unions, labour councils and the local Labour Party, they rooted workers in a cohesive political culture of which fraternity was often a natural extension: 'The dockers all used particular pubs where they'd all talk about the jobs—they more or less stayed in a group ... they were a community.'<sup>162</sup> Derek Way, who worked as a printer for than 30 years, for various companies across London, met his wife in the industry, and said many of his neighbours and friends on the Aylesbury worked in the print, too: 'It was a lot of people that lived on here worked in printing and ... I was always a very active trade unionist, like, you know, I used to go on all the marches, all the meetings and stuff like that.'<sup>163</sup> As late as the 1970s, it was common—even

expected—for sons to follow in their father’s footsteps. David Cleverly was one of several helping out at the 179 youth club in East Street at the time:

I mean I think the kids in the club, at least three of them were working on the docks, you know. When they were sixteen or fifteen they left school and got jobs on there, mainly because their parents did, or the dad did, you know, so they got the job. It was a bit like that then.<sup>164</sup>

Close-knit, notable for strong family links, but also insular, conservative and, at times, fiercely guarded, these ‘traditional’ jobs and industries were of a piece with the institutions surrounding them, and the communities they drew upon for labour. Here is Henry Quennell, a retired printer and former councillor for Faraday ward, whose second and third sons also became printers:

*Interviewer:* What did your parents do for a living?

*Henry Quennell:* My father was a lorry driver for so many years and then he went into the print. And then I went into the print.

*Interviewer:* Did you work locally?

*Henry Quennell:* Yeah, I worked in Tooley Street to start off with. When I left school I worked in Tooley Street and then I went, oh, several places.

*Interviewer:* Were you a union man?

*Henry Quennell:* Oh yeah, definitely. Well in the print you virtually, that was it, you couldn’t get in really, it was a closed shop ... you could get in, but you couldn’t get in the right places because they were all closed shops. I’m still in the union now.<sup>165</sup>

## THE LIKES OF THEM

In December 1975, an article in the *Southwark Tenant*, entitled ‘The Problem of Problem Families,’ told of a scourge of troublesome residents plaguing the borough’s new housing estates. ‘These people,’ it read, ‘are anti-social because they just don’t know any better—they are inadequate and cannot cope with normal everyday living.’<sup>166</sup> John Thomas, Southwark Council’s Tenants’ Community Officer, described the ‘diabolical things’ these families got up to—making lots of noise, begetting children who were dirty and rude. Some of ‘these women,’ he said, had to be taught how ‘to cook an egg or boil a kettle of water.’<sup>167</sup> The report almost reads as parody; a not so sophisticated lampoon of sub-cultural theory, in all its risibility. Yet for the council’s part, it may well have constituted a keen bit

of posturing. By pushing this discourse of morality, the housing department positioned itself as an arbiter of behaviour, and as a tough disciplinarian, not to be trifled with: ‘the Council is going to get much more severe and crack down on them ... It may well be that trouble-makers and nuisance families will be moved to places where they will be a nuisance only to each other.’<sup>168</sup> On one hand it harked back to much earlier attitudes in housing governance, such as those made known by Octavia Hill in 1885:

I do not say that I will not have drunkards [in my properties], I have quantities of drunkards; but everything depends upon whether I think the drunkard will be better for being sent away or not. It is a tremendous despotism, but it is exercised with a view of bringing out the powers of the people, and treating them as responsible for themselves within certain limits.<sup>169</sup>

On the other, it was a foreshadowing of currents to come, specifically the clichés and fictions of urban depravity that were latched upon by the latter-day council when slapping together regeneration narratives. David Byrne demonstrated how ‘problem families’ on a ‘ghetto estate’ were blamed by the authorities for deteriorating conditions for which the authorities themselves were responsible, through a lack of resources, maintenance, repairs, and so on.<sup>170</sup> ‘Problem families,’ then, became a scapegoat for social and material deficiencies; a compact expression of everything that was wrong with an estate, perpetually reproduced. There were certainly problems on the Aylesbury at this stage—problems of noise and vandalism that, as discussed later, were attributable to design failures and poor construction, as well as tenant behaviour. But the Aylesbury—still smart, still new, still Southwark’s ‘showpiece’—had yet to acquire the ‘unpleasant’ reputation with which some of the older estates in the borough were already tarred.<sup>171</sup> Even so, Southwark’s strange, infantilising rubric (‘The Council is doing all it can with these particular problem families, but more is needed—particularly from you, the tenants who live next door to them. They need understanding and encouragement to enable them to integrate with the rest of the community. At the same time, you must be firm about their misdemeanours’)<sup>172</sup> no doubt bled into what Merrett described as ‘society-wide ... distinctions between the “deserving” and “undeserving”, the “respectable” and “unrespectable.”’<sup>173</sup> And such distinctions, it seems, were as closely held on the Aylesbury as anywhere else:

*Lisa Baxter:* It wasn't that you didn't get on with people. I mean the guy next door upstairs was always in and out of prison anyway, so we didn't really have a lot to sort of do with him, and his wife was a bit fishwife, but we went round with their kids, didn't we? And there was like a mutual respect for them, and we never kind of fell out with them. But whereas my mum, I know this is going to sound—you probably wouldn't think it, but my mum was actually quite refined, even though she was very working-class and brought up on a council estate we was very well brought up and she had very good values and she was quite refined.

*Martin Gainsford:* Me mum could eff and blind with the best of them, at the right moment, but it wasn't something that came out of her mouth every other word. And I think that's one of the things that they noticed when they moved ... there were people from different parts of Southwark or Camberwell or Walworth that weren't really their cup of tea ... but I think they kind of distanced themselves a little bit from, from a lot of them.<sup>174</sup>

This idea of un-respectability, or roughness, or what could be termed 'Otherness,' coalesced around a number of perceived differences and assumptions—over status, behaviour and, particularly, over cleanliness and housing standards. Yet the way this was thought about, recognised and psychically entrenched on the estate, was as much about coming together as it was about pushing apart. 'The construction of Other,' stated Rob Kitchen, 'is a deep-seated method of self-protection leading to the grouping of like-minded individuals.'<sup>175</sup> In this sense, Otherness is a binding agent. It propels together similar elements while fortifying against those who fail to measure up. This might help explain why the TAs were looked on by some as cold and exclusive. Otherness is often arbitrary, even imagined. And as Ravetz pointed out, it is almost always driven by a spatial element: 'Oneself, home and near neighbourhood were ... invariably described as "respectable", while the opposite—the "rough"—was a term attached to others at a distance, even when that distance was no more than a street or part of a street.'<sup>176</sup> In the following passage, Sandie Read and Anne Lorraine, who both lived in the southwest corner of the Aylesbury, talk about the other side of the estate, just a few hundred metres away, east of Portland Road:

*Sandie Read:* I don't know, I don't know what happened down there.

*Anne Lorraine:* That was the err, lower classes [laughs].

*Sandie Read:* Yeah that was the rough, really rough area, yeah. That was the naughty end, yeah, Latimer, Wendover, Taplow, that was the naughty end, yeah.

*Interviewer:* Why was that the naughty end?

*Sandie Read:* It was the rough part.

*Anne Lorraine:* They was the rough kids down that end, so we sort of avoided that end of the estate. You had no reason to go down there anyway.

*Sandie Read:* Well I did because I had to go to school. I went to Walworth. So I went to lower school then the upper school which was on the Old Kent Road, so you had to go across like Gayhurst, Latimer, you know, and then onto Taplow ... and then you avoid that because they knew what block you came from and they sort of pick on you so in the end you started walking down like on the road bit so we didn't have to go across the blocks. So it was a right tight community, sort of tight each block had their own.

*Interviewer:* Was that the same for blocks like Taplow and Wendover?

*Sandie Read:* They all mixed, they'd all mix. Where Chiltern, Chartridge, Bradenham, we'd all mix.

*Anne Lorraine:* Yeah that was, it, from Chiltern up to Westmoreland Road ... it was close knit. Everyone knew everyone's business.

*Sandie Read:* It was the best blocks, the cleanest, the cleanest.<sup>177</sup>

Descriptions like 'rough,' 'naughty' and 'lower classes' tell us little about those areas and residents of which the respondents spoke. But they do shed light on the unity and loyalty felt toward the landscape they engaged with daily. Theirs was the 'best' bit, the 'cleanest' bit, the tightest knit. And these were feelings brought into sharp relief by the murky reaches of 'down there.' Such feelings were likely returned in kind by those living in the blocks described. Certainly, there were residents in the brick-built Gaitskell and Faraday houses who were eager to un-alloy themselves from the hulking slabs beside them:

Look, thing is ... we're not Aylesbury, we were brought in as the Aylesbury after, because we were there, and then the Aylesbury was built around us and then they included us into it ... we're in the brick ones, see? So we're not sort of like theirs ... it was really a posh house, you know?<sup>178</sup>

Aylesbury's taxonomy of Otherness was a complicated one. The way in which difference was categorised on the estate was often abstract and unsettled, like the boundaries of belonging and territorialism just described. Ideas about who belonged and who did not were largely

founded on broad generalisations and bigoted portrayals of identity, and were helped along by the council's own assumptions. Minority ethnic groups, lone parents, young people, newcomers and the unemployed were all variously singled out for social relegation, but this was no hard and fast rule. Finding any degree of belonging on the estate also proved elusive for those who came in alone:

It's not that it wasn't close knit, I mean the actual estate, it was difficult for people, particularly I think for people who moved in there and weren't from that area originally. And it was difficult for single mums, or individual elderlies, if they hadn't been from there originally. So to make contact, to make friends, was difficult. I think for the people who were originally from there, that had been rehoused there, you know, there was enough of a social network and they knew each other, to kind of overcome those things.<sup>179</sup>

Of course, Otherness was more likely overcome if you were easily subsumable into the homogenous mass. John Charnock, a husband, father and carpenter, moved from Madron Street, just off the Old Kent Road, to Northchurch block in 1972:

When you move into a new place, you're the outsider, 'cause all these other people ... they move bulk from an area, from Queen's Buildings in the Borough there, they've all moved bulk-wise into the flats.<sup>180</sup>

Charnock's outsider status was quickly shed. When his son came to blows with another boy on the block, he became fast friends with the boy's mother: 'She smacked her son and we were the best of friends from there on! That woman, like, she was a nice person to speak to after that sort of row, like. It was marvellous.'<sup>181</sup> Charnock eventually joined the Aylesbury TA in 1982. Children, plainly, were a natural and effective conduit for people to meet and make friends on the estate. As a sole means of contact, though, they were not always enough: 'I know a couple of families nearby, but I really only know them from the kids. We don't know anybody further away. Three years is a long time to be here and not know anybody.'<sup>182</sup>

Ethnicity was by no means a great social divider on the Aylesbury, but then again the estate was majority white at this time. While the statistical data is thin on the ground, we do know that as of 1971 almost 90 per cent of Walworth residents were born in the United Kingdom, 4 per cent were

born in Ireland, and a further 4 per cent were born in Commonwealth countries.<sup>183</sup> This adds some heft to the impressionistic evidence that suggests (overwhelmingly) that there was only a smattering of residents from minority groups. ILEA's 1982 report, *The Aylesbury Estate: An Action Research Project*, identified these residents as 'some West Indian, and a smaller number of families from other communities, including Asian and Turkish/Greek/Cypriot.'<sup>184</sup> There were, to be sure, not insignificant Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot populations living in Southwark at that time, distributed across its estates. (Many had arrived in the 1960s and 1970s, as economic migrants, or to escape the military conflict of 1974.)<sup>185</sup> In 1973, 28-year-old Aylesbury resident, Elen Noor, established a social group for Turkish women living on the estate. She said: 'Many of the women, particularly the older ones, tend to keep to their homes and stay behind closed doors.' By June 1974, the group, which met every Tuesday afternoon at the Chaplin Centre, in Taplow block, was 15 members strong.<sup>186</sup>

The 1982 ILEA report went on to state that racism on the estate, 'overt or unconscious,' was no more prevalent than anywhere else in the country. That is to say, its researchers encountered 'racist remarks and behaviour, expressing hostility to minority racial groups or a determination to exclude them from a particular amenity. The remarks were made as between white people.' It added: 'It is significant that our black colleague reported interviews which started by disclaiming racial prejudice and then went on "but ...".'<sup>187</sup> Southwark was as choked up with prejudice, fear and mistrust as anywhere else in London in the 1970s. With jobs fast disappearing from inner-city areas—precisely the places in which immigrants tended to live and work—it is of no surprise that relations were harried, or that far-right groups such as the National Front gained traction, particularly at a time when politicians were heaping on with their own brand of racist toxicity, from Enoch Powell's 1968 'rivers of blood' speech, to Thatcher's declaration, in 1978, that Britain 'might be swamped by people with a different culture.'<sup>188</sup> Linda Cleverly, for example, recalled a 'horrible' and febrile atmosphere during an inter-church march against racism in Walworth towards the end of the decade:

We met down in Burgess Park and then we walked up Walworth Road ... I can remember going past the estate and all these people, National Front people, lining the sides of the streets and shouting abuse at us and it was horrible actually. And then there was a big National Front demonstration

that caused quite a lot of concern that was around that time ... but they actually, the police actually stopped it from coming down the Walworth Road [in March 1980]. (Fig. 3.5.) They wanted to walk down the Walworth Road and people locally here shuttered up their shops. There was a lot of trouble, thousands of people came to try and protest against them marching. But they didn't actually come down the Walworth Road. I remember being just down the end here by, just by the corner of Albany Road, and they sort of walked round and down Albany Road and passed through, so it saved a fight, but it was horrible.<sup>189</sup>

In the lead up to the Newington Ward bye-election in 1978, the National Front mobilised in Southwark once more. The target? Labour candidate and eventual winner, the Ghanaian-born Solomon Parry. 'Distasteful slogans like "Keep Southwark White" and "Don't put a black on the Council" were used on many occasions by NF canvassers,' wrote the *Walworth Inprint*.<sup>190</sup>



Fig. 3.5 'The presence of thousands of anti-racists lining the Walworth Road ... thwarted the National Front's plans to march through Walworth.' (Courtesy of David Cleverly/*Walworth Inprint*, April 1980.)

Undoubtedly some of this bile would have trickled onto the Aylesbury, souring the atmosphere, congealing into moments of appreciable hate. And even if the trauma of an incident or confrontation was avoided, the wearing reminders—the looks askance, an NF scrawl—were no doubt as present on the estate as anywhere else. Harry Matthews, his brother and their Jamaican-born parents were one of the first families to move onto Latimer block in the early 1970s:

In those years ... sixties, seventies, eighties, we went through a lot of issues and challenges, you know, with racism, even at school. School, there was a lot of it.

*Interviewer:* And on the estate?

Everywhere, everywhere ... We went through a lot of challenges ... it was tough but you just learned how to deal with it, you learned how to deal with it.<sup>191</sup>

But ‘learning how to deal with it’ could mean turning inwards, throwing up walls; a sense of Otherness, conveyed by racist acts and exclusionary socio-spatial ordering and messages (stay ‘in your place,’ you are ‘out of place’ etc.),<sup>192</sup> was easily internalised:

[they] were very much in the minority, there was just a few of them so you, you know, keep your head down, you don’t say anything that you think anybody won’t understand or wouldn’t recognize, that’s how people behaved I think mostly, erm, with the exception of some people who were quite, who stood up for themselves.<sup>193</sup>

It is important to note that for every resident muddled by prejudice, there were likely more who, given the absence of diversity on the estate, had far greater things to worry about than matters of ‘race,’ and more still who were actively accommodating of difference:

We were very good friends with them. And my nan used to be so proud of the fact that she had a black family that she was friends with.<sup>194</sup>

When I first moved here there wasn’t hardly any black families here, there was not one in this block ... I had a Turkish lady, Greek lady, and she didn’t speak English at all, hardly at all, but it was alright, if I saw her she’d say hello. She never understood, if I knocked on the door to tell her anything she never understood anything ...<sup>195</sup>

To think about tenant attitudes towards difference and exclusion in isolation from the organisational culture that surrounded them would be to turn up a depleted picture. On the Aylesbury, certainly, there was an interlacing of correspondences between individuals, groups, and institutions, such as the TAs, for instance, or the housing department. Whether it was an editorial on ‘problem families,’ lumpish statements on race and religion (‘Turkish women on the Aylesbury Estate ... tend to keep to their homes and stay behind closed doors. They can’t speak the language and if they can it’s too often just to defer to their men.’),<sup>196</sup> or discriminatory allocation practices, the council’s behaviour established a divisive tenor. This, in turn, gave residents and groups of residents the (quasi-authorised) space to articulate certain views and act in certain ways: just as the housing department promoted ‘respectability’ at the expense of Others, so did individual residents, and so too did the Aylesbury’s TAs: ‘on my landing ... I mean there was a good mixture but it was mainly from the Caribbean, and very few of them would go on the tenants’ associations. It was not for them. They weren’t asked or invited’<sup>197</sup>; ‘You know the [TAs] had very entrenched views and certain agendas, and I don’t think single parents in a crèche would have been on their radar at all. Or if it had it probably would have been because of the noise.’<sup>198</sup> That which was entrenched politically took root culturally. In ways both large and small, the council helped create an atmosphere in which difference was exaggerated and exclusion banalised.<sup>199</sup>

As discussed earlier, this emphasising of difference was not for nought, but a source of strategic and rhetorical utility for the borough council (as justification for the failings of its neglected estates, for example). Peter Tatchell, Labour candidate for Bermondsey at the by-election of 1983, experienced first-hand how the political machine could fan the flames of prejudice. Regarding both the 1983 by-election and the Southwark council elections of a year earlier, he wrote: ‘Bermondsey people have a natural pride in being Bermondsey “born and bred”. When that sense of local rootedness is unscrupulously manipulated, it can generate prejudice against “outsiders”, whether they be “squatters”, “niggers”, “queers” or just people with a different lifestyle.’<sup>200</sup> (In December 1980, the *Walworth Inprint* reported that at a meeting on the transfer of GLC properties to Southwark, an unnamed Bermondsey councillor declared: ‘As far as I’m concerned, all coloureds are problem families.’)<sup>201</sup> Here, such ‘unscrupulous manipulation’ was masterminded by then leader of Southwark Council, John O’Grady; former Bermondsey MP, Bob Mellish; and the

‘traditional’ right-wing of the Bermondsey Labour Party (also known as the ‘Bermondsey mafia’), which sought to subdue Tatchell’s modernising Left. This was the ‘old politics’ of paternalism at work.<sup>202</sup> It assumed—and spoke to—a homogenous community (one cut from the same cloth as those who represented it), and ran its estates along autocratic lines.

The allocation of housing in the borough was yet one more way in which difference was played upon. Inequitable systems of allocation had to some degree always been ingrained in the council sector—a product, for the most part, of surplus (would-be tenants) and scarcity (council housing). Yet by the time this gap had been narrowed, it was also clear—and well-documented by many on the left—that the supply of new and decent housing was the privilege of a ‘respectable’ stratum of working-class families, at the expense of an ‘undesirable’ rump—the old, the young, black people, immigrants, ‘problem families,’ single-parent families, etc. These groups had to make do with the oldest, poorest, meanest accommodation, on what were variously termed ‘ghetto,’ ‘sink’ or ‘residual’ estates.<sup>203</sup> Nominal distinctions thus became physical, and tenants were divvied up by councils into ‘competing factions,’ in the words of Merrett.<sup>204</sup> It was a dismal pattern, repeated dismally in Southwark:

The other thing I noticed in terms of housing and Caribbean people that the council, you could call it ghettoize some of the estates ... there’s a road down there, Consort Road, where they got some small flats, small, you know, look like old people flats, and ninety per cent of those old black men, yes. And there’s another place on erm, Consort Estate, and I would say that fifty per cent of them was guys I used to go round with, older guys ... The other place I had a sort of shock was Grove, Gloucester Grove, when I went there during canvassing I couldn’t believe what I saw in terms of the amount of old single black people that was in that flat.<sup>205</sup>

There has also been a largish arrival of so-called ‘problem’ families, non-rent payers, disturbers of the peace, unmarried mothers. These tend to be concentrated in the oldest and cheapest estates.<sup>206</sup>

Meanwhile, those areas of the borough that were staidly white and ‘respectable’ were to be kept that way, despite the hastening exodus of many better-off families. Jeremy Fraser became a Southwark councillor for Newington Ward in 1986, and was leader of the council between 1993 and 1997:

In the early years, before 1982, Southwark had a housing policy which if you were not white, you had a star by your name. And if you had a star by your name, you were not allocated to certain parts of the borough. Now the people who did that would claim it was not apartheid, they would claim they were trying to keep families together, and they wanted to make sure that families could live near their relatives, that historically that's what they had done. The reality by that time was that had already well broken down. Families were already moving out, the younger families were moving out of Southwark, for good reason, bad reason, jobs, whatever, wanted a bit of a garden, whatever the reason. So I could never buy the argument, even when the argument was being put to me as a non-racist argument. When it was being put to me as a racist argument, there was no, there was no justification for it at all, obviously.<sup>207</sup>

It is hard to discuss allocation and selection practices on individual estates with any degree of certainty. We do know that the majority of original tenants on the Aylesbury were from clearance areas and that Southwark had a statutory duty to rehouse them (and to offer a right to return for those previously housed on its footprint).<sup>208</sup> But as both Merrett and Ravetz have pointed out, this duty was limited to recognised groups such as pensioners and so-called 'conventional' families. Authorities, then, were in effect given *carte blanche* to exclude against any number of arbitrary groups. These could include single people, people new to the area, couples without children, subtenants, tenants in furnished accommodation, tenants with a history of rent arrears, lodgers, and 'households otherwise thought "unsuitable" for the council sector (sometimes including single-parent families).'<sup>209</sup> Immigrants almost always fell with a thud into one or more of these categories, which may go some way towards explaining the lack of minority residents on the Aylesbury at the time.<sup>210</sup> Harry Matthews, who did not move from a clearance area, and whose parents were Jamaican immigrants, speculated that the only reason his family were given a place on the estate was because his step-father, a carpenter, had helped build it:

I guess the only reason why I got, why we are where we are, is our old man worked on the block. Had he not have worked there we may not have had the same sort of flat, you know, because like I said, I've got the garage, I've got the garden, and a lot of people don't have that. We've got space, so a lot of people don't have that ... as I said, people, in terms of housing, you didn't, you weren't given that opportunity.<sup>211</sup>

The passing of the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act in 1977 for the first time gave housing priority to unintentionally homeless households, of whom black people and single-parent families were disproportionately represented. Groups previously excluded from the council sector all of a sudden had a right to a permanent home of their own. Unsurprisingly, the enforced liberalisation of housing policy did not sit well with many local authorities, and were thus less than scrupulous in the statute's application: concepts such as 'priority need' and 'intentional homeless' were fuzzy enough for housing departments to hide behind. Even in 1981, when Southwark was boasting of a housing surplus, the council continued to enforce its draconian waiting-list criteria and, according to Goss, ghettoise its 'problem families.'<sup>212</sup> 'It may well be that trouble-makers and nuisance families will be moved to places where they will be a nuisance only to each other,' said the borough council in 1975.<sup>213</sup>

### 'OH, THE VASTNESS'

Sue Herrod was 23 years old when she made the journey from Lancashire to London, in 1978. She was living and working as an assistant social worker in Preston when she saw a job listing for a youth worker on a council estate in Southwark:

I applied and incredibly I got an interview, and I remember just coming down on the train, hitting London, and I'd been to London but never on my own ... I got into Waterloo, I think, then came down the Walworth Road, and I remember before I got there somebody had said it's got the longest walkway in Europe, and that was its fame. And I remember setting foot on this walkway, and just thinking 'I've never seen anything like it', and it was, it was mammoth ... And it was just kind of like boxes, boxes, boxes, boxes, concrete, concrete. That's what I remember of it. And just immense and vast and you know, I got lost. The youth club was right near the side, I remember it, it was just like, it felt like walking from John O'Groats to Land's End or something, it was mad ... coming from the north where I'd never seen anything like it at all. I was just shocked, I was overwhelmed. For me it was overwhelming and too much ... that scale and that size of things. I just couldn't kind of get a grip, and that lack of intimacy.<sup>214</sup>

Much was made of the Aylesbury's extraordinary size in the beginning. This was, after all, 'London's largest estate,'<sup>215</sup> meaning there was mileage to be had, and synonyms to be inserted: 'Massive,' 'Mammoth,' 'Huge,'

‘Vast,’ ‘Giant,’ ‘Colossus.’<sup>216</sup> In April 1975, Robert Toller of *The Architect* described Wendover as having ‘a scale more appropriate to an automobile plant.’<sup>217</sup> And echoing Councillor Ian Andrews opening ceremony invective, the *Evening News* called the estate the ‘Concrete jungle of Colditz.’<sup>218</sup> Whether or not such media portrayals had any bearing on the way residents thought or felt about the Aylesbury is a difficult thing to pin down. That they influenced the way in which tenants spoke about the estate is another matter. Personal accounts are rarely produced in isolation from public narratives: articulated memory invokes the language and labels pushed upon us by public discourses. Take, for example, Councillor Andrews’ ‘concrete jungle’ remark.<sup>219</sup> Glib and unthinking, the phrase stuck—as unfavourable nicknames tend to do—fast becoming a byword for the estate; a kind of anti-slogan. This was true in the press, certainly, where it was repeated ad nauseam, but also of residents themselves: ‘The most popular two words ... to fall from the mouths of tenants on one windy afternoon were “concrete jungle.”’<sup>220</sup> The phrase lingered on, cropping up as it does in the testimony of several interviewees: ‘concrete jungle, isn’t it?’<sup>221</sup>; ‘it’s just referred to as that concrete jungle.’<sup>222</sup> But its usage, in this sense, and of itself, reveals little, particularly when held up against some of the more well-rounded (and often more positive) testimony of those same respondents. Unless couched in some sort of context (‘I never ... thought: “I’m living in this concrete jungle, will there ever be an escape?” I never felt like that at all’),<sup>223</sup> the words ‘concrete jungle’ define only the narrowest conception of the estate. They are hollowed out when used this way, emptied of true meaning, notwithstanding the vast, pauperised no-go zone they immediately call to mind (which, in turn, empties the estate of its own true meaning, as we shall see.)

The size of the estate was always considered an obstacle. A 1975 borough-commissioned report, *People and Homes in Southwark*, warned that for all the value residents placed in their homes on the new estates, their immediate surroundings were just as important: ‘if the price to be paid is a soulless environment, then the price may be too high.’<sup>224</sup> Boundless grey (but for an occasional dash of colour) with stark, unbroken lines and, according to Toller, a ‘bleak monotony to the eye,’<sup>225</sup> the Aylesbury was deemed as ‘soulless’ as they came: ‘Oh, the vastness,’ declared Doug Marks, inaugural chair of the Aylesbury TA, in 1973.<sup>226</sup> Marks himself believed the estate was too big and too populous for the TA to work effectively: ‘The enormous size of the estate has brought its problems. The chief one being the difficulty of keeping in touch with

everyone ... One consequence of this difficulty in communications is that so many people never feel involved or part of the community.<sup>227</sup> In accord was Alderman Sawyer, who described the estate as a 'miniature town': 'Doug Marks makes the same point that everyone makes about the Aylesbury. The most significant fact about the estate is its sheer size.' A combination of tenant activity and 'good management' would go a long way towards 'reducing Aylesbury to a human scale,' he added.<sup>228</sup>

Despite Marks' concerns over the TA's ability to communicate holistically, it curiously resisted proposals to set up additional associations on the estate—a stance voiced at a meeting of tenants on 4 May 1976. Southwark was adamant that the existing body was 'not representative of the total population at Aylesbury,' and noted the swell of enthusiasm on the estate for such a proposal: 'certain blocks, notably Missenden, who have a very flourishing independent social group, obviously favoured the idea.'<sup>229</sup> In any event, and following a canvass of residents' views, three further tenants' associations were established by the end of the 1970s. Derek Way was chair of BACC Tenants' Association—officially recognised by the council in July 1977—for more than a decade<sup>230</sup>:

What used to be one tenants' association on the Aylesbury ... very cliquey, if you was in, you was in. And remember, twelve thousand people lived here. Well what happened they decided to break it up so there was four, there was the Aylesbury TA, Thurlow Lodge Tenants' Association, Wendover, and I used to run BACC84 ... six hundred homes we used to represent.<sup>231</sup>

The necessity of quadrupling the number of TAs adequately spoke to Aylesbury's size, and, once fully realised, they undoubtedly reached and represented portions of the estate in ways (time, resources, etc.) that a single body could not:

Derek used to organise a lot of the parties ... he used to do the old people's parties, Christmas parties—they used to be in the hall at the bottom of Bradenham. In summer he'd organise a trip to France for the day. Down on the grass he'd do activities once a year, like a fundraising sort of thing, bouncy castles ... face painting and all that sort of stuff.<sup>232</sup>

What once might have been considered the estate's far-flung reaches, too distant and obscure for any single, centrally based, TA to ever fully know, were now drawn into sharper focus. Theoretically at least, every

block could be involved and every resident seen and heard. But this in no sense remedied the Aylesbury's fragmentary nature. As we have seen, there was a kind of mental balkanisation of areas and blocks of which residents knew less well and associated less strongly. Like anybody else, those living on the estate constructed cognitive maps based on spatial habits and behaviour, such as visiting friends, going to and from work, or doing the daily shop. But outside of the commonplace, these maps grew hazy and indistinct: blocks and streets sited on the same estate, sharing the same postcode, could be a psychological, as well as a literal, bridge apart. Sandy Stewart, who moved to the Aylesbury in 1994, is a good example. She lives in Northchurch, a small, low-slung block on Dawes Street, at the estate's northernmost bounds.

I knew that obviously it was an estate, there were all these buildings that looked the same, but I had no idea how big it was. I really didn't. And I think one of the things about living on this estate is that actually, depending on where you live, you do have a neighbourhood, and you don't tend to go into other parts. We still have people, I'm sure, living on this estate who don't know there are new buildings in the south west corner that replaced a redbrick block and a small concrete block, and I'm sure they don't know that because they don't walk that way. I never walk that way ... I don't tend to walk sort of south and west, so I don't, you know I never saw that bit of the estate for years!<sup>233</sup>

The walkways did little to align the estate's more atomised parts, and the establishment of separate TAs could only have emphasised or, indeed, entrenched the spatial delineations between imagined 'neighbourhoods.' Moreover, the north-south running Portland Street and Thurlow Street made for natural dividers:

*Interviewer:* It's such a big estate ...

*Jean Bartlett:* To me it feels like three, 'cause when you look at it you've got ... all those properties over the other side of Thurlow Street, and then you've got the main road Thurlow Street, then ... from here to Portland Street which is a vast area, and then you've got another area. Personally, to me, it's always felt like three.

*Interviewer:* Did you have much to do with the other parts of the estate?

*Jean Bartlett:* No, no, we came more together through the regen [the regeneration of the estate, beginning in the late 1990s] because we all had

to start meeting up and start talking about what we ... you know, what the regen was going to look like ...

*Interviewer:* But in terms of knowing people on other parts of the estate ...

*Jean Bartlett:* No. No.

*Interviewer:* The areas feel separate ....

*Janet Shine:* I never, without meaning to, I never think about over that side of the road as part of us, I just always think of this half. I think that road really divides people.

*Jean Bartlett:* The two roads, that and Portland Street.

*Janet Shine:* Yeah. I feel more, I know Portland Street more I suppose because I walk through it to go shopping, I feel more happy about that area than that area. Not happy maybe, but more knowing about it.<sup>234</sup>

For many, then, the Aylesbury was a discrete estate in name only—there was one's own block, and then there were the hinterlands.<sup>235</sup> This was the assessment of ILEA's researchers, as set out in their 1982 report: 'We gained the impression, which was repeatedly reinforced, that local people do not regard the Estate as a whole as their local geographical community, but relate to particular blocks of flats, or groups of blocks, and also to some of the little side streets on the margin.'<sup>236</sup> We will see later how momentary and longer periods of collective tenant action could unite the estate under a single banner. And clearly, there were those who, per their routine, had a much more integrated idea of the estate, including WACAT's Brenda Lipson:

It did feel like one estate but that was because we were spread over it, so during the day, I definitely remember walking from Taplow over to Wendover to over to another part down somewhere else, you know, where we had the different rooms, so I could see it being connected up. But I would imagine for people living there that were on one bit of it, that was their reference, they would only, you know, go from the bus, walk down East Street and go onto their bit, and not necessarily see the connections up there, so it must seem bigger. It didn't seem that big. I mean it seemed big, it was big, but, you know, I could feel it as one place.<sup>237</sup>

Some children, too, seem to have had a fuller sense of the Aylesbury in toto, given the freedom time, play and push-bikes afforded them (Fig. 3.6). Born in 1972, Robert Banks grew up on the estate in the 1970s and 1980s after his parents moved from East Street to Wolverton block, in 1968:



Fig. 3.6 Children playing on a walkway, 1971. (Courtesy of Southwark Council.)

You could run for miles. There used to be bridges across the roads. You could basically go from the Old Kent Road here to the Walworth Road without touching the roads, you know? You could just walk the landings. So we used to go out on our push bikes for miles and miles, you know? Yeah it was lovely ... Do you know what, we was spoilt for friends, you know? And there weren't no gangs, like, and knives and all that. It was like, proper, being like a proper community. I play with like a firm of lads off the landing for a couple of hours, then I'd go round the next few blocks and play with a few other lads and then so on, you know? That's just how it was. I used to go to my mate Kelly's over there. I had friends all over the estate, all over this estate, and I used to go from place to place hanging out.<sup>238</sup>

But this was only some children. Many more would stick to what they saw as 'our area' or 'our manor'—usually a block or a group of blocks, some of which were handily identified and identifiable by splashes of vivid colour:

*Martin Gainsford:* ... like I say the colour-coding to the blocks, it kind of delineated the kids. Although sometimes you would end up playing football with a larger group of kids, quite often you did tend to gravitate to kids that were from your colour.

*Lisa Baxter:* Or your Chartridge.

*Martin Gainsford:* Yeah, and then there was the big Chartridge and small Chartridge.

*Interviewer:* Was this the same for you, too, or was it just a boy thing?

*Lisa Baxter:* Well I tended to go round with my friends from school. One was on Bradenham, one was on Chiltern, you know, and a couple of them were on our Chartridge or the one nearby, because we were all at the same school we just went round together, so no, I don't think it was really like that.

*Martin Gainsford:* When I say colour, I mean colour of the blocks. The yellow block, the red block, and it was 'have you seen that girl just moved in on the yellow block?', 'new bird on the yellow block.'

*Interviewer:* The blocks were painted different colours?

*Lisa Baxter:* Yeah!

*Martin Gainsford:* Yeah they were, they were.

*Lisa Baxter:* The doors were.

*Martin Gainsford:* The front doors and the storage doors, the frames were yellow, and the Artex-ing that they put on the walls were yellow. So we were blue block, Chartridge was blue.

*Lisa Baxter:* We were sort of mauve-y, there was the big long bright blue Chartridge and we were kind of a mauve-y blue.

*Martin Gainsford:* And there was green block, the long green block, a yellow block, and that was also Chartridge, Chartridge was one of the biggest blocks, but not in one huge one like Bradenham.

...

*Lisa Baxter:* But we never really went beyond Chiltern really, it was Bradenham, Chartridge and Chiltern. I never knew Taplow, Missenden, Gayhurst, we never went down there. I mean if you rode your bike past Chiltern you were sort of out of your territory. It was weird, wasn't it?

*Interviewer:* So you never went as far as Wendover?

*Lisa Baxter:* Oh no, that was miles away.

*Martin Gainsford:* That was forbidden territory. Miles away. Not because there was gangs of kids going to bash you up but you just knew ...

*Lisa Baxter:* You just didn't go that far. I mean as the crow flies it probably wasn't actually that far but you just didn't know anyone from down there, the kids weren't familiar ...

*Martin Gainsford:* No, not familiar, they went to different junior schools perhaps.

*Lisa Baxter:* You just wouldn't, you wouldn't venture that far at all.

*Interviewer:* Did it feel like a different estate?

*Lisa Baxter:* Yeah, in a way, yeah.

*Martin Gainsford:* Absolutely, yeah.

*Lisa Baxter:* There was like a group of blocks around in a square where everyone parked their cars.

*Martin Gainsford:* A big square on the grass.

*Lisa Baxter:* And you had like a circular bit where you drove in one way and out the other and on the other side there was an area of grass where people used to play, and that was your manor, and then you'd go on to the next bit and they'd have theirs. And occasionally me and my friend might ride our bikes down there and it was exactly the same square, exactly the same as ours but it wasn't yours and you didn't recognise it and you got a sense ...

*Martin Gainsford:* And you got a sense that you're overstepping the mark a bit, get back to ours.

*Lisa Baxter:* ... this isn't where I play, yeah, yeah.<sup>239</sup>

Decent (clear, extensive, uniform) signage was always going to be important on the estate, both for obvious, orientative reasons, but also to help identify the Aylesbury as one. It was found by some to be lacking: in February 1975, Southwark's Tenants' Consultative Committee—a body of tenant and council representatives, of which Joan Amodio was one—expressed their dissatisfaction: 'We feel generally that the signs at present ... are probably inadequate in view of the size of the estate.'<sup>240</sup> Meanwhile, citing stringent medical regulations on advertising, and spurred into action by a number of local GPs, the General Medical Council argued that there was an 'unethical abundance' of signs for the Aylesbury Health Centre (including a neon-lit sign over the Taplow walkway), and called on Southwark to remove them. 'You are lucky to find the health centre as it is,' responded Aylesbury resident and borough councillor, Kitty Clunn. 'Nobody can find a thing.'<sup>241</sup>

The question of Aylesbury's size must be thought about in terms of height as well as breadth—a prosaic sprawl it was, but one that also stretched skywards (the estate's tallest blocks ranged between 11 and 14 storeys). The *South London Press* declared in 1977 (alongside a broody Aylesbury panorama) that 'living in the sky was nearer the Devil, in psychiatric terms, than Heaven.'<sup>242</sup> It was a statement that held little water, no matter the biblical imagery. In her 1955 study, *Living in High Flats*, Margaret Willis, a sociologist in the LCC's architect's department, found that residents responded very positively to living high: after an initial

period of uncertainty, 90 per cent of the families surveyed said they preferred it on a higher floor, where the noise was lesser, the views more expansive, and the air more bracing.<sup>243</sup> Many Aylesbury residents living in high flats were similarly enamoured (Fig. 3.7):

I think the first impression I got was it was light and spacious ... it just had a sort of, I don't know, a different quality, I think maybe because it's not overlooked. And there was this endless sky, views of sky and panoramas, I think that was quite impressive. But it was the light more than anything ... it was just wonderful to live with the light after so long having no light.<sup>244</sup>

I mean when we saw the flat with my sister we fell in love and we couldn't believe our luck ... it's basically, you know, the spaciousness, the views ... and also the lighting, the windows.<sup>245</sup>

In addition to the widespread practice of keeping their own bit clean, a smattering of residents did their best to enliven the plain, repetitious, grey-green corridor landings (Fig. 3.8): 'One resident decided to brighten up the corridors in the estate. So she hung up eight landscape pictures and she keeps potted plants outside her door.'<sup>246</sup> Residents often sat out on the landings together and, during good weather, on the walkways—a habit that refused to cede to the passage of time: 'Most of the characters on the block you can talk to as a family type thing. At the moment they've got tables and chairs up on the balcony ... all sitting on there, chatting sort of thing.'<sup>247</sup> Some of those with a more daring disposition, like Anne Lorraine, took high living an inadvisable step further, scaling the walls of the lower blocks (still as high as five storeys) to seek out the sun:

I nearly fell off the roof in Chartridge, we used to climb up there sunbathing ... God help you if Alex [caretaker] caught ya, I used to say 'for God's sake. My roof. Go away.'<sup>248</sup>

But it was not all sunny uplands. As Willis' study suggested, being transposed from the street to the sky could be a dizzying experience, especially for elderly people. 'They were living in a terraced house, you know, and had their own backyard and everything,' said one Southwark Housing Officer. 'It's a completely different way of living here, and it can take a hell of a long time to get adjusted to it.'<sup>249</sup> Aylesbury TA's Joan Amodio saw



Fig. 3.7 Wendover views, November 2014. (Michael Romyn.)

much of the same, and singled out the lifts as a potential head sore: ‘If you look at the big new estates, you will see that what is happening is the opening up of a new way of life for a lot of people. You have the old people who find themselves using a lift for the first time in their lives.’<sup>250</sup> A perennial



Fig. 3.8 Wendover corridor, November 2014. (Michael Romyn.)

problem, the lifts were regularly breaking down, only intermittently repaired, and rarely modernised.<sup>251</sup> Then there was the prospect of getting stuck in one:

I was strolling about last Christmas, and I heard this bellowing from right across the other side. When I went over it was an old man stuck in the lift. He'd been there for over an hour, and nobody nearby was taking any notice. I got the superintendent, and he had to find a porter who had a key. It was another hour before we got him out.<sup>252</sup>

Of course, the platonic ideal of safe, working lifts trumped stairs every time, and were an upgrade for those more accustomed with cramped tenement stairwells:

We lived in Long Lane, and we were up four storeys high without a lift ... [at Aylesbury] there was a lift, a ramp, and stairs. There was all the boxes ticked for me to get in and out [with a pram] without the hassle that I had.<sup>253</sup>

But even if the lifts were working as they should, some still found the provision to be lacking:

If you lived on the top floor, mate, and you had two or three children and you had a pram you was in trouble. And there used to be a big crowd, you know, at the bottoms of the lifts like, you know, waiting to get up.<sup>254</sup>

This raises what was perhaps the most telling knock on the estate at this time: the preponderance of children living up high. On the neighbouring Heygate—which benefited from a more conventional, ‘donutty’ footprint, as well as the learnt lessons from the preceding Aylesbury development—the majority of its larger, three- and four-bedroom family homes were contained in the middle of the estate, in a series of four-storey maisonnettes.<sup>255</sup> The Aylesbury, on the other hand, was strangled by the high number of family dwellings built into the scheme, and the relative lack of space in which to install them at something close to ground level. Architect John Nichols:

Something like seventy-five, eighty per cent of dwellings were two bedrooms or bigger so they were family dwellings and there was absolutely no way that we could put those on the ground, there just wasn't enough space to do it. So we had this very, very high number of medium to large family dwellings—lots and lots of kids went into the high rise and that was it ... So not only did we have a very distorted kind of mix, we had many children living miles away from the ground, but it also meant another problem of the scheme in use, which is the business of adequate performance by the lifts, for example. Lifts were very prone to vandalism and they were always breaking down so living in the high-rise blocks quite soon, there were a number of additional difficulties, and I think we'd been a bit optimistic.<sup>256</sup>

The lifts were one thing, but there was further concern over the type of environment the blocks presented for children, and indeed for those adults tasked with minding them. Clearly, for tenants with young children, it was a relatively long and, as one can imagine, tiresome journey from the high storeys to the street. And while the landings were useful for adults to meet and talk, they were an unsuitable place for children to play—made more so by the fact that they were unseen from the flats (what Newman would describe as a lack of 'natural surveillance'),<sup>257</sup> as Aylesbury TA's Doug Marks explained: 'The doors of the flats open on to the pedways or the corridors, but there are no windows from which pedways and corridors may be constantly surveyed ... The children cannot be seen and the residents are unable naturally to care for the estate in the same unconscious way people in a street care for each other, *and keep each other's children in check*.'<sup>258</sup> While evident that Marks had swallowed the Newman handbook whole, the point was valid. A 1961 inquiry into the effects of high-rise living on children aged between two and five found that among 300 families living in London above a fifth storey level, half the children were not allowed outside to play.<sup>259</sup> This seems like an extraordinary number, and one wonders what the results would have been for those housed beneath this apparently transformative fifth-floor line. Still, there were at least traces of this kind of thinking on the Aylesbury, such as that of David and Janet Ward, of Wendover block, who 'won't let their children [aged eight, six and five] out to play because, they say, it's dangerous.'<sup>260</sup> The report of the 1961 inquiry, *Two to Five in High Flats*—introduced in the House of Commons by Margaret Thatcher—cleaved to the sort of determinism that pegged tower blocks as a disruptor of normal social development.<sup>261</sup> It stated: 'Perhaps the most serious deprivation is the limitation by flat life on

the easy mingling and playing with other children, for only through play with others may the young child learn about co-operative social relationships.<sup>262</sup> All told, it is hard to square this assessment with the testimony of respondents who grew up on the estate. Robert Banks, for example:

The estate was like a shiny new penny. It was lovely. It was really lovely. It's hard for me to paint a picture for you but it was a beautiful place to live ... The community side of it, you know? I mean, you knew all the neighbours ... You know, you would never have got that sort of community in a row of houses as you did with the landings. And the safety as well 'cause the kids we could all fly up and down the landings, you know? I used to have a go cart as well as me bike, but a proper go cart, not a pedal one but a big 'un. And we used to fly down the ramps on 'em. We loved it as kids down' ere.<sup>263</sup>

Or Harry Matthews:

There was lots of us as kids coming in so we all got to know each other to the point that we were always in and out of each other's house, you know, a lot of us we were always in and out of each other's house, and as I say ... when we were there we had fun, we had fun.<sup>264</sup>

In 1974, Southwark Council's Susan Rustem, a landscape architect, weighed in with her own Newman-esque critique of the multi-storey. 'Blocks of flats also cut off mothers from their children when they play outside,' she said. 'In a house a mum can shout to her kids when they're up to mischief and keep an eye on them when squabbles break out. Neighbours are also more involved with the children, know where they live and so on.'<sup>265</sup> But again, while recognising that such an analysis may well have rung true for tenants on certain blocks or estates, for many others it would have been meaningless:

*Lisa Baxter:* And all the kids would go out and play together.

*Martin Gainsford:* Play run outs, football, and just congregate. The girls would do their two balls or little girly things, kids would be playing football, or then it would be a whole gang of boys or girls.

*Lisa Baxter:* And the thing is your mum could always, my mum would come out onto the balcony, she could see exactly where we were playing, you know, and I was always too loud, she used to come out and say 'Lisa, I can hear you above everybody else, you're too loud.'<sup>266</sup>

Neighbourliness existed well enough on the eighth floor as it did on the ground: ‘you bang on the door you see if everyone’s alright, “Hello Carol, is your son indoors, is your mum indoors?” It was lovely, it really was.’<sup>267</sup> At the same time, however, there were unquestionably some living up high who felt isolated and anonymous, despite the massed proximity of other human beings. One has to imagine that these feelings were experienced more acutely among residents living alone, or residents who, as a consequence of age and circumstance, spent a good part of their day in the closed compartments of their homes, such as mothers with young children, or the elderly. Various newspaper and magazine articles made hay from the supposed link between Aylesbury’s flats and social alienation. In the *Mercury*, in 1976, architectural historian and Lewisham councillor and planning chairman, Nicholas Taylor, said of the estate: ‘Each person has a small isolated cupboard in the sky.’<sup>268</sup> (Taylor, here, had apparently forgotten the roomy gifts bestowed on council tenants by the Parker Morris Committee.) And two years earlier, in a notably overheated takedown of the ‘notorious’ Aylesbury, *Time Out* wrote: ‘The most common and heartfelt complaint was of the depressing isolation of living in apparently close proximity to thousands of others.’ ‘It’s no good if you’re living on your own,’ said one tenant. ‘You could be lying dead and nobody would come. You just don’t see people on the landings.’<sup>269</sup> These articles, and others like them, invariably began with standardised preconceptions about what was wrong with mass housing, upon which layers of sensationalist gloss were applied. But this is not to say they were entirely unfounded, for respondents, too, noted the propensity to depression among young mothers and housewives on the estate. Non-residents Su Braden and Sue Herrod, for example:

By the time we had set up WACAT we realised that there were also a lot of very depressed people around. I mean everyone talked about vandalism ... and all that kind of thing, but even more worrying in some ways was the number of women on Prozac. So many people, and particularly women, didn’t go out at all.<sup>270</sup>

I remember, you know, meeting for the first time in my life women who were on Valium, I remember that, always remember that. I remember going into people’s houses and people just sitting there and ... I never found it a place where I felt like, you know, this is a place where something great could happen, I never got that sense of it.<sup>271</sup>

How much of this had to do with the estate itself is hard to say. We do know, however, that the experience of feeling marooned or isolated in plain sight was by no means exclusive to flatted council estates. Hannah Gavron's 1966 study, *The Captive Wife*, showed that women from both working and middle-class backgrounds could feel walled in, and at the same time cast adrift, by motherhood. Raising young children, Gavron argued, imposed physical and psychological restrictions, to the point where one's home, regardless of size, style or tenure type, became a place of loneliness, isolation, even captivity.<sup>272</sup> Joyce McDonald could attest to such feelings while living in terraced Bagshot Street, before she and her family moved into a 'lovely' flat on the Aylesbury: 'having three children I was a nervous wreck. I had a nervous breakdown round there ... My next-door neighbour had to have the children, I just, I couldn't cope.'<sup>273</sup> Moreover, there were those who actually preferred the relative obscurity of the estate, and who chose to live there because of it. Julia Lindmeyer and her parents moved from a much smaller block of post-war council flats in New Kent Road (later demolished to make room for the Heygate Estate) to a 12th-floor flat in Taplow block:

I was a little sorry to leave the nice compact little 'house-like' block of six flats with its rear garden. My mother was relieved as she did not like living on the ground floor and felt the neighbours—with whom we were on good terms—were too close and could observe her movements in and out of the block. She chose the Aylesbury Estate because of its 'anonymity' and freedom from close view of other tenants.<sup>274</sup>

And anonymity, for the Lindmeyers, was in no sense synonymous with loneliness or alienation:

We were on good neighbourly terms with all the tenants in our part of the corridor, and my mother became friendly with those from other parts of the building and from the smaller blocks who used the laundry in Taplow. Some of the neighbours on the twelfth floor installed our plastic (alas!) tiling in the bathroom and lavatory (which was separate from the bathroom—an excellent arrangement). I did not feel a sense of belonging to a community in Taplow but I did like the people who lived near us and those other tenants I met in the lifts. I never felt lonely or alienated. My mother, particularly, loved the freedom of the vast estate. We did not join the TA or participate in any social activities arranged by Management but we did socialize with our neighbours, Christmas drinks and cards and so on.<sup>275</sup>

### ‘BLOODY KIDS!’

‘Tenants will die, warns fire chief’; ‘Mammoth estate is a death trap’; ‘A HORROR blaze will turn London’s largest estate into a death trap.’ Thus read the front page of the *South East London and Kentish Mercury* on 30 September, 1976. The cause of this imminent catastrophe? Vandals. ‘[They] will be to blame when tragedy strikes the Aylesbury Estate, Walworth. They have been smashing valuable fire-fighting equipment on the estate.’ Roger Vaughn, the fireman responsible for such fatalistic predictions went on: ‘There is no doubt that vandalism will eventually cost lives ... The Aylesbury is one of the worst estates I have ever seen for vandalism.’ This was fearful stuff, to be sure. But those who made it through this blizzard of ‘grim warning,’ to the staler dregs of the piece, were perhaps assuaged by the soberer tones of tenant and council leaders. ‘We refute the suggestion that the fire equipment is smashed throughout the Aylesbury Estate,’ said a spokesman for Southwark Council. ‘The hose reels have been damaged but the fire service assure us that they are not needed ... London’s chief fire officer ... is going to investigate these allegations. We just don’t agree with them.’ Joan Amodio added that she was ‘worried about the fire risk,’ but ‘generally vandalism is low.’<sup>276</sup>

An article like this serves well to encapsulate the uneasy relationship between public representations of the estate and, for want of a better phrase, what happened on the ground. As with treatments of its size, appearance and the alienation it was supposed to have bred, literal ‘HORROR’ headlines did well to hasten the estate into conceptual exile: portrayed in this way, the Aylesbury was imagined and widely understood as a place existing outside of ‘normal’ (i.e. middle class) society. Moreover, the media’s disregarding of social context, its manipulation of the problems that did exist, and the cumulative effect of its language (‘concrete jungle,’ ‘top of the flops’ etc.), undid any chance the estate might have had in getting ahead of the shame and stigma that eventually caught up with all council housing by the end of the 1980s. With regard to vandalism on the Aylesbury, it was a perennial headache, but one that throbbed hardest during the estate’s first decade: in April 1975, *The Architect* estimated that the estate had, already, after just a handful of years, racked up at the hands of vandals a repair bill worth £475,000.<sup>277</sup> A small example: on the 24 February 1971, the Housing (Urgency) Sub-Committee green-lit the installation of wire mesh screens to the Amersham Community Centre following ‘a large number of breakages of windows.’ The work

totalled £416.<sup>278</sup> That same year, the tenants of number 47 and 49 Wolverton were threatened with eviction when it emerged that their children had caused ‘considerable vandalism and nuisance.’<sup>279</sup> It is safe to assume that many more such warnings were issued.

Children were indeed the principal culprits. ‘Most of it’s done by gangs of 16-year-olds,’ claimed one unnamed tenant. ‘They go round about six in the evening, smash the lifts, and then go inside again.’<sup>280</sup> Doug Marks, on the other hand, saw that ‘almost all the early damage on the estate was done by children between 8 and 12.’<sup>281</sup> But one has to imagine that age was of low concern for tenants considering the ruin and mayhem described: the *Evening News*: ‘Aylesbury Estate is 60-acre breeding ground for vandals and petty criminals ... a confused mass of ... graffiti-scarred walls.’<sup>282</sup> *The Observer*: ‘[Residents] seem not to see the spectacular vandalism and rampant aerosol graffiti in the corridors and lobbies.’<sup>283</sup> The *South London Press*, in 1975: ‘Vandalism is making the estate turn prematurely grey. It is a paradise for graffiti artists and hit-and-run hooligans. But what were miles of blank walls four years ago have now become one massive concrete doodle sheet, filled to capacity with the kids’ newfound knowledge of sex and swearwords.’<sup>284</sup> Brian Alexander, of the *South London Press*, two years later: ‘I saw a bored youth letting off steam by kicking in a walkway panel, and a group of youths in their late teens throwing a child off a soccer pitch.’<sup>285</sup> *The Guardian*: ‘Mustafa, 16, claimed to have done hundreds of pounds worth of damage on the estate by smashing windows.’<sup>286</sup> In all, it was a cataclysmic portrait; a concerted howl of disgust. Adding insult to injury, *Building Design* made an example of the Aylesbury in a broader piece about vandalism in Britain: ‘The Aylesbury Estate was soon covered, pavement to gutter, in graffiti, especially on and around the walkways ... a massive estate like the Aylesbury ... is in constant danger of becoming a dump.’<sup>287</sup>

Yet again, when weighed against the voices of people who lived and worked on the estate, the extent of the problem described appears less drastic, less straightforward, more lifelike: Aylesbury resident and Southwark Councillor, Kitty Clunn, thought it was ‘basically a very good housing estate ... I think we suffer from a minority of children who spoil the quality of life for us all.’<sup>288</sup> And writing to the *Mercury* in September 1976, J. Lawlor, of Wendover, Thurlow Street, said: ‘We of course had our settling-in troubles, with kids etc. But now we find that our passage way is a place where neighbours chat and say hello, take in our milk and parcel post, and even take our key to let the electric man in to read the

meter.<sup>289</sup> In March 1978, more than a year after it was reported that vandalism on the Aylesbury was ‘low compared to other London estates,’ a council spokeswoman reported that ‘vandalism has declined sharply [confirmed by officers at Carter Street Police Station] and the residents are getting a bit fed up with the estate’s reputation.’<sup>290</sup> This was certainly the case for K. Spencer, of Latimer block, who told the *Mercury* in 1976: ‘I think you are misleading your readers over the Aylesbury Estate. You give them the impression it is a notorious slum. I invite you to take photos from my flat of the nicest view of the estate—‘till now you’ve only shown the worst.’<sup>291</sup> There was also a strong sense from some respondents that issues surrounding graffiti and vandalism, while real (‘I mean there were some difficult kids there, there were. I mean that’s why we were doing the IT [Intermediate Treatment] work’),<sup>292</sup> were also manageable (and, indeed, managed): ‘we had caretakers, and I think that’s what made the difference, even if there was a bit of graffiti they would get it removed.’<sup>293</sup> Others, like Derek Way and Julia Lindmeyer, could not recall much of any destructive behaviour on the estate in the 1970s, which somewhat debunks the ‘rampant,’ ‘pavement to gutter,’ maximalist accounts.<sup>294</sup> WACAT’s Tony Downmunt, who was based on the estate for a handful of years from 1975, worked extensively with an IT group composed of, in his words, the estate’s ‘heaviest kids’—all of them, at some point, had run afoul of the law. For Downmunt, the experience was surprising, and gratifying, and well-illustrates the divide between lived experience and broad-brush media depictions:

The group I worked with for years and years actually nicked all our video gear one night ... we were walking into the front door of the room and the kids were piling out the back window with all the video gear, and so we, you know, put the word round, you know ‘This is ridiculous, this is the stuff you use, bring it back’. And we didn’t see who did it or anything—they scarpered as we were coming in ... but of course I put the word round and we got it all back within a few days. So it’s not, you know, it’s, it was sort of a bit wild but not kind of really, really heavy in a way you can get on estates.<sup>295</sup>

Blame for the actions of so-called vandals was attributed widely. On the young people themselves: ‘We have got the worst of the bunch here ... they were moved in from slum areas like Queen’s Buildings and they just don’t care.’<sup>296</sup> On parents: ‘The vandalism is terrible. Children need discipline.’<sup>297</sup> On protest—a ‘savagely frustration against the concrete city world’:<sup>298</sup> ‘Perhaps vandalism can ... be seen as a big “NO”-“NO” to an

estate so clearly built for second class citizens, so clearly designed for the deserving homeless.<sup>299</sup> On novelty: ‘Whenever you have a new estate you have really bad vandalism over the first six months.’<sup>300</sup> And, unsurprisingly, on design: ‘There are so many areas of the estate where nobody naturally goes, such as the enormous stairwells, useless corner spaces, odd closed-off rooms. All these are in one way or another *hidden spaces* where children can go and cause damage, deface walls and break windows.’<sup>301</sup> Meanwhile, the people who designed the estate zeroed in on the cutting of corners and costs during development (the pernicious influence of the cost yardstick). ‘The lack of finishes and the poor quality of many of the materials provided has created a very drab environment,’ wrote the Borough Architect’s Division, in 1973. ‘This seems almost to have provoked mistreatment and vandalism.’<sup>302</sup>

There may have been a grain or two of truth in all of the above, but a further, more straightforward explanation for the Aylesbury’s vandalism troubles was the sheer number of young people living there. As of 1971, roughly 37 per cent of the estate’s 9000 residents were aged 16 or under, of which 16 per cent were aged between ten and 15 (23 per cent in one enumeration district). In comparison, the figures for Southwark as a whole were 25 per cent and 10 per cent, respectively.<sup>303</sup> Correlating an unusually high number of young people with the sort of behaviour associated with them is certainly no imaginative stretch. David Biss was a police officer at Carter Street between 1965 and 1978: ‘I must say I didn’t see a lot of graffiti when I was there ... but of course the population in that area, there was nothing there when I arrived and of course, how many people live on the Aylesbury? Thousands? So you suddenly get thousands of people, you’re gonna see a difference aren’t you?’<sup>304</sup> For Neil McIntosh, then Director of Shelter, the housing charity, Aylesbury’s problem was simple: the children were too many. ‘A couple of years ago 40 per cent of the people were under 18,’ he said, in 1978. ‘That puts a pressure on the social fabric that it cannot take.’<sup>305</sup>

McIntosh undersold the resiliency of the estate’s ‘social fabric,’ yet the burden placed upon it by young people was, as indicated, not insubstantial, and, it seems, felt most keenly by elderly tenants.<sup>306</sup> Noise was the chief irritant and universal complaint. And while this was to be somewhat expected—as in any urban area of high-density living—the proportional dominion of children on the Aylesbury did not help. The estate was ‘generously provided’ with play areas and ball courts, and numerous were the grassy quadrangles between the blocks, which, though not intended to be played upon, inevitably were.<sup>307</sup> (Fig. 3.9.) This could have only



**Fig. 3.9** An unfinished and unimaginative play area, July 1976. (Courtesy of John David Hulchanski, University of Toronto.)

compounded the problem, rendering the noise inescapable at busier times, such as weekends and school holidays. A September 1973 broadcast by *Radio London*'s Nick Warrell (summarized a month later in the *Southwark Tenant*) captured the frustration felt by many:

*Warrell:* Family flats mean children, and for many like Mrs Stubbs, 61, children mean noise.

*Mrs Stubbs:* You ask them to be quiet. All right they have to play, but not scream and holler.

*Mr Stubbs:* Weekends is terrible.

*Mrs Stubbs:* I mean we never had a bathroom or lavatory for thirty years. We have got everything now, but no peace of mind.<sup>308</sup>

The walkways exacerbated things. First, by being an attractive space for young people to congregate: 'The close living is disliked by people like Mrs Chapman. She lives on a corner where pedestrian ways meet. The covered space is used by youths as a noisy meeting place for all hours of the day and night.' (Fig. 3.10.) Second, by serving, unintendedly, as a racetrack: 'you take your life in your hands when you step outside, with all the bikes being ridden along the walkways.'<sup>309</sup> And third, by dint of faulty (or cheap) construction: a lack of decent finish to the pedways meant that



**Fig. 3.10** Aylesbury landing, July 1976. (Courtesy of John David Hulchanski, University of Toronto.)

noise (usually the thump and clack of footfall) could be heard in numerous ground floor flat bedrooms, which, in another questionable judgement, had been positioned directly beneath. Said one tenant: ‘I have an invalid husband who tries to rest during the day. All he gets are children running up and down, playing ball and shouting. Then, at night there’s people trampling around above you.’<sup>310</sup> In 1975, Southwark was staring at a £160,000 bill for the putting down of a rubber finish on the walkways—all 13 miles of it—so as to deaden the offending noise.<sup>311</sup>

The policeman turned writer, Harry Cole, who we met in the previous chapter, was his usual hyperbolic self when it came to the ‘warring’ relationship between old and young. ‘This is almost always complicated by the design of many of the new housing estates,’ he said. ‘I often have the feeling that architects only became architects in the first place because they always disliked their grandparents. When one sees the location of many of these old people’s houses, it is difficult to disprove this theory.’<sup>312</sup> In light of some of the more alarming opinions held by Southwark in regard to its elderly tenants—‘Old people tend naturally

to seek sympathy and attention ... many will ... deny their own ability and confidence ... Elderly people, too, tend toward exaggerated jealousies and mild paranoia'<sup>313</sup>—such a dastardly scheme may seem less than far-fetched. But the reality of Cole's old-young dichotomy—of which 'old people hate kids' seemed to be the crux—did not exist.<sup>314</sup> Some were irritated by the commotion, some were not, and some welcomed the human exuberance of it all: 'There is a very large number of older people who want to see children, hear the noise, and look outside their windows and see children jumping around—life going on.'<sup>315</sup> Life going on, and in complex, contradictory, but mostly ordinary ways. Though daubed in black and white—the disastrous Aylesbury with the fatal flaw—life on the estate went on, like everywhere else, and would continue to do so regardless. 'A few years ago I moved to the Aylesbury,' said 66-year-old Eve Bransby. 'I lead a busy life, what with the Pensioners Club at the Activities Centre and the Tenants' Association and helping to organise the Walworth Festival. It all keeps me going.'<sup>316</sup>

### UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Tragedy struck the Aylesbury twice in its first decade. In 1973, two young girls were accidentally killed in their home in an incident related to the estate's temperamental district heating system. Former policeman David Biss was the first attending officer at the scene:

we gone in, and there was two kids dead in the bath. When we went in the bathroom was so hot, unbearable you see ... We tried to give them, we gave them mouth to mouth and all that sort of thing and it wasn't working. Their bodies were so hot and the fella with me was in tears ... what happened these two kids have got up in the middle of the night, gone into the bathroom, mum and dad have had a skinful so they're out for it, so they've gone in there, decided to get in the bath and wash their dolls, and they switched the hot water on and of course it came out cold to start with, didn't it, or lukewarm or whatever as it would do, wouldn't it? And got into the bath and of course they erm, they got scalded and they couldn't get out.<sup>317</sup>

(Residents had made numerous complaints about the water fed to them at 'boiling point.'<sup>318</sup> Five years later, in April 1978, 11-year-old schoolboy Terry Bishop suffered grievous injuries when he fell from a corridor window on the eighth-floor of Wendover—a drop of more than 100 feet,

according to the *South London Press*. The boy's mother, Maureen Bishop, 'frantically tried to save her son ... when she found him hanging from his fingertips ... but with his hands bleeding and torn by the jagged glass, Terry fell to the ground as his horrified mother looked on.'<sup>319</sup> Aside from their inherent awfulness, what bound these two incidents was the blame rightly laid at the feet of the council. While there seems to have been no further accidents of a similar magnitude or otherwise associated with the estate's heating system—this, thankfully, was its miserable low—mechanical problems would continue to blight it for years to come, much to the dissatisfaction of residents. As early as March 1977, Southwark received a tenant-led deputation demanding an improved heating service, a reimbursement of several weeks' heating charge, and the waiving of a 40 per cent hike in said charge—a source of aggravation in itself.<sup>320</sup> As for the fallen boy, the writing had been on the wall for some time. The 1973 report of the Borough Architect's Division, *Aylesbury Development in Use*, flagged up the overuse of glass in public areas both as bait for vandals and as a safety concern.<sup>321</sup> Architect John Nichols had recognised the potential for problems, too:

there was some glazing associated with the public stairs which was always getting broken. So having an awful lot of kids in a slightly vulnerable environment, public areas, was another unfortunate consequence.<sup>322</sup>

The Housing Committee was aware of the danger as early as 1972. In view of 'the risk of serious accident due to falling glass,' it conducted a 'thorough examination of alternatives,' including an 'unbreakable' plastic wire option.<sup>323</sup> Terry Bishop's fall six years hence would indicate that such an alternative was not seriously pursued.

Like a stark light, these lamentable events served to expose many of Aylesbury's gaps, shortcomings and outright failings. They were dependent on a concatenation of factors, no less design oversights and council neglect. But so too did cost limits play their part: the estate was set back early and often by the Ministry's cupidity, and Southwark was forever chasing to catch up:

I did not like the lack of 'finish' to the common parts of the building. Outside the flat the flooring was just grey concrete, full of dust, which took months of sweeping before it became clean. After some years I think the floor was sealed with some black adhesive substance, not very attractive. Also the walls around the lifts were not faced with tiling until sometime after

the building was open. Within the flats the tenants themselves tiled their bathrooms and parts of the kitchen around the sink, which had been left without protection.<sup>324</sup>

Other, much larger ‘built-in dilapidations,’<sup>325</sup> as *The Architect* termed them, included miles of leaky flat roofs, leaky and deteriorating private balcony ceilings, and the vandal-hit lift lobbies lined with cheap insulation boards.<sup>326</sup> (Apparently, none of this was enough to dissuade Southwark from entering the Aylesbury into the Department of the Environment’s 1973 Good Design in Housing Award.)<sup>327</sup> In total, the litany of works needed or recommended ran up considerable estimates—approximately £2.6 m in 1975. Some of this was ‘put back’ into the estate at double the pre-yardstick cost; some of it was never fully dealt with.<sup>328</sup>

Going by the scathing newsprint, or Newman’s funeral commentary in *The Writing on the Wall*, it would be easy to think that the Aylesbury was dead already, a £12 m stillbirth. But this would be a false assumption. There were mistakes made in their dozens, yes, but there were tenants in their hundreds and thousands who were at least satisfied with the new estate. The repairs were not to dress up a corpse, but rather to equip a still-breathing body with the capacities haste and short-sightedness had denied it formerly. The Aylesbury was a work in progress at this stage (indeed, it was a building site for much of the 1970s), and in order for it to thrive, it would have to be viewed in such a way moving forward. ‘The estate has been described as a “mini-town” and a new approach to the running of it is required,’ wrote the borough architects. ‘It is not considered realistic to think of such a development as complete at any particular point in time, and a developing approach is required in order that the problems that occur can be responded to.’<sup>329</sup>

In July 1976, David Hulchanski, a housing development professor at the University of Toronto, then an urban planning student, visited the estate as part of a month-long tour of British housing and urban design:

I just found it interesting or nice, it was Modernist. There wasn’t yet explicit resentment to Modernist approaches ... I just saw a new place that looked good and was just interesting. It wasn’t memorable in the sense of ‘oh, this is really great’ or ‘this is unfortunate’ or ‘this is going to be a disaster.’<sup>330</sup>

He had his camera with him, and maybe it was the clear skies and dazzling sun on this hottest British summer on record, but the Aylesbury he



**Fig. 3.11** Balconies, sunlight, saplings and lawns, July 1976. (Courtesy of John David Hulchanski, University of Toronto.)

captured seems bright and tidy and much airier than one might imagine an inner-city housing estate to look like. (See Figs. 3.10, 3.11.) The saplings are growing up, children are playing, and there are no smashed windows to be seen; no compromising splurge of graffiti. Soon after Hulchanski's visit, in September (when another photo was taken, of smiling representatives 'toasting' the Aylesbury's opening),<sup>331</sup> Chancellor Denis Healey and the Labour Government went cap in hand to the IMF, setting in train deep and indelible public spending cuts, and prefiguring the rise of Thatcherism. In terms of financial sustenance, it was to be a decade-long winter for the Aylesbury. Certainly, the 'developing approach' to its running—deemed necessary by the borough architects—stayed as words on the page of a report. Rare were Hulchanski's photos for showing the new blocks and walkways, and fortuitous, too, for capturing the estate at what was perhaps its fleeting best.

## NOTES

1. London Borough of Southwark, *Aylesbury Development Area Opening Ceremony*, 11 April 1970.
2. Mansfield (dir.), *Horizon: The Writing on the Wall*, (BBC, 1974).
3. Oscar Newman, *Defensible Space*, (New York: Macmillan, 1972).
4. Mansfield (dir.), *Horizon*, (BBC, 1974).
5. LBS, *Aylesbury Development Area Opening Ceremony*, 11 April 1970.
6. *South London Press*, 16 October 1970.
7. *SLP*, 16 October 1970.
8. Tony Aldous, *The Times*, 3 November 1970.
9. Aldous, *The Times*.
10. Aldous, *The Times*.
11. Aldous, *The Times*.
12. *SLP*, 11 September 1970.
13. *SLP*, 11 September 1970.
14. A smattering of blocks were occupied as early as 1968.
15. Of course, these statements were likely cherry-picked from a more substantive discussion for the purposes of the article.
16. Aldous, *The Times*.
17. Inner London Education Authority, *The Aylesbury Estate: An Action Research Project on the Aylesbury Estate, South East London*, by I.L.E.A.'s *Community Education Workers* (London: Southwark Institute of Adult Education, 1982), 88.
18. Derek Way, 23 October 2014.
19. Carol Vincent, 7 October 2014.
20. Julia Lindmeyer, 'My Memories of Life on the Aylesbury Estate, 1970–2011', (Unpublished Memoir, 2015).
21. Donna Grant, 9 February 2015.
22. Pat Davies, 27 February 2015.
23. Creation Trust, 'Billy and Cindy Sinclair', *Put it on the Map! The Aylesbury Estate Project*, (2011), <http://www.putitonthemap.org>, accessed 31 May 2016.
24. *SLP*, 16 October 1970; *SLP*, 27 October 1970.
25. According to a survey of more than 800 residents, undertaken by the Walworth Residents Association in September 1970. See: *SLP*, 11 September 1970.
26. Lisa Baxter, 5 March 2015; Martin Gainsford, 5 March 2015.
27. Creation Trust, 'Cindy Sinclair', <http://www.putitonthemap.org>, (accessed 31 May 2016).
28. Linda Cleverly, 13 April 2015.
29. Sandie Read, 5 June 2015.

30. Southwark Council Housing Committee, *Aylesbury Redevelopment: London Borough of Southwark Department of Architecture and Planning* (25 October 1966), Box 256, Folder 6/66–5/67.
31. The 1980 Housing Act introduced a systematic security of tenure for council residents. See: Southwark's tenancy agreement: SCHC, *Proposed Housing Bill: Consultation Paper on Tenants Charter—Summary and Comments* (7 November 1979), Box 633, Folder 11/79–3/80.
32. Read, 5 June 2015.
33. Baxter, 5 March 2015.
34. As Ben Jones pointed out, the stigma associated with 'slum' neighbourhoods often pursued working-class residents when moving into the new estates from the 1930s onward. See: Ben Jones, 'The Uses of Nostalgia: Autobiography, Community Publishing and Working Class Neighbourhoods in Post-war England', *Cultural and Social History*, vol. 7 (2015), 356–57.
35. SCHC, *Report of Policy and Resources Committee to Council* (24 November 1976), Box 773, Folder 5/76–12/76.
36. Read, 5 June 2015.
37. Sandra Williams, 4 February 2015.
38. Joyce McDonald, 5 November 2014.
39. SCHC, *Report of Policy and Resources Committee to Council* (24 November 1976).
40. Read, 5 June 2015.
41. Davies, 27 February 2015
42. Michael Romyne, 'The Heygate: Community Life in an Inner-City Estate, 1974–2011', *History Workshop Journal*, vol. 81 (2016), p. 211; SCHC, *Care and Upkeep of Estates* (8 January 1980), Box 633, Folder 11/79–3/80.
43. Baxter, 5 March 2015; Gainsford, 5 March 2015.
44. Robert Millward, 5 March 2015.
45. Read, 5 June 2015.
46. SCHC, *Report of Housing (Management) Sub-Committee* (6 February 1974), Box 20,284,151, Folder 5/74–12/74.
47. Alison Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture*, (London: Routledge, 2001), 115–16.
48. *Southwark Tenant*, December 1972. Established in 1972, the *ST* was a quarterly newspaper financed and produced by Southwark Council for free distribution on its estates. There was some concern expressed by the housing department that its title, the *Southwark Tenant*, 'possibly has a feudal ring.' See: SCHC, *Tenants' Association Newsletter* (12 July 1972), Box 20,286,216, Folder 6/72–11/72.
49. John Synnuck, 17 December 2014.

50. SCHC, *Dogs on Aylesbury Development* (28 March 1973), Box 639, Folder 6/72–5/73.
51. SCHC, *Housing Estate Gardens and Balcony/Window Box Competition* (11 October 1972), Box 20,286,216, Folder 6/72–11/72.
52. McDonald, 5 November 2014.
53. SCHC, *Report of the Tenants Consultative Committee* (19 February 1975), Box 20,284,151, Folder 1/75–5/75.
54. Gainsford, 5 March 2015.
55. Ravetz, 116. Synnuck (17 December 2014), said: ‘But don’t forget as well we were delivering ... I found it really odd cutting someone’s washing line and giving their washing back, you know. But they’d say, “Ooh, we’re really sorry”. Imagine you did that today—well you’d be lynched, rightly so.’
56. Alan Crane, 18 June 2015.
57. *SLP*, 15 December 1967.
58. *SLP*, 15 December 1967.
59. Harry Matthews, 30 March 2015; *ST*, February 1974.
60. Robert Banks, 2 October 2014; Creation Trust, ‘John Charnock’, *Put it on the Map! The Aylesbury Estate Project*, (2011), <http://www.putiton-themap.org>, accessed 31 May 2016.
61. Vincent, 7 October 2014; Grant, 9 February 2015; *Time Out*, 7–13 June 1974; *South London Press*, 11 July 1969; Ida Darlington (ed.), ‘New Kent Road’, *Survey of London: Volume 25: St. George’s Fields: The Parishes of St. George the Martyr Southwark and St. Mary Newington*, (London County Council: 1955), 120.
62. Williams, 4 February 2015; Lorraine, 5 June 2015.
63. Way, 23 October 2014; Read, 5 June 2015; Davies, 27 February 2015; Baxter, 5 March 2015.
64. London SE1: Community Website, *Queen’s Buildings, Scovell Road*, 2008, <http://www.london-se1.co.uk/forum/read/1/987/page=1>, (accessed 19 July 2016).
65. Creation Trust, ‘John Charnock’, <http://www.putitonthemap.org>, (accessed 31 May 2016); *SLP*, 10 January 1975.
66. Way, 23 October 2014.
67. Lorraine, 5 June 2015.
68. Read, 5 June 2015.
69. Vincent, 7 October 2014.
70. Grant, 9 February 2015.
71. Lorraine, 5 June 2015.
72. Romy, ‘The Heygate’, 203.
73. Read, 5 June 2015.
74. Baxter, 5 March 2015; Gainsford, 5 March 2015.

75. Gainsford, 5 March 2015.
76. Michael Collins, *The Likes of Us: A Biography of the White Working Class*, (London: Granta, 2004), 173. See also: Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of Working-Class Life*, (London: Chatto & Windus, 1957), in which Hoggart recounts working-class life and culture in the Leeds districts of Potternewton and Hunslet in the 1920s and 1930s.
77. Jerry White, *London in the Twentieth Century: A City and Its People*, (London: Vintage, 2008), 156.
78. Grant, 9 February 2015.
79. Collins, *Likes of Us*, 151.
80. Like many London street markets, East Street declined significantly during the Second World War. In 1948, Harry Williams said it was a 'drab, dead thing, infinitely remote from the Cockney spirit and tradition.' See: Harry Williams, *South London*, (London: Robert Hale, 1949), 330. Various accounts of the post-war market describe a colourful coalescence of music, magic, dancing, escapology, gambling, and exotic animals. 'You could pose for a photo with a small monkey at the Walworth Road end of the Lane,' wrote Richard Mann. 'You might also catch a tap dance from a busker or listen to a one-man band with his bass drum and cymbal on his back.' The cast of characters ran deep, too, from the 'spivs' and 'cosh boys,' to the blind accordionist, to the 'famous' sarsaparilla man, whose cry rang out: 'If you want to live forever, you must drink my sarsaparilla!' 'He unfortunately died, oh, about twenty years ago,' said John Wallington, Secretary of the East Street Traders' Association. See: Creation Trust, 'John Wallington', *Put it on the Map! The Aylesbury Estate Project*, (2011), <http://www.putitonthemap.org>, accessed 30 August 2016; Alec Forshaw and Theo Bergstrom, *The Markets of London*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1983), 58–9; Davies, 27 February 2015; Richard Mann, 'Memories of a Walworth Childhood 1945–1965', (Unpublished Memoir, 2013); Collins, 153.
81. Forshaw and Bergstrom, *Markets*, 58.
82. Way, 23 October 2014.
83. Creation Trust, 'John Wallington', <http://www.putitonthemap.org>, (accessed 30 August 2016).
84. Brenda Lipson, 6 November 2014.
85. Henry Quennell, 6 March 2015.
86. Baxter, 5 March 2015; Gainsford, 5 March 2015.
87. The Thamesmead Estate in Bexley, for example, or the Broadwater Farm estate in Haringey, were criticised for being cut off from the surrounding areas. See: Valerie G Wigfall, *Thamesmead: A Social History*, (Greenwich: The History Press, 2009); Lord Gifford Q.C., *The Broadwater Farm Inquiry: Report of the Independent Inquiry into Disturbances of October, 1985, at the Broadwater Farm Estate, Tottenham*, (London: Karia Press, 1986), 16–7.

88. Arments Pie and Mash, a fixture in Walworth since 1914.
89. Lorraine, 5 June 2015; Read, 5 June 2015.
90. Davies, 27 February 2015.
91. Gainsford, 5 March 2015.
92. Gainsford, 5 March 2015.
93. Alex Jarosy, 20 January 2015.
94. Tony Newman, 15 October 2015.
95. Gainsford, 5 March 2015. 'Used to be a lovely little pub, that did. Nice and clean and really nice people and all that,' added Way, 23 October 2014.
96. SCHC, *Aylesbury Development: The St. Paul's Tavern P.H.* (25 October 1972), Box 754, Folder 6/72-12/72.
97. SCHC, *Aylesbury Estate—St. Paul's Tavern* (28 March 1973), Box 639, Folder 6/72-5/73.
98. SCHC, *Other Matters A) St. Paul's Tavern, Aylesbury Estate* (21 February 1973), Box 639, Folder 6/72-5/73.
99. SCHC, *Aylesbury Estate—St. Paul's Tavern* (28 March 1973).
100. *ST*, May 1973.
101. *Walworth Inprint*, November 1978.
102. *ST*, February 1974.
103. *WI*, February 1979. Regarding the deeply unpopular Housing Finance Act, 1972, introduced under the Heath administration to create the so-called Fair Rents through a system of means-testing (a political measure that effectively encouraged better off tenants to opt for owner occupation, thus hastening the residualisation of council housing), Southwark tenants, in their bitter opposition to the legislation, were no different from hundreds of thousands across the country. Like many Labour councils, however, Southwark did little to resist the new rents other than to promise that it 'would get every concession possible to keep rent increases down.' *ST*, December 1972. Many of the contentious aspects of the legislation were repealed when Labour returned to national office.
104. The district heating system was typically operative during a 'core period' in the year—1 October to 31 March—that could be extended at the council's (not the tenant's) discretion, as Synnuck recalled: 'I can't believe I'm saying this but this is true, we decided each year when we turned the heating ... on and when it would turn off, and for a number of years it was the chairman's wife, Charlie Sawyer's wife, who decided. I shudder to think now but it seemed natural at the time, and you look now and think, "Wow, how did we get away with that?" ... it was purely on a whim when we turned it off and when we turned it on.' See: Synnuck, 17 December 2014; SCHC, *Improvement of District Heating Systems*, (15 March 1988), Box 780, Folder 1/88-4/88.
105. Su Braden, 6 March 2015. See also: SCHC, *Aylesbury Tenants' Association- Receipt of Deputation*, (16 March 1977), Box 773, Folder 2/77-10/77.

106. The thread of this argument, beginning in the 1960s, continues to spool forth. See the 2013 report, *Create Streets*, by the Conservative Party think tank, *Policy Exchange*. Nicholas Boys Smith and Alex Morton, *Create Streets: Not Just Multi-Storey Estates*, (London: Policy Exchange, 2013).
107. Ravetz, *Council Housing*, 26. Historians such as F.M.L. Thompson and Neville Kirk posited that the notion of ‘respectability’—based on such distinctions as cleanliness, sobriety, thrift, and domestic orderliness—became entrenched among the English working classes in the period 1845–1880. As Ravetz pointed out, its currency waned after 1945, but continues to resonate to this day: in her 2016 book, *Respectable*, Lynsey Hanley argued that Right-to-Buy reaffirmed and reformulated working-class divisions, and cast those remaining council tenants as latter-day ‘unrespectables.’ See: F.M.L. Thompson, *The Rise of Respectable Society: A Social History of Victorian Britain, 1830–1900*, (London: Fontana, 1988); Neville Kirk, *The Growth of Working Class Reformism in Mid-Victorian England* (London: Croom Helm, 1985); Lynsey Hanley, *Respectable: The Experience of Class*, (London: Allen Lane, 2016).
108. Ravetz, *Council Housing*, 26.
109. Baxter, 5 March 2015.
110. ‘We looked at the Tenants’ Association as being made up of mainly men who were the old guys.’ Lipson, 6 November 2014.
111. Jarosy, 20 January 2015.
112. SCHC, *Items for Consideration—Tenants Association Membership* (26 March 1975), Box 20,284,151, Folder 1/75–5/75.
113. SCHC, *Aylesbury Estate—Tenants Association and Community Premises* (6 September 1976), Box 773, Folder 5/76–12/76.
114. *ST*, February 1974.
115. Jarosy, 20 January 2015.
116. *ST*, November 1973.
117. *ST*, May 1975.
118. *ST*, May 1973.
119. *ST*, February 1974.
120. Harriet Harman, ‘A Tribute to Joan Amodio, 1932 to 2011’, *Harriet Harman: Labour Member of Parliament for Camberwell & Peckham*, (2011), <http://www.harrietharman.org/>, accessed 15 September 2016.
121. *ST*, February 1974.
122. *ST*, December 1972. Southwark Social Services’ Richard Tetlow added: ‘The Aylesbury summer scheme ... was run by the estate’s own Tenants’ Committee. It was the committee that raised the money, organised and paid its own staff (mostly local teachers) and took overall responsibility ... It was also the committee who recruited about a dozen mothers to

- accompany the groups as extra helpers, while two mothers ran a crèche for toddlers so that further mothers could be released to help on outings.’
123. *ST*, May 1974.
  124. *ST*, February 1974.
  125. SCHC, *Aylesbury, Amersham Community Centre* (11 October 1972), Box 20,286,216, Folder 6/72–11/72.
  126. SCHC, *Aylesbury Estate—Tenants Association and Community Premises* (6 September 1976).
  127. Jean Bartlett, 19 September 2014.
  128. SCHC, *Aylesbury Estate—Tenants Association and Community Premises* (6 September 1976).
  129. SCHC, *Amersham Community Centre—Aylesbury Estate* (6 April 1977), Box 773, Folder 2/77–10/77; SCHC, *The Aylesbury—Amersham Community Centre* (13 April 1970), Box 258, Folder 6/69–5/71.
  130. Matthews, 30 March 2015.
  131. Sue Herrod, 10 August 2015.
  132. SCHC, *Amersham Community Centre—Aylesbury Estate* (6 April 1977).
  133. Bartlett, 19 September 2014. ‘There is plenty going on every night at our community centre,’ wrote Mr E. Smythe of Taplow block. ‘I am a pensioner, aged 75, and I enjoy Monday afternoon there.’ See: *South East London & Kentish Mercury*, 29 September 1976.
  134. Davies, 27 February 2015.
  135. SCHC, *Aylesbury Estate: Premises for Tenants’ Association* (26 October 1977), Box 773, Folder 2/77–10/77.
  136. Baxter, 5 March 2015.
  137. Tony Dowmunt, 5 January 2015.
  138. Williams, 4 February 2015
  139. SCHC, *Laundries—A Further Report on a Way Forward* (4 July 1989), Box 639, Folder 5/89–11/89.
  140. Williams, 4 February 2015.
  141. SCHC, *Items for Decision: Laundries* (12 February 1975), Box 20,284,151, Folder 1/75–5/75; SCHC, *Estate Laundries* (7 November 1979), Box 663, Folder 11/79–3/80; SCHC, *Aylesbury Estate—Laundry Charges* (4 July 1989), Box 20,286,682, Folder 5/89–11/89.
  142. SCHC, *Estate Laundries* (6 February 1974), Box 20,284,151, Folder 5/74–12/74.
  143. Lorraine, 5 June 2015.
  144. Lorraine, 5 June 2015; Read, 5 June 2015.
  145. SCHC, *Estate Laundries* (7 November 1979).
  146. SCHC, *Aylesbury* (30 March 1971), Box 259, Folder 6/69–4/70.
  147. Vincent, 7 October 2014.

148. Read, 5 June 2015. See also: Gainsford, 5 March 2015. For Joyce McDonald (5 November 2014), over at Gaitskell House, Merrow Walk was an ‘out the way place. I don’t think anyone really wanted to go there.’
149. SCHC, *Financial Review of Shops and Commercial Premises on Housing Estates* (23 February 1977), Box 773, Folder 2/77–10/77.
150. *WI*, May 1981.
151. *WI*, May 1981.
152. Robert Dennis, ‘The Decline in Manufacturing Employment in Greater London, 1966–74’, *Urban Studies*, vol.15 (1978), 63–73.
153. Southwark Trades Council, *Employment in Southwark: A Strategy for the Future* (London: Southwark Trades Council and Community Development Project, 1976).
154. Sue Goss, *Local Labour and Local Government: A Study of Changing Interests, Politics and Policy in Southwark, 1919–82*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1988), 83–4.
155. Goss, *Local Labour*, 83–4.
156. London Borough of Southwark Press Service, *Southwark Launches £3 Million Development Fund* (20 October 1977).
157. Harold Carter, ‘Building the Divided City: Race, Class and Social Housing in Southwark, 1945–1995’, *The London Journal*, vol. 33 (2008), 163–64.
158. Peter Townsend, Paul Corrigan and Ute Kowarzik, *Poverty and Labour in London: Interim Report of a Centenary Survey* (London: Low Pay Unit, 1987), 18.
159. David Cleverly, 17 June 2015.
160. Carter, ‘Building the Divided City’, 167.
161. Gainsford, 5 March 2015.
162. Southwark resident, quoted in Goss, *Local Labour*, 39.
163. Way, 23 October 2014.
164. Cleverly, 17 June 2015.
165. Quennell, 6 March 2015.
166. *ST*, December 1975.
167. *ST*, December 1975.
168. *ST*, December 1975.
169. *Royal Commission on the Housing of the Working Classes, Vol II: Minutes of Evidence*, (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1885), 297.
170. David S. Byrne, ‘Problem Families’: *A Housing Lumpen-Proletariat*, Working Papers in Sociology No. 5, (Durham: University of Durham, 1973).
171. Aubyn Graham, 4 March 2015.
172. *ST*, December 1975.

173. Stephen Merrett, *State Housing in Britain*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), 226.
174. Baxter, 5 March 2015; Gainsford, 5 March 2015.
175. Rob Kitchin, 'Out of Place', 'Knowing One's Place': Space, Power and the Exclusion of Disabled People', *Disability and Society*, vol. 13 (1998), 344.
176. Ravetz, *Council Housing*, 26.
177. Lorraine, 5 June 2015; Read, 5 June 2015.
178. McDonald, 5 November 2014. The Aylesbury itself was largely cast into Otherness by neighbouring residents—for whom the estate was an active intrusion, turning their old world inside out—and was thus regarded with all the suspicion and myopia this brought. A 1982 report by ILEA and the Southwark Institute of Adult Education, described a 'friction' between Aylesbury tenants and what it called 'fringe residents' on the Ecclesiastical Commissioners' Estate. The estate, it pointed out, comprised 'well-kept church cottages', and was populated by 'respectable white upper working class, whose roots in this area goes back 100 years.' See: Inner London Education Authority, *The Aylesbury Estate*, 77.
179. Lipson, 6 November 2014.
180. Creation Trust, 'John Charnock', <http://www.putitonthemap.org>, (accessed 4 October 2016).
181. Creation Trust, 'John Charnock'.
182. Aylesbury tenant, quoted in *Time Out*, 7–13 June 1974.
183. London Borough of Southwark, *People in Southwark: Districts Report* (London: London Borough of Southwark, 1974), 23.
184. ILEA, *The Aylesbury Estate*, 14.
185. Greater London Authority, *Turkish, Kurdish and Turkish Cypriot Communities in London* (London: Greater London Authority, 1974), 7.
186. *Southwark Sparrow*, June 1984.
187. ILEA, *The Aylesbury Estate*, 19. Gainsford said: 'At that time a lot of people were racist ... I mean it's weird, in a weird way, it's funny, it was always "He's black, but he's lovely." It was one of those weird things, but that's how people were.' Gainsford, 5 March 2015.
188. Margaret Thatcher interviewed by Gordon Burns, *Granada TV: World In Action*, (27 January 1978), <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/103485>, accessed 1 November 2017.
189. Cleverly, 13 April 2015.
190. *WI*, November 1978.
191. Matthews, 30 March 2015.
192. Kitchin, 351.
193. Cleverly, 13 April 2015.
194. Baxter, 5 March 2015.

195. Davies, 27 February 2015.
196. SS, June 1984.
197. Matthews, 30 March 2015.
198. Bonnie Royal, 26 February 2015.
199. It should also be noted that these relationships were, of course, dialogic—for the council, especially, there was expediency to be had in aligning itself behind the dominant tenant view.
200. Peter Tatchell, *The Battle for Bermondsey*, (London: Heretic Books, 1983), 92.
201. WI, December 1980.
202. Tatchell, *Battle*, 7.
203. Merrett, *State Housing*, 225; Goss, *Local Labour*, 169–70.
204. Merrett, *State Housing*, 226.
205. Graham, 4 March 2015.
206. T.R.J. Martin and T.R.M. Wilson, *Housing and Community in Bermondsey*, Bermondsey Parish Church (Mimeo: February 1974), quoted in Carter, ‘Building the Divided City’, 171.
207. Jeremy Fraser, 12 May 2015.
208. SCHC, *Right to Return* (1 December 1982), Box 20,286,216, Folder 4/82–2/83.
209. Merrett, *State Housing*, 216.
210. Ravetz, *Council Housing*, 132.
211. Matthews, 30 March 2015.
212. Goss, *Local Labour*, 100.
213. ST, December 1975.
214. Herrod, 10 August 2015.
215. SELKM, 30 September 1976.
216. SLP, 7 April 1978; SELKM, 30 September 1976; *The Observer*, 19 January 1975; SELKM, 16 September 1976; SELKM, 9 September 1976; SLP, 10 January 1975.
217. Robert Toller, *The Architect*, April 1975.
218. *Evening News*, 3 March 1978.
219. The *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*, 8th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 532, attributes the phrase, ‘concrete jungle’ to English anthropologist, Desmond Morris, and his 1969 work, *The Human Zoo*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1969), vii: ‘The city is not a concrete jungle, it is a human zoo.’
220. SLP, 10 January 1975. This was, of course, a point picked up on by a reporter, in a largely deprecatory piece—‘The Aylesbury is an ugly duck with tatty feathers but it does provide 2000 badly needed homes’—in which such a statement lends handily to its barbed tenor.
221. Newman, 15 October 2015.

222. Quennell, 6 March 2015. See also: Creation Trust, 'John Charnock', <http://www.putitonthemap.org>, (accessed 4 October 2016).
223. Gainsford, 5 March 2015.
224. SCHC, *People and Places in Southwark: A Compact Review of the 1975 Household Survey for Southwark Borough* (1975), Box 773, Folder 5/76-12/76.
225. Toller, *The Architect*, April 1975.
226. *ST*, May 1973.
227. *ST*, May 1973.
228. *ST*, May 1973.
229. SCHC, *Aylesbury Estate—Tenants Association and Community Premises* (6 September 1976).
230. SCHC, *Aylesbury Estate: Premises for Tenants Association—BACC* (26 October 1977).
231. Way, 23 October 2014. In 1984, BACC was renamed BACC84.
232. Lorraine, 5 June 2015.
233. Sandy Stewart, 3 December 2014.
234. Bartlett and Janet Shine, 19 September 2014.
235. It is important not to confuse a lack of identification with the estate as a whole with a lack of community feeling, for this, as we have seen, was not in short supply.
236. ILEA, *The Aylesbury Estate*, 14.
237. Lipson, 6 November 2014.
238. Banks, 2 October 2014.
239. Baxter, 5 March 2015; Gainsford, 5 March 2015.
240. SCHC, *Report of the Tenants' Consultative Committee* (19 February 1975).
241. *SLP*, 10 January 1975.
242. *SLP*, 19 April 1977.
243. Margaret Willis, *Living in High Flats: An Investigation* (London: London County Council Architect's Department, 1955).
244. Roger Carson, 6 October 2014.
245. Aysen Dennis, 24 November 2014.
246. *SELKM*, 9 September 1976.
247. Creation Trust, 'John Charnock', <http://www.putitonthemap.org>, (accessed 31 May 2016). See also: Grant, 9 February 2015.
248. Lorraine, 5 June 2015.
249. *ST*, November 1973.
250. *ST*, December 1972.
251. A report of the Borough Architect's Division, *Aylesbury Development in Use*, published in May 1973, spelled out the litany of problems afflicting the estate's lifts, including breakdowns, a lack of maintenance, and long waiting times. See: Borough Architect's Division, *Aylesbury Development in Use* (Peckham Road: Borough Development Department, 1973), 14.

252. Aylesbury resident quoted in *Time Out*, 7–13 June 1974.
253. Creation Trust, ‘Billy and Cindy Sinclair’, <http://www.putitonthemap.org>, (accessed 31 May 2016).
254. Way, 23 October 2014.
255. Tim Tinker, 31 October 2012.
256. John Nichols, 30 September 2014.
257. Newman, *Defensible Space*, (New York: Macmillan, 1972).
258. *ST*, May 1973.
259. Joan Maizel, *Two to Five in High Flats: An Enquiry into Play Provision for Children Aged Two to Five Years Living in High Flats* (London: Housing Centre Trust, 1961).
260. *SELKM*, 16 September 1976.
261. *Yorkshire Post*, 11 May 1961. See: Margaret Thatcher Foundation, ‘Press Conference on Needs of Pre-School Children’, 11 May 1961, <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/100955> (accessed 28 October 2016).
262. Maizel, *Two to Five*, 23.
263. Banks, 2 October 2014
264. Matthews, 30 March 2015.
265. *ST*, May 1974.
266. Baxter, 5 March 2015; Gainsford, 5 March 2015.
267. Vincent, 7 October 2014.
268. *SELKM*, 9 September 1976.
269. *Time Out*, 7–13 June 1974.
270. Braden, 6 March 2015.
271. Herrod, 10 August 2015.
272. Hannah Gavron, *The Captive Wife: Conflicts of Housebound Mothers* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966).
273. McDonald, 5 November 2014.
274. Lindmeyer. ‘My Memories’.
275. Lindmeyer. ‘My Memories’.
276. *SELKM*, 30 September 1976.
277. *The Architect*, April 1975, 32.
278. SCHC, *Aylesbury Development—Centre Building—Protective Screens to Windows* (24 February 1971), Box 259, Folder 6/70–4/71.
279. SCHC, *Aylesbury—Nos 47/49 Wolverton* (4 March 1971), Box 258, Folder 6/69–5/71.
280. *Time Out*, 7–13 June 1974.
281. *ST*, May 1973.
282. *Evening News*, 3 March 1978.
283. *The Observer*, 19 January 1975.
284. *SLP*, 10 January 1975.

285. Brian Alexander, 'Children Who Live on the Aylesbury Estate', *SLP*, 6 December 1977.
286. *The Guardian*, 15 March 1976.
287. Tim Anderson, 'Keeping Up with Vandalism', *Building Design*, 29 February 1980.
288. *SLP*, 6 December 1977.
289. *SELKM*, 23 September 1976.
290. *SELKM*, 9 September 1976; *Evening News*, 3 March 1978.
291. *SELKM*, 9 September 1976.
292. Lipson, 6 November 2014.
293. Grant, 9 February 2015.
294. Lindmeyer, 'My Memories'; Way, 23 October 2014.
295. Downmunt, 5 January 2015.
296. *SLP*, 10 January 1975.
297. *Evening News*, 3 March 1978.
298. *ST*, May 1974.
299. *The Architect*, April 1975, 32.
300. *ST*, November 1973.
301. *ST*, November 1973. Aylesbury's large, plain slab blocks are also likely to have made instances of vandalism more pronounced. This is as opposed to smaller, cellular, more spaced out housing units, which would better conceal such acts.
302. Borough Architect's Division, *Aylesbury Development*, 8.
303. Neil McIntosh, *Housing for the Poor? Council Housing in Southwark*, (Southwark: Southwark Community Development Project, 1975), 22–3. Regarding the lower population number cited here, this was at a time before the Newington Lodge (141 dwellings) and R. White's factory (340 dwellings) extensions were complete.
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## CHAPTER 4

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# Plotting a Map to Marginality, 1979–1997

A major question still facing the Council is whether the resources will be available in the long term to keep pace with the continuing processes of decay and obsolescence. Public expenditure on housing is now tightly controlled by central government, and is likely to be so in the foreseeable future.

—*Southwark Housing Committee document, 31 January, 1979.*<sup>1</sup>

In September 1985, Margaret Thatcher joined the growing ranks of Southwark homeowners when she and husband Denis bought 11 Hambledon Place, a five-bedroom, two-bathroom, mock-Georgian ‘executive’ house, sited in a newly built gated development in Dulwich Village, in the south of the borough.<sup>2</sup> The Prime Minister was ‘smitten with the place,’ according to Charles Moore, her official biographer, and further believed it necessary ‘to get back into bricks and mortar’ in light of the soaring property prices.<sup>3</sup> Southwark’s welcome was anything but warm. Branding the £400,000 acquisition, ‘fortress Thatcher,’ the then leader of the council, Tony Ritchie, wondered aloud if the Prime Minister would ‘like to involve herself in some community work ... to help alleviate some of the economic problems of the borough made worse by the Government.’<sup>4</sup> It would remain to be seen whether or not Thatcher was to ‘be a good neighbour,’ as Ritchie had requested of her.<sup>5</sup> But given the accumulating pressures put upon Southwark, and the lack of alleviation seen in six years of Tory rule since 1979, such an outcome seemed unlikely.

The Thatchers, as newcomers to Southwark, were swimming with the changing tide. By 1991, the borough population was a skimpy 227,060,

down more than 34,000 since 1971 (and this after a late decade rally from the 1981 low of 209,724).<sup>6</sup> The mini exodus was not surprising. Shifting patterns in world trade and the regional migration of manufacturers out of London had all but seen off the cornerstones of industry (and employment) in Southwark. It was a decline traceable in the unemployment figures: in December 1982, the *Southwark Sparrow* reported ‘frightening levels’ of joblessness with nearly 20,000 out of work and 40 applicants for every vacancy.<sup>7</sup> By March 1986, the number had ‘soared to a new high’ of 21,751 (equating to a 24.9 per cent borough unemployment rate).<sup>8</sup> In October that same year, Peckham was bestowed the unenviable distinction of largest number unemployed in London—more than double the Liverpool average.<sup>9</sup> As for Faraday ward, which the Aylesbury all but comprised, it was among the worst for joblessness in the borough: in October 1991, more than 10 per cent of those out of work in the district had been so for three years or more; 33 per cent, meanwhile, had been workless for at least a year (by this point, unemployment in Southwark had crept down to around 18,700).<sup>10</sup>

Hewn of many ‘economically active’ residents, the remaining population grew older (in 1981, 15.7 per cent of the population was over 65, compared to 12.2 per cent a decade earlier) and, relatively speaking, stayed poor: the average household income in Southwark in 1975 was £1000 less than the UK mean; in 1981, more than half the borough population earned under £100 a week compared with a third nationally; in 1986, the average household income remained well below the national average, and more than 50 per cent of residents were in receipt of housing benefit.<sup>11</sup> Of all London boroughs in 1986, Southwark had the third highest proportion of single parent families and pensioners living alone, and the greatest number of disabled people. All these groups suffered disproportionately when it came to housing, employment and income, as did black and minority ethnic residents, who comprised 20 per cent of the population that same year (most were concentrated in the middle of the borough, in either the oldest or largest estates, where the proportion of BME residents was regularly upwards of 50 per cent).<sup>12</sup>

By the time 11 Hambledon Place had been furnished (‘in the chintzy Peter Jones style which Mrs Thatcher favoured’), Walworth, like so many inner-urban districts, was in the midst of economic trauma and beset by the patterns of deprivation that this gave rise to.<sup>13</sup> Poverty and powerlessness were everyday hardships. Crime was up. Violence won the headlines. It was at the same time bleak and dramatic. As for the Aylesbury, by the end of the period in question, it occupied the third most deprived ward in

Southwark (Faraday), and the fifth most deprived in England. Nearly a third of Aylesbury residents were on income support, and just under half its schoolchildren received free school meals (compared to 16 per cent nationally). A high proportion of residents were either elderly (double the national average) or young (34 per cent were under 18). A third of residents lived alone, while Faraday ward as a whole accounted for four times the national average of single-parent families.<sup>14</sup> In 1983, Paul Harrison wrote of the inner city as a ‘universe apart,’ an ‘alien world,’ the ‘social antipodes of middle-class Britain.’<sup>15</sup> Such language is unhelpful at best. It masks the complexities of place, and confers on the city a kind of ‘symbolic spatial order,’ in the words of Suzanne Hall.<sup>16</sup> There was much more to the Aylesbury during this period than the gloomy statistical portrait just painted. And to focus solely on a neat selection of ‘social problems’ would belie the reality (and normalcy) of life on the estate, including the many faces of community engagement, which were themselves often a response to unpalatable economic hardships imposed from the outside. There was, nevertheless, at least something to Harrison’s sensationalist bent. Housing policy and economic restructuring had chipped away at places like the Aylesbury, rendering them rundown, less stable, and prime for the urban policy interventions that lay ahead. By the time the Thatchers had left Downing Street, and moved full-time into their Barratt-built home, the gulf between Walworth and the leafy surrounds of Hambledon Place was narrow in distance only.

### A SNAPSHOT IN TIME

For all intents and purposes, 1980 was just another year in Southwark’s unwavering trend downwards. Outward migration, rising unemployment, relatively pitiful incomes and various other categories of statistical woe foretold a precarious decade to come. The housing waiting list was growing (up to 9000), and those residents applying to the council as homeless under the 1977 Housing Act were similarly on the rise.<sup>17</sup> The Aylesbury was changing in turn. Lured by the prospect of home-ownership, younger and wealthier households were moving out, swapping the ailing inner city with comparatively bright-eyed satellite towns in places like Bromley, Bexley, Essex and Kent.<sup>18</sup> Martin Gainsford:

Lots of the people we knew of a similar age were getting married and then moving out ... people of our generation, slightly younger than me, slightly

older ... were looking to get out of the Aylesbury, and not just the Aylesbury, but the surrounding area. I had pals who lived in East Street market, Trafalgar Street, again, moving on. Even though we didn't have great jobs, we had the money to put money together to get a mortgage ... I thought to myself, I've got my girlfriend, we're looking to get a place together, this isn't for us. And I think lots of people started to think that. And it could be said that we deserted [the estate] and consequently the holes that we left were filled by rougher and rougher people, but you can't, you can't create a fortress because in its own way that's just as bad.<sup>19</sup>

As the 1980s wore on, the vacuum left by exiting tenants was gradually filled with the 'priority homeless'—those families and individuals living in more urgent circumstances, such as lone parents, those deemed vulnerable, or those unable to work. (Meanwhile, WACAT's annual report for the year 1980 described a population scarred by 'redundancy ... many have had to change their jobs or are currently unemployed'.)<sup>20</sup> One has to imagine that these were the sort of residents Gainsford had in my mind when describing the incursion of 'rougher and rougher people.' Most new arrivals—priority homeless or otherwise—likely knitted themselves seamlessly into the social fabric of the estate. But there was also a minority who, at certain times, and on certain blocks, unsettled the status quo:

*Donna Grant:* We ended up, they put a lot of problem families, as they called them, problem families, because they thought if the problem families live with the decent families they may change, but it never worked. It was just, oh, it was a nightmare.

*Interviewer:* When was this?

*Donna Grant:* They started moving them in in the eighties.<sup>21</sup>

Annoyances, rifts or disturbances were more often than not contained to a low-level. Any harrowing instances were rare but indelible:

*Anne Lorraine:* Then there was Agnes. She threw herself off of the top balcony and tried to take her grandchild, was it her grandchild or her youngest child? She threw herself off but they managed to grab the child before she actually jumped. She splattered all over the floor, so yeah.

*Interviewer:* Was Agnes a friend of yours?

Anne Lorraine: Well she was friends with everyone ... I mean she used to walk about talking to herself and things and no one took no notice. They were always like, 'You alright, Agnes?' And then she'd stand and have a chat

with you if you saw her down the road, a bit of shopping and that, and then when she did what she did I don't think anyone knew how dark, the dark side she was in.<sup>22</sup>

Inevitably the shocks and tragedies took their toll: moments such as these made the estate feel less secure, more dissonant, and, for some residents perhaps, they lent to a creeping sense that things were heading in the wrong direction. This is not to say, however, that residents failed to absorb the shocks, or were somehow overwhelmed by these scarce occurrences. In the summer of 1980, a team of 19 community workers undertook an assessment of adult educational needs on the Aylesbury. The resulting 1982 report, *The Aylesbury Estate: An Action Research Project*, revealed an estate marred by all the usual suspects—isolation, boisterous adolescents, an oft-defective physical environment (see below)—but that was by no means wretched or defeated. While many of those interviewed did indeed look upon the Aylesbury with increasing uncertainty—‘... a 69-year-old Italian Jewish lady ... won't go out after 4pm—knew of one woman who had been mugged last week at 2:30 pm ...’—they were at the same time reassured and enlivened by friends and neighbours and various communal happenings: as a whole the testimony could be described as upbeat, or, in the report's own claim, ‘less pessimistic’ than expected. Take for example the 30-year-old mother of two from Scotland, who ‘liked the house and has made friends’; the ‘keen gardeners with balconies, window boxes and small garden plots’; the ‘two young white boys ... about 12’ who ‘attended the local club ... enjoyed playing snooker and table-tennis,’ and who ‘were extremely happy about living on the Aylesbury’; the 45-year-old ‘Mrs H,’ a ‘very active member of Thurlow Lodge T.A. and organiser of events for the Aylesbury Festival’ who was ‘particularly interested in the elderly’ and lived in a ‘very attractive well-furnished flat’; the ‘distinct street atmosphere’ on an unidentified block, where ‘Mrs K, Mrs E and their friend Mrs D are key people,’ and who ‘organised (the block) for the Jubilee Celebrations’ and ‘are involved in festival arrangements.’<sup>23</sup>

The report also revealed a side of the estate seldom considered in the newspapers, or indeed in other official examinations of the Aylesbury—its ordinariness. For all that was exceptional about the estate, and for all the mythification it endured, the Aylesbury, in the eyes of its residents, was mostly normal, unremarkable; a place of routine and refuge, of rest and recreation, of family and familiarity. For the husband of one 54-year-old grandmother and mother of four, it was where he pursued ‘his main

interest—crosswords,’ on returning home from his job as a water borer. For the aforementioned Italian Jewish woman, it was where she played bingo on a Monday and enjoyed flower arranging in her flat. It was where ‘Mrs R’ attended a yoga class, ‘Mrs B’ practised dressmaking and keep-fit, and the husband of ‘Mrs H’ played ‘the electric organ ... (have one in the flat).’ It was where ‘Mr and Mrs Y,’ who had lived on the estate for eight years, spent their evenings learning Spanish (Mrs Y) and tending to an impressive collection of militaria (‘Mr Y ... has over 4,000 badges from UK, USA, Commonwealth and South Africa’). It was where one woman would watch the television after shopping and cleaning for her elderly, arthritic brother.<sup>24</sup>

The report further hinted at a growing ethnic mix on the Aylesbury. No longer homogenously white, as it was when the estate first opened, the leaking away of original tenants combined with the quickening passage of black and ethnic families into council housing (from which, historically, they had largely been excluded), meant the Aylesbury had begun to appear more diverse at this time.<sup>25</sup> We read of a group of Cypriot women, who were ‘pleasant, talkative but uninterested in Adult Education’; of a ‘young black girl of about 12’ who ‘said she went to the disco’; of a ‘Hindu lady on the walkway with a toddler and tiny baby’; of a ‘young black couple who were very interested in (adult education) classes’; of a ‘Turkish-Cypriot girl, one of five children,’ who ‘wants to be a hairdresser,’ and whose ‘father has ice-cream van’; of the ILEA-run youth club, put on five nights a week and attended predominantly by ‘black youths.’<sup>26</sup> Damion Brown, his Jamaican-born parents and five siblings moved into Chartridge block two years after the report was published, in 1984:

I’d say it was just black and white. I can remember on my landing it was just black and white, and it was just Caribbean and English, and there was a stage where ... once the English families moved off we didn’t get any new English families on my landing.<sup>27</sup>

For Brown, the colour of his skin was never an issue growing up on the estate:

We knew everybody. We knew everyone not just our landing but pretty much the whole block, that whole block we knew everybody, everyone knew each other ... there was never really a problem between neighbours, there was always a sense of community.<sup>28</sup>

But while greater ethnic difference on the blocks may have helped quell or at least send into hiding any existing exclusionary sentiment, so too is it possible that a chemistry of prejudice, fear and other base elements might have hastened some residents' departure:

*Linda Cleverly:* White working-class people began to move out, and loads of them ended up in Gillingham, down in Kent, or Orpington, places like that, and I think they thought that things were changing and they didn't like it ... Again they were ordinary working-class people. That's what they were opting to do, it wasn't to do with sort of house prices pushing them out particularly, it was just sort of choice, and there was probably a sort of racist attitude around that as well. In fact I used to go to the seaside with this lot ... we went to Margate quite often [and] we did have one black family that was coming with us and she was late getting to the coach and there was a real rumpus because I was saying, 'let's hang on, let's wait a little bit', and there was a really bad attitude about it, yeah, it was really hard ... so there was a bit of that around.

*Interviewer:* In the early '80s?

*Linda Cleverly:* Yeah.<sup>29</sup>

This, of course, was just the beginning of the decade. The Aylesbury was changing according to large-scale demographic and economic shifts—the transformation of London from industrial to post-industrial, most notably. But there was so much more bearing down. The Tory government's newly launched cannonade on council housing, local authorities and the social democratic experiment as a whole, would prove equally telling for the estate in what would prove entropic years to come.

### A RESIDUAL STATE OF MIND

Eleven years ago of course it was all new and everybody seemed to respect the place a lot more then. But I would say in the last four years it has deteriorated so much, it is dirty now, but of course even this is the best part of it believe it or not. Over there is 20,000 times worse. I don't think I would live in the heart of it, not even if it was rent-free because it is so bad.<sup>30</sup>

This was Kathleen, an Aylesbury resident, explaining her view of the estate and its plight to journalist Stephen Cape for the BBC Radio 4 programme, *Today*, broadcast in January 1983. While apt to note that Kathleen (block unspecified), like so many others in the documentary

record, invoked a spatial dimension when describing the ‘best’ (hers) and ‘worst’ (theirs) of the Aylesbury, more interesting, perhaps, was the manner in which *Today* anchor, John Timpson, introduced the segment (on inner-city violence). He said: ‘Whether you blame unemployment or lack of parental discipline, or the general run-down of the areas, the fact is that the level of violence in recent years has increased and shows no signs of abating.’<sup>31</sup> Inevitably the design of the estate—‘there are so many dark corners to hide in’—was further volunteered as reason for the Aylesbury’s decline.<sup>32</sup> Nowhere in the programme were mentioned the swingeing cuts and injurious dogma that Thatcher, scythe in hand, had foisted upon Southwark, and upon its housing department in particular.

The 1980 Housing Act ushered in a bleak and an as yet uninterrupted era for council housing in Britain. Right to Buy was its centrepiece policy, and what turned out to be the government’s biggest and most popular privatisation by far. Offered at Everything Must Go discounts of up to 50 per cent, those sitting tenants able to buy their council homes did so readily: between 1980 and 1997, there were more than 1.3 m sales in England, including 184,823 in London, and 7763 in Southwark.<sup>33</sup> A relatively small, relatively better-off section of council tenants was thus delivered something golden—‘freedom and mobility and that prospect of handing something on to their children and grandchildren,’ in Thatcher’s own words.<sup>34</sup> (That the spoken objectives of freedom, self-reliance, mobility and wealth creation were entirely inconsistent with such large state hand-outs was conveniently put to one side.) But the picture was less rosy for those unable or unwilling to join in—typically poorer households in urban areas afflicted by high unemployment, and living on the least desirable estates.<sup>35</sup> Said housing expert, Alan Murie, in 1982:

The government ... has been unwilling to acknowledge that [Right to Buy] sales will exacerbate problems in a public sector which in certain cases is already becoming a second best, a welfare housing service. The longer the combination of low public investment and council house sales continues, the more unequal the housing experience of different families will be ... Those who remain public sector tenants will be even more disadvantaged compared with owner occupiers.<sup>36</sup>

Southwark Council was less measured in its criticism of the policy. That same year, in a *Sparrow* article entitled, ‘It may be legal, but we think buying council houses is immoral and anti-social behaviour!’, leader of the



**Fig. 4.1** Anti-Right to Buy cartoon in the *Southwark Sparrow*, 1982. (Courtesy of Southwark Council.)

council, Tony Ritchie, predicted a desperate outcome: ‘All we are going to have left for renting is ghetto pockets in the inner parts of the borough’<sup>37</sup> (Fig. 4.1).

Material disadvantage aside, Right to Buy recalibrated the way in which local authority housing was thought about. Once an aspiration, and a point of pride among residents, renting from the council was all of a sudden cast as ‘second best,’ in Murie’s words; as a tenure of the weak and lazy. ‘We could now,’ wrote Lynsey Hanley, ‘refer to the deserving and undeserving poor as though they were a different species, and not merely the lucky and unlucky sides of the same coin.’<sup>38</sup> But this was exactly the point. The Thatcher Government saw council housing as burdensome and profligate; a flagrant intervention in the market that, like all pillars of the welfare state, should be pared back in short order.<sup>39</sup> Right to Buy communicated this to the general public in the plainest possible terms.

The assault on council housing continued apace with a major shake-up of rents and subsidies. Slipped onto the statute book amid the Right to Buy furore, the new system saw government curtail the general subsidy so as to proportionally drive up council rents.<sup>40</sup> In 1981–1982, the first year of the new regime, rents rose by an average of 48 per cent; by the mid-1980s, most local authorities received no general subsidy at all.<sup>41</sup> For better-off council tenants, the combination of heavily subsidised sales and sharp-rising, unsubsidised rents, sent a thinly veiled message: you are no longer welcome in the public sector. Meanwhile, for those tenants for

whom home ownership was out of reach, higher rents meant a greater reliance on means-tested assistance: 44 per cent of council tenants claimed housing benefit in 1976 compared to some 66 per cent a decade later (greater than 50 per cent in Southwark in 1986).<sup>42</sup> As the number of claimants rose, so too did the relationship between landlord and renter change. Tenants, said Peter Malpass, began to confront their landlord 'not as people with money in their hand to pay the agreed rent, but as claimants.'<sup>43</sup> For many residents, such a shift undoubtedly landed a telling psychic blow. It further created divisions between those who received benefit and those who did not, yet again enforcing and reinforcing destabilising ideas of difference, stigma and Otherness:

... like I said the people that are regularly having police coming round or some kind of issue with their home or household, and you'd get a few of them together, those are the same ones that are probably not going any further with their lives, they're happy to live off benefits, stay there, not go on, not venture out, be involved in crime, and you're putting them altogether? What do you expect? You get a little pool of trouble.<sup>44</sup>

In line with the greater take-up in state assistance, the way in which tenants paid rent and received benefit was restructured in 1982 under the Social Security and Housing Benefits Act. From then on, the Department of Health and Social Security (DHSS) paid the claimants' rent (or a proportion of it) directly to the local authority, which then effectively paid itself on the tenants' behalf. Operationally speaking, the new system was costly and complex.<sup>45</sup> In Southwark, it 'caused chaos,' not just for the now administratively responsible council, but for tenants, too.<sup>46</sup> Here is Frank Pemberton, Southwark councillor between 1984 and 2002:

Housing benefit, that was another nightmare where there was a lot of people doing the wrong things, misinterpretation, a lot of training had to be done on the housing benefit stuff so they actually got the claims right, and people either got their benefits or they didn't get their benefits.<sup>47</sup>

Barely a year after the new welfare arrangement was put in place, and at a time when both rents and rates were on the rise, the Tories announced a £230 m reduction in housing benefit nationally. The governments' own social security advisory committee described the cuts as an 'indiscriminate' hit on low income families, while Tony Ritchie was quick to condemn

them as an ‘appalling hidden tax increase for the poorest members of the community.’<sup>48</sup> A report to the borough’s housing committee added: ‘It is inevitable that rent arrears will rise.’<sup>49</sup>

And rise they did. In just two years from January 1980, rent arrears in Southwark increased six-fold, from £1.2 m (one of the lowest levels in London) to £7.2 m.<sup>50</sup> From this point forward the situation only grew worse: in January 1986 arrears had reached £23 m (easily the highest in London, and a staggering amount considering accumulated arrears in England stood at roughly £200 m at this time); by the end of the decade the number was fast approaching £40 m.<sup>51</sup> The amount of rent owed varied notably from district to district. In the year 1987–1988, for example, 24 per cent of Dulwich households were in rent arrears of four weeks or more, compared to 40 per cent in Walworth and 52 per cent in Camberwell (just one more criterion with which to gauge the uneasy disharmony between the borough’s struggling middle and its better-heeled south). As an escalating national phenomenon, the Conservatives were keen to pin the accelerating deficit on local authority incompetence. In an interview with the housing magazine, *Roof*, in 1987, John Patten, then Minister for Housing and Urban Affairs, argued that managerial inefficiencies and a lack of political will were to blame; Patten, true to party line, said poverty and economic hardship had nothing to do with it.<sup>52</sup> Southwark, meanwhile, was more sympathetic to its debtors’ plight. In January, 1986, when arrears were up to £23 m, the council cited ‘acute poverty’ and ‘urban deprivation’ as ‘major factors.’ It went on: ‘Most tenants in arrears live in the large, soulless, unpopular estates. Male unemployment is 11% over the national average ... Those lucky enough to have a job are low paid.’<sup>53</sup> Discounting the flimsy implication that getting into arrears was somehow induced by living on a large estate, ‘soulless’ or otherwise, it was nevertheless correct to presume that many hundreds of tenants did not view rent as the first claim on the family budget.

But Southwark was also aware of those ‘who can and won’t pay,’ as well as the extent to which other, up-to-date tenants, bore the brunt<sup>54</sup>: it was estimated that in the year 1990–1991, failure to collect owed rent would cost the average tenant an additional £3 per week in rent and some £40 per person in poll tax.<sup>55</sup> In January 1990, under scrutiny of the District Auditor, the council acknowledged its historical ‘leniency’ on debt collection, and—in a point scored to the Tories—a ‘lack of dedicated management.’<sup>56</sup> It thus resolved that ‘vigorous action’ was ‘clearly justifiable in the context of the council’s increasingly strained financial circumstances,’

even if, as it certainly would, raise the 'level of multiple indebtedness in the community.'<sup>57</sup> 'Vigorous action' was jargon for eviction. The council ousted more than 500 tenants in 1990–1991, and promised to do the same to many more: a series of posters and adverts, launched in the borough in February 1992, bore such uncompromising slogans as 'SOUTHWARK COUNCIL WILL EVICT 1250 TENANTS FOR RENT ARREARS THIS YEAR: Don't be one of them,' and 'THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME. DON'T LOSE IT: Rent Arrears could cost you your home.'<sup>58</sup>

Throughout the period in question, the Southwark Group of Tenants Organisations (SGTO), which has assisted Southwark TAs and campaigned on their behalf since the late 1970s, commented on the situation as they saw it—an increasingly desperate local authority, hamstrung by pinched budgets, digging both itself and its tenants in deeper by upping rents and employing ever-escalating disciplinary measures.<sup>59</sup> It said: 'At the SGTO we believe that this is neither a sensible nor sane response to the situation. After all who in their right mind would suggest that the best way to sober someone up is to buy them another drink. Similarly, it is ludicrous to suggest that the cure for rent arrears is even higher rents.'<sup>60</sup>

In protracted, penurious and steadily crushing fashion, centrally imposed constraints on investment in council housing withered and starved what the right to buy failed to amputate. Certainly, the imagined schism between what was supposedly good (private) and bad (public) in the housing sector—so effectively determined by the state-assisted upsurge in home ownership and the ideological bloviating that surrounded it—was only fully amplified by images of the begrimed and broken council estate. Government control of local authority capital expenditure did not, however, coincide neatly with the start of Thatcher's premiership. The deep cuts in public expenditure that the IMF successfully negotiated in 1976 had taken a toll on local authorities in the run up to the Labour-deposing general election. In Southwark, for example, in January 1979, when an estimated 21,000 homes, including many on council estates, were 'in need of major maintenance,' and where housing constituted the authority's single biggest expense, Southwark's spending was 'tightly controlled by central government.'<sup>61</sup> While the Director of Housing would 'urge' the chancellor to meet its budgetary shortfall with a more generous subsidy, the council seemed resigned to the fact that it would have to boost its coffers through 'regular rent increases.'<sup>62</sup>

But as Malpass pointed out, it was not until the Conservatives took office that such constraints became suffocating. The incoming government's will to cut public expenditure—particularly in the housing programme, where 75 per cent of all planned reductions were concentrated—was imposed early and often. It immediately slashed the Labour-approved capital allocations for 1979–1980, and then, in the second half of 1980–1981, it called a moratorium on local authority capital spending.<sup>63</sup> The Housing Investment Programme (HIP), introduced in 1977 as a means of facilitating greater flexibility and forward planning in such areas as new builds, general maintenance and modernisation, was also rapidly curtailed: total HIP allocations for 1978–1979 stood at £4.8 bn; by 1986–1987, they had fallen to £1.4 bn.<sup>64</sup> Similarly damaging were the tighter limits imposed from above on capital receipts—sums overwhelmingly generated through the disposal of land and houses (Right to Buy), and which in the first half of the 1980s especially were the lifeblood of local authorities. By 1985, councils were only permitted to spend a fifth of sales' receipts, of which most was used on the repayment of outstanding debts. No matter how abundant, a council's capital reserves were not to be funnelled into stock repairs nor used to limit rent increases.<sup>65</sup>

In all, it was a deleterious package of cuts and impositions. Ravetz described it as 'irrational in so many ways,' but thought it best explained as a way to bring thorny Labour councils to heel for 'ideological, as much as financial, reasons.'<sup>66</sup> Southwark was as thorny and as Labour (dug in since the early 1930s) as they came. And as the largest social landlord in London, it perhaps held the gimlet eye of Thatcher longer than most. In 1981, a GLC-compiled stock condition report recommended Southwark invest a minimum of £40 m a year over five years on repairs and maintenance alone—an average of £2300 per dwelling.<sup>67</sup> Over the course of the year, however, Southwark received little more than half this amount (£21.9 m), which was in any case bifurcated so as to plug a hole in a pre-existing new build commitment.<sup>68</sup> (In the same report, the chief building surveyor for Lambeth suggested equipping council tenants with 'do-it yourself kits' so that they might 'minimise ... mounting maintenance costs.' The *Sparrow* wrote: 'We wonder what our tenants would think of the idea?')<sup>69</sup> Such a discrepancy forced the borough to abandon its 'planned' maintenance programme in favour of a skeletal, 'crisis' only approach.<sup>70</sup> Tony Ritchie said:

The repair was totally reactive, they only do repairs when it goes wrong. There was no pre-planned maintenance at all, in any way whatsoever, and because they just can't afford to do it ... and then when something does go wrong, well you have to go on the end of a waiting list or the end of a queue to get a response to it ... and of course the whole construction of the area like the Aylesbury where one flat is interdependent upon another for a lot of its supplies means that it's much more likely to go wrong than if you're living in a nice four-bed semi in Dulwich ... There was just less money coming in absolutely, less absolutely, less and less.<sup>71</sup>

This was the dejecting tenor of things to come. In 1984–1985, the council put in for a £71 m HIP allocation; it was allowed to borrow just £31 m. In 1985–1986, it asked for £93 m, but received only £27 m. Reflecting an ever-growing repair bill (an estimated £556 m by this time, or £9300 per property) the council's bid in 1987–1988 exceeded £100 m; it was allocated £29 m.<sup>72</sup> A Housing Committee report dated February 1985 summed up the magnitude of the situation in a few grim sentences:

Districts are at breaking point, virtually unable to meet existing needs. The housing and transfer lists are lengthening while the number of properties available for letting is shrinking because of sales, an inability to carry out major repairs and a severe reduction in the new build programme. We are in a serious housing crisis.<sup>73</sup>

The government was 'putting the knife in,' as the *Sparrow* put it, and the council wanted its residents to know. Councillor Ritchie, for one, was 'anxious that tenants realise' who exactly was responsible for this 'appalling' run of cuts.<sup>74</sup> 'We, as councillors, are blamed for the lack of new build, for the run-down estates, but the people should be blaming the government,' he said. 'It is their fiscal policies which ... influence to a very great extent what goes on in local government.'<sup>75</sup> Ritchie found an ally in Harriet Harman, MP for Peckham, who urged tenants, officers and councillors to 'unite' against a 'divisive and exploitative' Conservative government. She added: 'Southwark as landlord is accused by tenants of not doing their job, but how can they when they are refused the amount of money they need from the national taxes.'<sup>76</sup> In alliance with other combative Labour boroughs such as Hackney and Lambeth—as well as Ken Livingstone's GLC, which went toe-to-toe with the Thatcher government on such issues as transport fares, manufacturing investment, and housing<sup>77</sup>—Southwark did all it could to provoke and oppose its Goliathan foe.

But while the war may have been righteous, it was also wasteful (in terms of resources), and certainly one it could never win. The struggle came to a head in all its Sisyphean reality with the rate-capping rebellion of 1985. Here, the Conservatives sought to further chisel away at local authority expenditure by limiting—or capping—the amount it could raise through rate-taking (based on a property’s nominal rental value), which unsurprisingly, and like rents, went up as government grants went down. Southwark, being staunchly Left and, according to the Tory manifesto, ‘grossly extravagant,’<sup>78</sup> was one of the first councils targeted by the new legislation (introduced under the Rates Act, 1984).<sup>79</sup> In February 1985, a ‘Rate-capping Special Issue’ of the *Sparrow* tapped into this jangling vein of discord. Drawing stark lines between ‘Whitehall or Town Hall?’ it questioned the government’s logic of reducing the borough’s spending powers by more than £20 m while at the same time declaring it the tenth most deprived area in the country. ‘The direct result of rate-capping,’ it said, ‘will be cuts in services or massive rent increases or BOTH.’<sup>80</sup>

In the early hours of 8 March 1985, the council assumed a defiant stance, voting 49 to 13 against setting a rate for the coming financial year—a result ‘greeted by cheers from councillors in the chamber and a packed public gallery.’<sup>81</sup> The high would prove short-lived. Weighed down by the threat of surcharge, bankruptcy and disqualification from public office, and perhaps fed up with the interminable profusion of long, fractious meetings (‘I was a lot younger than I am now but nevertheless it took its toll physically ... they’d argue the toss all night’), the council’s resolve eventually slackened.<sup>82</sup> On 30 May, and amid chaotic scenes, the council voted 26 to 23 to set a rate at the maximum level allowed:

... the night that we set the rate ... we actually chained ourselves in to have a meeting. People were climbing down the balcony to get in the chamber, it was like riots! And they were using the benches as rams, as rams! It was like a medieval battle scene, to get in.<sup>83</sup>

Looking back, Tony Ritchie saw the episode as less about resources than an issue of control:

I think if we were honest ... the rate-capping certainly initially didn’t have the disastrous effect we were saying it was gonna have, and this was primarily because we actually wanted to build up an opposition to what we saw at the time was ... the government’s programme of taking away local democracy

and local accountability, of us being able to decide, as a local community, what the community wanted to spend, in its own community, on its own services.<sup>84</sup>

But even if the elderly day centres were not closed straight away, and the nursery places did not suddenly dry up, and the 600,000 meals Southwark provided each year were not immediately slashed by more than a half, these *were* the sorts of services that, over time, were picked apart by the siege-like squeeze on local authority budgets.<sup>85</sup> The erosion may have been gradual, but the consequences were stark.

Like anywhere and anything else under borough control, the down-swinging axe of cuts and privatisations made light work of the Aylesbury. (See Fig. 4.2.) In 1980, the ten-year warranty which held Laing's responsible for a portion of the repairs and maintenance on the estate expired, leaving resource-stretched Southwark to pick up the slack. But extra work was not necessarily matched by extra staff, and repairs began to 'take weeks instead of hours to complete.'<sup>86</sup> The *Walworth Inprint* shed light on this palpable downgrade in its November 1980 edition:

Southwark's hands are tied by the present government and the Tories have once again hurt the people who can least afford to be hurt ... Already there have been two incidents in the launderettes. A key broke in the door of the Taplow launderette and this was then taken out of action for a week while tenants waited for the council to fix it. On 20<sup>th</sup> October, the Bradenham launderette was flooded but when Council workmen arrived they only succeeded in flooding the stores [sic] below with 200 gallons of soapy water.<sup>87</sup>

(That same year, a 600 name-strong petition demanding the presence of an Aylesbury-based workforce was delivered to the council and in turn shrugged off.)<sup>88</sup>

Time and again, respondents pointed to council neglect as a major source of frustration and worry. Their homes—often cherished, even exalted—were in advancing need of revamp and repair but there was no one willing to meet it. The planned internal redecoration cycle, once four-yearly, then, as of April 1977, seven-yearly, ultimately ceased, and with some unashamed prodding from the council, more and more responsibility for repairs and upkeep was shifted onto tenants<sup>89</sup>:

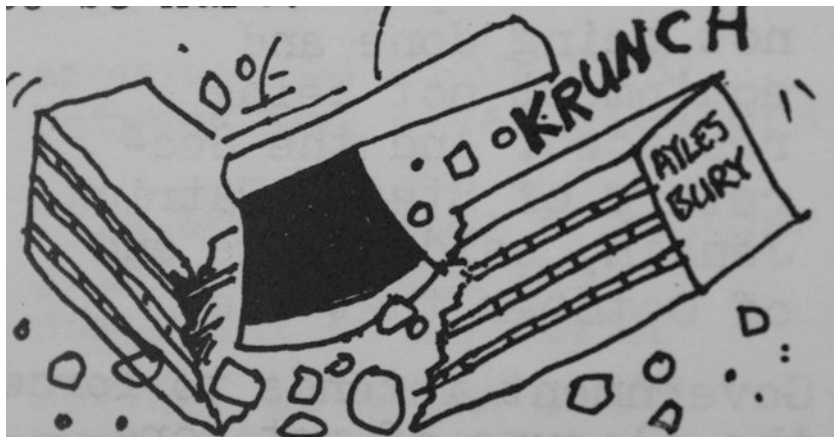


Fig. 4.2 *Walworth Inprint*, November 1980. (Courtesy of david Cleverly.)

*Martin Gainsford*: I think as the eighties progressed, there were more people out of work so consequently the council were subsidising their living, so consequently, well, 'we've got to subsidise them so we can't pay the money out on a new load of people to decorate', where the paint was beginning to peel, toilets need changing ....

*Lisa Baxter*: But gradually people did their own thing, and people then changed their own kitchen, changed their own bathroom ...

*Martin Gainsford*: Because the council stopped doing it.<sup>90</sup>

A September 1989 Housing Committee report listed some of the works the council *had* managed to carry out on the Aylesbury despite investment constraints. These included the renewal of front doors on the taller blocks, maintaining the capricious district heating system, drainage repairs, and replacing a 'small percentage of poorly designed window frames.' Yet the document also pointed to the jobs that had not been seen to in the preceding decade, such as the upkeep of hoppers, pipes and drains; repairs to the asphalt walkways and ball courts; replacing glazing in the communal areas; doing something with so-called 'dead' zones; and fixing and decorating refuse cupboards and store sheds. Moreover, where money from the revenue account was prioritised for renovating voids and maintenance emergencies, things like internal carpentry and tiling, and non-dangerous communal repairs were backlogged as a consequence.<sup>91</sup> The same was true of repainting, removing graffiti and addressing other

external shortcomings, which, according to a housing survey, had reached somewhat of a crisis point in 1992: of all the blocks in the borough at this time, 38 per cent required roof repairs, 50 per cent needed window repairs, 46 per cent had been vandalised, 57 per cent needed repainting, and 68 per cent had ‘defects’ in the common areas. ‘The survey results indicate that large sums of money are required to bring our properties up to standard,’ said chairman of the Housing Committee, Councillor Mike Gibson, ‘but expenditure of this magnitude is beyond the Council’s and tenants’ resources.’<sup>92</sup> Lighting on the Aylesbury was another matter of concern, and one inextricably coupled with the tenants’ sense of security. A borough-wide update of lighting on estates was undertaken during the 1980s, where old fashioned bulk-head lamps were swapped for something more modern. But again, a lack of planned maintenance militated against the Aylesbury, and by 1989, it was one of two estates in Walworth singled out for its poor illumination.<sup>93</sup> Oliur Rahman moved to the adjacent North Peckham Estate in 1992, but ‘grew up on the Aylesbury’ (i.e. it was where he spent his time):

Again, if you didn’t grow up in that community ... if you looked in from the outside, it would look like, wow, that’s Aylesbury Estate, it is scary. Because you wouldn’t really walk around after nine o’clock when it’s dark, you’d be like ‘where am I going?’ And the lighting was not like what it is now. Like they had a lighting programme that used to light the whole of the estate up, but it was dim, it was the whole yellow, fluorescent yellow lights, and if you’ve got smog you ain’t seeing nobody.<sup>94</sup>

In terms of council resources, Southwark’s estates were barren territory now, denuded of money, and the caretakers that once roamed them were a vanishing breed. A freeze on staff recruitment in the borough meant that by 1989, the number of full-time residential caretakers on the Aylesbury had fallen from 12—its original allocation—to eight, while the number of assistant caretakers had dipped from 11 to eight.<sup>95</sup> Inevitably, a discussion about ‘abolishing’<sup>96</sup> the service was already underway, and by 1990, residential caretakers and their assistants had disappeared altogether.<sup>97</sup> There was some perfunctory rhetoric around caretaker safety—‘... once a resident caretaker was a respected member of the Community. They are often now seen as an arm of authority and therefore a “target”’<sup>98</sup>—as if that was a factor in the decision to remove them, and as if somehow a vacuum of ‘authority’ would make the situation described any better. The crux of it

was obviously resources, or a lack of them, of which Right to Buy once again played its part:

Certainly we reduced the number of resident caretakers and eventually we removed those. What really caused problems was, again, one of these unforeseen things, because with Right to Buy, the properties themselves, the servicing of the properties, was never designed with mixed tenure ... so there was tremendous pressure to reduce the service charges because caretaking was one of the elements of the service charge ... it was finding cheaper ways of being able to deliver the basic services.<sup>99</sup>

For a number of respondents, the abolition of caretaking was both cause and symbol of what they saw as the estate in decline:

The caretakers they just done away with because obviously they're trying to save money, and cutbacks and things like that, and that's when you notice the deterioration of the block because things were just going downhill ...<sup>100</sup>

I think this is where a lot of the problems started, when the council got rid of the caretakers, because that's when it all started going downhill, you know, because obviously where the caretakers used to take pride in their work and, you know, look after the place, well, because they got rid of them, you know, it wasn't kept very well.<sup>101</sup>

A drop in the number of full-time cleaners—from an original 12 to only five in 1989—only hastened the downturn. In 1988, the Aylesbury TA went to arbitration with the council after it failed to clean parts of the estate for 'over two years.' (In the council's defence, chair of housing, Councillor Mark Howarth, cited the same freeze on vacant posts that brought the caretaking service to its knees.)<sup>102</sup> Litter piled up, abandoned furniture was left to moulder, tatty communal areas were liveried in graffiti:

People used to put mattresses outside, you know, if people didn't want their furniture anymore they wouldn't get it removed properly they used to dump it outside and, you know, it was becoming quite dirty and a lot of graffiti and things we never used to see when we were first there.<sup>103</sup>

Writing to the *Sparrow* in 1987, one unnamed Aylesbury resident said the litter outside his block (presumably Northchurch or Taplow), blown in from East Street market, was so bad that he 'often goes outside at night

to clean it up because I feel so ashamed.’ He said: ‘I am sick of ringing the Aylesbury Office for two years or more ... it’s absolutely filthy, and it’s not swept from one week to the next.’<sup>104</sup> Two years later, in 1989, Aylesbury’s TAs threatened to ‘take action’ against residents if they failed to ‘stop throwing dirty nappies over their balconies.’<sup>105</sup> Such an abatement in standards was perhaps magnified by what some saw as the estate’s unrelenting drabness—the ‘miserable’<sup>106</sup> walkways, its weather-stained blocks: ‘In the winter, if you had day after day after day of rain, those concrete blocks turned darker and darker and darker until you looked out and you thought, “what the hell’s happening here.”’<sup>107</sup> Then there was Aylesbury’s cockroach problem, which reared its head in the late 1980s<sup>108</sup>:

We had a terrible problem with cockroaches as well ... they just used to get in all the heating ducts and it was so warm in the flat that we used to end up, it was awful, we used to end up with cockroaches all over the place, obviously a lot of damp problems, issues with that.<sup>109</sup>

All estate cleaners were eventually removed when the service was privatized in 1991, as a result of compulsory competitive tendering (the enforced submission of local authority services to competitive tender under the Local Government Acts of 1988 and 1992).<sup>110</sup> Other jobs under threat at this time included those of Southwark’s estate officers: the council’s inability—or unwillingness—to replace staff saw their numbers dwindle in the borough, from 136 at the beginning of the decade to just 98 in August 1986 (prompting the *Walworth Inprint* to ask, ‘Where have all the estates’ officers gone?’)<sup>111</sup> Tasked with a range of duties, including the collection of rents, and the logging of complaints, repairs and transfer requests, the remaining officers, who were already individually responsible for upwards of 750 properties, said they would refuse an increased workload.<sup>112</sup> ‘You never knew who your estate officer was,’ recalled Sandie Read, ‘they could change them like you change your knickers, honestly.’<sup>113</sup>

Step by step, in both small ways (the abandonment of the window box competition) and large (the closure of the estate’s laundries in December 1986), many of the institutions and services that kept the Aylesbury ticking over were wound down.<sup>114</sup> The convenience, support, and sense of order these services afforded tenants were thus snatched away just when many needed them most. If the world around them seemed shakier, less sure, then the very least residents could expect of the estate was some

sure-footing: ‘What people want now,’ wrote the *Inprint*, ‘is just day to day work to be done to make their lives more bearable and their estates more cared for.’<sup>115</sup> But the council was no longer the bulwark it once was or needed to be. Enfeebled by central government, and bewildered by the rate and direction of social change, Southwark found itself in the grips of its own existential crisis.

### NEW WORLD, NEWISH GUARD

The local elections of May 1986 marked an important directional shift for the borough. Outgoing was the old panjandrum and director, John O’Brien—the one-man housing show who ruled his department by executive fiat: ‘What, we wonder, will the Tenants of Southwark be able to do without him? For so long tenants have relied on him to use the system he created of Housing management to make sure tenants never got to control their own destinies ... “Big John” had the control he did because he never let anything get decided without his approval.’<sup>116</sup> O’Brien came to symbolise the ‘paternalistic pragmatism’ of an earlier time; of working-class homogeneity and restricted core values; of automatic Labour support.<sup>117</sup> It was an attitude increasingly at odds with Southwark’s changing population, and with a housing department saddled with cuts and a fast-deteriorating stock. O’Brien and his dynastic, bruising cabal (‘... he always had a cigar in his mouth as well, this gangster aura with these bloody cigars’)<sup>118</sup> were seemingly unable to cope with diversity or individuality, or in the words of Harold Carter, unable to respond to the ‘growing empowerment of those outside their own circle, and to pressures which stressed human rights (and human need) as the basis for access to socially owned assets.’<sup>119</sup> The world had changed, and the stitching that once held these men in place was gone. ‘Good riddance,’ declared the *Inprint*, in 1986.<sup>120</sup>

Also outgoing was Southwark leader and councillor since 1978, Tony Ritchie, who made way for Anne Matthews—a carpenter by trade, and a reforming leader in the ‘new Left’ tradition. Matthews was eager to put distance between the incoming council and some of the more unsavoury aspects of the previous regime, such as the ‘cosy drinking-club culture’ that existed among councillors and union bosses, and scandals such as that which occurred at Nye Bevan Lodge, a borough-run nursing home in Camberwell.<sup>121</sup> She was also keen that Southwark push the cause of women, ethnic minority groups, gays and lesbians, single people, and the

homeless—those previously under-represented by O'Brien and the old guard, who, stuck on a 'time-lag,'<sup>122</sup> saw such people 'less as a constituency than as a threat.'<sup>123</sup> Here, Matthews was building upon work already undertaken by her young, upstart cohort. For example, a Women's Committee, chaired by Sue Goss, was established in 1982 so that 'women in the borough ... felt like they were actually sharing problems with us, rather than complaining to a structure which might be part of those problems.'<sup>124</sup> A Community Affairs Committee and a Race Equality Committee were also set up at this time, followed by a Race Equality Unit soon after (tasked with identifying inequality of access and opportunity in the borough). Of course, there was no clean break in the transmission of the old paternalistic culture—a lingering hangover was always inevitable. Nevertheless, the elections in 1982 and, particularly, in 1986, released new appetites in Southwark for a kind of governance based on community participation and greater tenant control. Aubyn Graham, who became chair of the Race Equality Committee in 1985, said:

Right across London and most Labour authorities, all what we had was called the old guards, in London, so they was pushed out, de-selected, and we had completely new, bright, bright ideas! Young people who are going to change the world, come in with a lot of radical ideas, and we got some things done.<sup>125</sup>

Issues of image and inclusion, however, were of secondary importance to that of the council's 'survival,' as Southwark chief executive Anna Whyatt put it in the borough-commissioned information film, *Southwark Can Deliver*, in 1989. In it, a revolving cast of officers and councillors spoke in appropriately dour tones about the precarious situation in which Southwark found itself: addressing council workers directly, Anne Matthews spelled out a future in which redundancies were forthcoming. But there were some notes of guarded optimism, too. Whyatt maintained that an adaptive and restructured council could do more with less; that it could 'create an organisation that is efficient in what it does.' A resolute Matthews added: 'Success will depend on you as employees, and especially as managers, showing genuine respect for the priorities of Southwark residents and putting these priorities first. If you do this, there's no doubt in my mind that Southwark can deliver.'<sup>126</sup> While few doubted the severity of Southwark's fiscal plight, it was felt by many within the borough that the council was failing with what little it had. Jeremy Fraser—later to become

leader of Southwark—was one of a new crop of councillors elected in 1986 who embodied a break from the administration's more traditional past ('When I was on I was a rarity because, you know, I'd gone to university ... I think there were only about three of us on the council at that time who'd gone to university'). He said:

We had been too profligate in the way we had managed our resources previously, and we hadn't taken the opportunity when we had the money to put the estates into a condition they should have been in, therefore the crisis of the quality of our housing and at the same time the lack of money were kind of hitting together if you see what I mean?<sup>127</sup>

The 'dysfunctional relationship' between the council and its direct labour force was a particular concern for Fraser:

You know, we could always do with more money, but we were using our money so poorly in the way we managed our staff—we were so controlled by the unions in the early eighties that it was just ludicrous ... the guys who were supposedly working on the council would always do, you know, a money job rather than finish their own work, because nobody was really harassing them to do the work.<sup>128</sup>

Dissatisfaction with the council was experienced widely, as a 1980 MORI survey, 'Public Opinion in Southwark,' made plain: 'There was a very widespread feeling that "the Council wastes a lot of money."' <sup>129</sup> For tenants, this discontent coalesced most forcibly around the inadequacies of the housing department, specifically: the quantity and quality of information it disseminated; the housing managers who were 'uncaring and inconsiderate of residents' views'; the district housing offices, whose staff were considered less helpful than those working in the borough's libraries, welfare offices, and its Citizens Advice Bureau.<sup>130</sup>

The housing service *was* by now out of date, structured as it was to meet demands anticipated in the early 1970s. Its very nature—vast, byzantine—placed enormous strain on the council and kept tenants at arm's length. Decentralisation was offered up as the answer; the silver bullet to fell the three-headed monster of inefficiency, unresponsiveness, and tenant disengagement.<sup>131</sup> The idea—long in the pipeline, but first presented to council in August 1987<sup>132</sup>—was to devolve decision-making powers to an expanded number of housing offices (from six to 19), to be known as

'neighbourhood offices.' With fewer tenants, or 'consumers,' on their watch, staff could offer a 'more personal and responsive service,' in the words of John Broomfield, Director of Housing and man in charge of the restructure.<sup>133</sup> Meanwhile, out from under the bureaucratic yoke, the once 'uncaring and inconsiderate' housing managers would be free to prioritise the concerns of residents living locally, and divvy up budgets as they saw fit. It was intended that the new housing offices provide a comprehensive service—estate management; the monitoring of contracted services, such as cleaning and repairs; a place to seek advice on matters of rent, benefits, anti-social behaviour and so on—and it seems this was achieved with some success, at least in the beginning.<sup>134</sup> A September 1992 housing revenue report stated that the 'Neighbourhood structure has demonstrated significant improvements in income collection, service delivery and quality.' Documents of this kind were typically cheerless records of losses and planned reductions. Yet despite significant overspend for the year 1991/1992, and a borough deficit of nearly £7 m, it maintained that 'cuts at this time ... would put at risk the improvements that have been achieved to date.'<sup>135</sup> SGT0's Cris Claridge was similarly impressed. She said: 'It did work ... I mean, when we had decentralisation I used to walk into the office regularly and you'd know people.'<sup>136</sup>

As for greater community participation—the very essence of decentralisation—Southwark put in place a network of 19 'Neighbourhood Forums' (which ran along the same boundary lines as the newly devolved housing offices), and a consultative channel between these forums and the housing committee, known as the Tenants' Council. The forums were conceived as an outlet for the as yet unfocused concerns of aggrieved estates and communities. Residents who had long suffered the slings and arrows of a traditional, top-down administration would, in theory, and through community representatives (drawn from TAs), be able to exert 'influence over the way housing services are provided,' including having a say in the way money was spent.<sup>137</sup> But rhetoric and reality failed to measure up: a lack of political will, a lack of training for tenant delegates, and that well familiar spectre, a lack of money, suppressed the fulfilment of a resident-led service.<sup>138</sup> What materialised instead was a convoluted network of 'talking shops,' where agendas were imposed from above, and debate could stray into parochialism.<sup>139</sup> Ian Ritchie helped administer the devolved system in his role as Community Development Officer at Southwark, and later sat on the Tenants' Council as a delegate for Nunhead and Peckham Rye. He said:

It is mainly council generated stuff that is considered, and it's mainly not dealt with very well ... you sit down and there's about half a dozen of us I suppose who go to tenants' council who understand and can ask the relevant questions, but I always cringe when I hear the words 'and on my estate' ... I think, 'here we go.'<sup>140</sup>

It seems unlikely that the new 'neighbourhood democracy' effected much in the way of lasting change for residents on the Aylesbury.<sup>141</sup> On the other hand, it did induce greater transparency within the housing department, brought officers and tenants face to face, and, in the shape of neighbourhood forums, provided a legitimate space for airing grievances, even if these were customarily ignored.<sup>142</sup> The modernising agenda of 1986—if never fully realised—was a good and necessary thing for the changing borough. Principles such as equal opportunities and minority rights were passed into currency, while a nascent commitment to tenant consultation suggested promise. But it has to be remembered that this was a period of capitalist ferment in Britain, and of shifting political philosophies. Public provision held vanishingly little scope or purchase, and Southwark, sapped by a weaponized fiscal policy, and clamouring for investment, increasingly saw no other alternative than that which was market-led. As we shall see, officers and councillors who once bristled at the Thatcherite doctrine eventually acquiesced to its principles (there were those, too, who pushed it with fervour): the borough's problems, they wagered, could only be solved with financial logic.

### STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

Tony Taitte turned 43 in 1995. He was homeless, and had been out of work for several years (Taitte was a plasterer by trade):

I'm sure you know a lot of people that's living rough, you know what I mean? Not because they're stupid, you know what I mean, but certain things is not happening ... That was me. It wasn't happening.<sup>143</sup>

A veteran of south London, Taitte knew the Aylesbury well, and was happy to be offered a home on the estate, in Wendover, when he applied to the council that year:

I had a girlfriend here, a couple of girlfriends, you know what I mean? ... and what helped me really, right, when I did move, or when I knew that I was coming here, is East Street market, right, where they sell black people food, right, and we have Peckham just across the road ... so this is actually a central little part of south London where we have a nice park next door to us as well. All the features make me want to stay here, I don't want to move off the estate.<sup>144</sup>

Linda Edwards was similarly pleased when she was offered a flat in Wendover in 1990. Recently divorced and statutorily homeless, she was living with her two young sons in a bed and breakfast in Crystal Palace, by way of a women's refuge in Devon:

I'm so grateful that, you know, obviously, in my time of need, and I had nobody, you know, if you're going through anything, any kind of dispute, domestic or otherwise, everybody's against you, aren't they? No matter what everyone's against you. And in my time of need along came Southwark.<sup>145</sup>

Edwards was one of many single mothers living on the estate: 'Where I lived on there on Wendover there was mainly, actually it was very, very rare to see, you know, kids that actually had a dad there.' She found her new environment stable and friendly, and one in which she discovered a sense of commonality: 'We'd all talk together or whatever and things went on and you'd all meet over the schools and you'd all chat and everybody sort of trusted everybody.' Her children, too, were quick to settle in: '... the boys were established, I mean this was the boys' home, they was out there playing with their friends playing football, going to school, doing all the things that we do, do you know what I mean?'<sup>146</sup>

Florence Essien moved to Walworth from Eket, Nigeria in 1987. She was 24, studying for her A-levels, and sleeping on the living room floor of her guardian's one bedroom flat in East Street: 'I was still living with her until one day I really had it up to here, I couldn't take it anymore ... I said "look, I can't study", I was in tears.' She registered with the council in 1989, and within a week she was handed keys to a 12th-floor flat in Wendover. Just enrolled as a university undergraduate, it was a fresh start for Essien, and in practical terms, it was a godsend: 'I just wanted somewhere I could close the door and study my books and do what I needed to do. I just wanted my privacy at the time.'<sup>147</sup> Stories like Taitte's,

Edwards' and Essien's display some of the human logic behind a place like the Aylesbury (as yet, there was little financial logic at play here, no bottom line considered). These are stories about meeting need. They are about people getting an equitable shake (or close to it) in something as fundamental as housing. They are about local authorities delivering people from insecurity and hardship. Council estates are full of these stories.

As unemployment spiked, and need did accordingly, Southwark Council was lent upon more than ever—for welfare, nursery places, homes and so forth. Even for established tenants—who may have felt the familiar slipping away, the old certainties beginning to crack—the council could be something of a lifeline. Postal worker Julia Lindmeyer, for example, was unemployed for the duration of the 1980s and sporadically in the late 1970s. 'It was becoming a common problem ... on the estate,' she said.<sup>148</sup> Derek Way, meanwhile, was one of 6000 printers dismissed by News International for taking part in the Wapping dispute of 1986–1997: 'None of us ever got a job again, not in the print game.'<sup>149</sup> (In solidarity with the striking workers, Southwark banned *The Sun*, *The Times*, and *The Sunday Times* from its libraries in 1986. 'Surely no one with any conscience can continue to buy Rupert Murdoch's papers knowing the disgraceful way he has treated his employees,' said Tony Ritchie.)<sup>150</sup> Against such a backdrop of scarce work and low wages, many tenants came to rely on their municipal landlord for the lower rents, security of tenure, and support structures it provided. Equally, though, the pressures of living in penurious times, and in environments that were oft-neglected, and trending towards disarray, could be stifling. Cynthia Cockburn argued that such pressures could give rise to what she called 'individual direct action'—generally a (self-) destructive response to an intolerable situation, such as damaging a lift or stealing from one's neighbour, itself a catch-22. At the same time, however, certain instances of 'individual direct action' should be interpreted, according to Cockburn, as acts of self-defence: the impoverished young mother taking to shoplifting, for example.<sup>151</sup> Tony Ritchie well-recognised this motivation in Southwark's streets and estates:

It was a very poor community with a lot of poverty, you know ... if you get around to Thursday morning and you've got no money to be able to get even a cup of tea or something, you get desperate ... if someone's walking down the road and you want a fiver you're gonna get a fiver, you know? People have got to understand that.<sup>152</sup>

But Cockburn identified a further, much more prevalent working-class response to situational oppression and crises, in the form of organised collective action, or ‘community action.’ Here, groups—both formal and informal—organised around issues related to poverty, planning and, above all, housing, as a way of defending themselves or improving their lot. There were a number of these groups and campaigns active in Southwark during the period in question. In 1987, for instance, the SGTO agitated for the creation of more welfare-support centres and credit unions (there were two credit unions in Southwark at this time) so as to better serve the borough’s ‘low paid, unemployed and disadvantaged.’<sup>153</sup> A women’s welfare rights campaign, championed by Harriet Harman, was launched in March 1983.<sup>154</sup> And then there was the Squatters Network of Walworth (SNOW), led by Walworth resident and future Southwark councillor, Piers Corbyn (brother of the future Labour leader, Jeremy Corbyn), set-up in the early 1980s. Organised and effective, SNOW’s mission was to assist would-be squatters in the occupation of Southwark’s 3700 (as of October 1983) empty and unused flats: ‘At SNOW we have helped victims of domestic violence, refugees from racial attacks, people who have come to London in a desperate search for work ... council tenants who have been forced to move out of unsuitable, unsafe or overcrowded accommodation and people who had been reduced to sleeping on the streets.’<sup>155</sup> So organised were they, in fact, that according to Frank Pemberton, they distributed squatting starter packs or ‘boxes,’ containing a crowbar, a drill, a manual for reconnecting the electricity, and other squatting essentials.<sup>156</sup> For Synnuck, the group was a nuisance: far from occupying and, in some cases, renovating dilapidated properties that an already-stretched council would otherwise fail to make habitable, he argued that SNOW-enabled squatters were effectively jumping the housing queue.<sup>157</sup> Many of them, he added, would have been ineligible for the waiting list in any case:

They weren’t putting people off our waiting list in houses, they were generally people who wouldn’t have otherwise been allocated those properties ... we found that there was our properties advertised in student halls in Italy ... It was foreign students coming over for the summer.<sup>158</sup>

Bonnie Royal squatted with her two young children in a flat on the Friary Estate in Peckham in the mid-1980s, after splitting with her then partner. Despite working in the borough (at the Aylesbury crèche) and

‘doing loads of bloody work’ on the flat, she was denied a council tenancy because she was deemed ‘intentionally homeless.’ She said: ‘I kept writing to [the council] and saying can I please pay rent and they kept saying “you can’t, you’re occupying illegally.”’ Aylesbury youth worker, Sue Herrod, also squatted in the mid-1980s, in nearby St Agnes Place, Kennington—the longest continually squatted street in London (1974–2007).<sup>159</sup> Squatting was in all likelihood as prevalent on the Aylesbury as anywhere else in the borough. Damion Brown said that ‘any flat that was abandoned or vacant would be filled by squatters.’<sup>160</sup> For Brown and his family this was of no concern. But others were to differing extents perturbed by the presence of unauthorised residents (though this was more the case with the rough sleeping that occurred in the estate’s refuse cupboards and stairwells, as described below).

Expressions of ‘community action’ were voiced on the Aylesbury, too. They were a way of resisting worsening conditions, or at least accepting the decline with obstinacy. According to Emily Robinson et al., they also suggested a rising demand among the working class at this time for greater self-determination, and thus a dissatisfaction with the paternalistic, socially conservative culture characterised by O’Brien.<sup>161</sup> An abbreviated chronology of these expressions might read as follows: in 1981, members of Thurlow Lodge TA voted overwhelmingly (845 to 140) to withhold payment of rent and rate increases. ‘With the filth on the walkway, also bad heating, we should have a reduction in rent, not an increase,’ said TA Chairman, Alf Langley.<sup>162</sup> At a meeting in June 1989, more than 150 Aylesbury residents demanded Southwark clean up the estate following ‘years of empty promises and neglect.’ With councillors looking on, and Harriet Harman providing auxiliary heft, tenants’ leader Joan Amodio said: ‘They’ve all agreed that we are in a disgusting mess. But what has happened? Nothing. We now go to the council, not begging but to make sure things are done.’<sup>163</sup> That same year, a group of representatives from the TAs, the Aylesbury crèche, Aylesbury Youth Club, the Social Services department, and the borough’s Black Women’s Action Centre, among others, came together to form the Aylesbury Initiatives Group. Concerned first of all with the estate’s upkeep, the collective also attempted to secure pots of cash for various improvements and projects, such as beautifying spartan concrete with tenant-created murals.<sup>164</sup>

The impetus for much of this activity fed directly from the estate’s four TAs. As discussed previously, these were broadly exclusive arrangements, possessed of a narrow conception of community, and which, for many

years, ignored the beat of the borough's modernising drum: a kind of compendium of the estate's original population, the TAs could be fiercely resistant to change. In the context of community action, this resistance was encapsulated by their 'angry' opposition to a proposed permanent (to last at least ten years) travellers' site in Albany Road, close to the south-west corner of estate, which was first mooted in November 1987.<sup>165</sup> (The opposition was successful; the site was turned into parkland, as originally planned.) But it can also be understood as a reaction to the diminishing traditions of working-class life, to which many TA members were once fully subscribed. TAs, Neighbourhood Forums, the Tenants' Council, the SGTO, and other resident-centred participatory groups, provided a valuable psychic crutch to those denizens bereft of the social and political culture so entwined with Southwark's depleted manufacturing base.

Where the TAs were disparate representatives of Aylesbury's growing diversity, a new set of projects began to emerge on the estate in the late 1970s and 1980s that were geared specifically towards greater inclusion. Like the many faces of community action seen across Southwark and, indeed, a lot of urban Britain at this time, these projects were created with need in mind, and were generally improvised with little official assistance. They also mirrored the rise of the 'new Left' on the political scene, whose own origin story was bound up in local activism, minority rights, and the shunning of old traditions. Groups included the Aylesbury Toy Library, which was set up in a disused shop on Taplow walkway in 1979 by 'local mums and teachers';<sup>166</sup> the aforementioned Turkish women's group, established in 1983; the Pan-African Organisation, created to 'foster racial harmony between all sections of the community,'<sup>167</sup> and located in Taplow block from 1983 (but which was brought into 'disrepute' in 1992 when its coordinator, Ibrahim Sesay, was suspended for an 'inexhaustible ... list of irregularities')<sup>168</sup>; a one o'clock club for young children and their mothers<sup>169</sup>; the Aylesbury Cypriot Women's Group<sup>170</sup>; a day nursery in Taplow; and, as of 1984, the Aylesbury crèche, also in Taplow: '... where (mothers) could leave their children while they went off shopping or stay and have a chat and a cup of tea with other mums.'<sup>171</sup> Just beyond Aylesbury's bounds was the 179 youth club, which moved from East Street to St Peter's Church (off the Walworth Road) in the late 1970s; the Walworth Project, which, among other things, gave advice on legal matters and welfare rights<sup>172</sup>; the Walworth Pensioners Project, hived off from the Walworth Project in 1981; and the Walworth Play Association, which organised schemes for children at Michael Faraday School during the

summer holidays. ‘The older kids said that if they hadn’t been over here, they’d have been up to mischief,’ said Aylesbury resident, Jean Bartlett.<sup>173</sup>

Then there was WACAT, Aylesbury’s answer to any number of community arts projects that had been popping up and petering out in London since the late 1960s. Young and self-consciously middle-class, its founders Su Braden (an art editor for *Time Out*) and Tony Downmunt (a recent film school graduate) went into it in 1976 with a lowered guard, a leading chin, and an admittedly hazy mission statement:

They didn’t necessarily want community art, they had probably never heard of it. But at the beginning I am not so sure that we knew what form it would take. We had certain skills that meant we could bring people together. So it was all about that. But we were very naive too ... We were all outsiders in a way. So it was carried on the weight of what we did and our openness to them being totally involved.<sup>174</sup>

That the project’s direction should be shaped in dialogue with the community was clarion-clear, as was the eventual goal of handing over management to tenants. But accompanying its inception was a strong whiff of the sort of woolly architectural determinism in vogue at the time. ‘The conditions on the Aylesbury Estate produce the typical physical barriers which prevent people freely expressing themselves,’ stated WACAT’s annual report for 1980. ‘The design of the estate offers little incentive to community cohesion and activity.’<sup>175</sup> Downmunt said:

We had this idea, this sort of utopian vision that you could open up these community spaces in these blocks and people would come together in really interesting ways and become empowered and want to change things and want to make their living situation more amenable and all of that ... I mean, in retrospect, there’s a lot of idealism and bullshit in all of that, really, and a lot of ... evangelical stuff about, you know, we thought this was a good idea so people should think this is a good idea too.<sup>176</sup>

As an overarching philosophy, the project perhaps fell short. But this is not to take away from the variety and sheer quantity of work undertaken by the group until its eventual closure in the early 1990s (by then renamed Horizon).<sup>177</sup> Organised around a print shop in Taplow (originally in Latimer), a photography room in Wolverton, a video studio in Chartridge, and an activities centre in Wendover, WACAT put on countless projects and classes aimed at residents of both genders and most ages. There was a

radio scheme ('When was the last time you heard someone like yourself telling how it is in Thatcher's Britain, Walworth, 1988?'),<sup>178</sup> a women's dance group (visited by Glenda Jackson in 1982),<sup>179</sup> various youth theatre productions (the 1987 play, *East Street*, was a 'true to life ... multi-racial' tale of drugs, abuse and redemption on the Aylesbury),<sup>180</sup> a music project, and, in 1980, an exhibition of residents' photos at the Hour Glass pub, to name just a few (Figs. 4.3 and 4.4). Participating tenants were encouraged to reflect on their lives and surroundings through their work: among the dozens of titles (now sadly missing) produced by the video project were *Gang Girls*; *Being Black*; *The Law*; *Unemployment*; and *Trouble Next Door*, an exploration of home life 'showing parents,' children's and neighbours' attitudes to each other.<sup>181</sup> WACAT made a few stabs at collating participation numbers (the photography project, for example, was 'used by about eighty people per week'), but it would be impossible to quantify the group's reach with any degree of accuracy.<sup>182</sup> Apparent, though, was that all this new social infrastructure—the crèche, the toy library, WACAT and the rest—was treasured by those who used it. Bonnie Royal, a single mum, started work at the crèche in 1984:



**Fig. 4.3** WACAT's women's dance group, 1982. (Courtesy of Su Braden/WACAT, *Annual Report*, 1982.)



**Fig. 4.4** WACAT/Horizon radio project, 1988. (Courtesy of David Cleverly/*Walworth Inprint*, April 1988.)

I was coming from kind of rock bottom and was moving out of the depths of a pretty uncomfortable situation so for me that felt really like, ‘Wow, I’ve got a job, I can take my kids, I don’t have to pay for childcare, I can meet other mums, I can go to WACAT, I can make radio plays’, so it was all, you know, it’s calmer isn’t it. If you feel very positive then you’re maybe not walking around noticing the negative as much.<sup>183</sup>

Treasured or not, these local projects and initiatives were squeezed remorselessly, and in many cases broken for good by the stomping weight of penury (if they contained within them a financial logic, it was far too abstract for the decision makers to parse). Urban Aid—the major source of central government funding for voluntary bodies operating in areas of need—turned increasingly chimerical in Southwark under Thatcher’s stewardship.<sup>184</sup> Between 1984 and 1985, the number of projects approved for Urban Aid was cut by two-thirds, while in 1986, funding for ‘holiday projects’ was more than halved (£26,000 to £12,000) from a year

earlier.<sup>185</sup> In the same year, Southwark requested over £2 m in aid grants to fund 80 community groups throughout the borough. It received just £594,000. 'The Government promised faithfully that local voluntary groups would not have to pay the price of [GLC] abolition,' said Tony Ritchie. 'It now appears that two thirds are to pay the highest price of all—no funding.'<sup>186</sup> In March 1984, WACAT was denied its usual Urban Aid allocation, which had hitherto paid the wages of its nine full-time workers.<sup>187</sup> Stretched and harried, it scraped along, making do with diminishing Southwark revenue grants and fundraising proceeds until it was forced to call time.<sup>188</sup>

Seeing WACAT and other relied upon services stripped from the Aylesbury must have felt for some like another cruel turn. Once again, the estate had been rendered less by outwardly strange and impersonal forces. At the same time, though, it should be recognised that support and sociability on the estate did not begin and end with these transient structures. As we have seen, Aylesbury possessed a store of social capital built on neighbourly links, familiarity and shared experiences. Accelerated residential turnover and worsening deprivation levels certainly made a significant claim on these resources. But as Lisa Baxter and Martin Gainsford found out, the store was not so easily depleted:

*Lisa Baxter:* On the day of my Mum's funeral, you wouldn't really think that it would be such a big thing, but the funeral cars had to come into the estate and had to drive around the square, and everybody, literally, came out onto their balconies to watch the funeral cortege.

*Martin Gainsford:* And people were standing in the street, holding traffic up so they knew, because there's a funeral thing coming ...

*Lisa Baxter:* And it was just such a big thing, and we were amazed.

*Martin Gainsford:* And people came out and cleaned, they said, 'We don't want your lovely flowers on the dirty walkway.'

*Lisa Baxter:* We were just amazed that people came out dressed in black, they weren't coming to the funeral but they just came out and stood along the route all dressed in black.

*Martin Gainsford:* And again, you wouldn't have necessarily thought that, but there was that kind of D-Day spirit still, people mucking in, and she was one of our own. And 'that could have been me, I want to go out and show respect' ... to make sure our kids aren't tearing about on bikes in the day and that.

*Interviewer:* There was still a sense of community?

*Martin Gainsford:* Oh, yeah.

*Lisa Baxter:* Yeah. I mean that was sort of in the late eighties [1988].<sup>189</sup>

### ‘MUGGERS’ PARADISE’

To better understand the conceptual intersection of the Aylesbury and crime we must first go back to the beginning. According to the *South London Press*, the police labelled the Aylesbury a ‘concrete den of crime’ in 1970, the year the estate was opened.<sup>190</sup> By 1976, *The Guardian* was talking about a ‘healthy criminal culture’ that surrounded the estate<sup>191</sup>; while in 1978, the *Evening News* had it down as a ‘breeding ground for trouble.’<sup>192</sup> These were just the first in a series of representations that married the estate to deviant behaviour. But what exactly were these articles describing? PC John Charman was Aylesbury’s beat officer from 1970 to at least 1977. Speaking to *The Guardian* (1976) and the *South London Press* (1977), he offered a criminal profile of the estate configured almost solely around juvenile delinquency. ‘It’s like this,’ he said. ‘Some you talk to, some you shout at, some you take home to Mum and Dad and some you might give a quick clip. We’re willing to turn a blind eye on some things and pull them up on others.’<sup>193</sup> Graffiti, smashed windows, some joyriding, the occasional fit of break-ins: ‘We had a spell of two or three house break-ins a day,’ said Charman, ‘but we have since discovered that the offenders were kids who lived off the estate.’<sup>194</sup> It was nothing so different from that which occurred before the blocks went up (minus the graffiti perhaps).<sup>195</sup> Nor was it unlike what was going on in other high-density residential areas. Said Charman: ‘If you compare crime rates in the Aylesbury with an area of the same size and population, the crime rate ... becomes more realistic.’<sup>196</sup> With a little more context, then, all the column inches and menacing headlines (‘Concrete Den of Crime,’ ‘Concrete jungle of Colditz,’ etc.) scan as wildly disproportionate, and wanton, too, in that they stoked and projected an unearned notoriety.<sup>197</sup>

We have already considered the print media’s inattention to social context in the reporting of problems on the estate. Predictably, this failure or unwillingness to look behind an issue did not much improve as the biting effects of deprivation took hold. Crime was hyped, condemned and glossily packaged to mobilise interest. But rarely was it interrogated in any meaningful way. In 1988, the *Guardian*’s Alan Rusbridger penned an Aylesbury hit-piece based, ostensibly, on observations gleaned from a ‘tea-time’ stroll.<sup>198</sup> Lurid, crassly generalized (‘people ... leading miserable, blighted lives’), and misreported, crime on the estate was not so much discussed as it was alluded to: ‘The doors all have spy holes and ostentatious locks. Some have metal strips down the side; one or two have been

entirely re-faced in metal.<sup>199</sup> There are no crime statistics; no tenants' voices to be heard. It did deign to cast a myopic eye on Southwark's unemployment rates, but concluded—as many passing glances of the estate tended to do—that the Aylesbury was simply a big mistake: 'We know better now,' it said.<sup>200</sup> The *Today* broadcast proffered a similar final analysis: 'The Aylesbury Estate should never have been built in the first place.'<sup>201</sup>

By the early 1980s, the criminal emphasis of these grittified, Aylesbury-centric articles had shifted from the sort of 'nuisance' offences committed by 'juvenile delinquents' to more violent and emotive acts, such as sexual assaults and 'muggings.' (As Stuart Hall et al. demonstrated, the term 'mugging' was a culturally manufactured catch-all for violent crimes and disorder in urban districts generally. Its import and overuse in the media could induce periods of 'moral panic,' according to Hall, which were inextricably linked to ideas of race and culpability—the felon as the young black criminal—and were seized upon by authorities as a rationale for greater control.)<sup>202</sup> In January 1983, *The Times* published an unnerving portrait of the Aylesbury, in which muggings were 'normal,' burglaries commonplace, and 'fear [became] a habit ... as unthinking as the first cup of coffee in the morning or the last cup at night.'<sup>203</sup> It described how residents would warn potential visitors, 'even relatives,' to steer clear. It stated that walking the estate alone was 'unthinkable' for 'most' women. It chronicled the plight of Mr George Watling, 'frail' at 72, whose neighbours "'tuck him in" at night by checking that his flat ... is securely locked.'<sup>204</sup>

The report cited as evidence two violent crimes: the 'mugging' of a young mother, and the sexual assault of a 17-year-old girl. That these incidents were distressing for residents, let alone the victims, is undeniable. But again, this was impressionistic writing first and foremost; a scant underpinning of facts conflated with a few agitated voices ('It is a living hell,' said one of three tenants quoted) and the author's own overheated narration. Incendiary in tone, the article conformed to the traditions of 'urban' representation at this time, in which poorer areas—such as council estates and the ill-defined 'inner cities'—were routinely depicted as morally deficient and habitually violent.<sup>205</sup> Drawing from a shallow pool of sensationalist language and imagery—Aylesbury was a 'muggers' paradise,<sup>206</sup> North Peckham was a 'predators' playground,<sup>207</sup> the Brandon Estate was 'plagued' by its 'Corridors of Fear'<sup>208</sup>—media depictions of inner urban areas presented a distinctly Manichean vision—a

‘commonsense’ world of right and wrong, heroes and villains, authority and disorder.

Simplified, fetishized, objectified, and finally commodified, council estates, rendered in this way, were imaginary constructs, their meaning defined not by their histories or inhabitants, but by external agencies of control (politicians, police, the media, etc.).<sup>209</sup> Thrust to the fore of public debate, and into the collective consciousness, the spectacle of the ‘notorious’ council estate reinforced racial and class stereotypes, hid systematic inequalities, and legitimised state disinvestment and the repression of restive populations. In 1983, Sir Kenneth Newman, then Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, described London’s estates as ‘symbolic locations’ where ‘unemployed youths—often black youths—congregate; where the sale and purchase of drugs, the exchange of stolen property and illegal drinking and gaming is not unknown ... they equate closely with the criminal rookeries of Dickensian London.’<sup>210</sup> As Britain’s most senior policeman at the time, Newman’s remarks fomented public fear over safety and disorder, and appeared to justify so-called hard policing tactics. They also gave credence to the idea that council estates were the city’s dangerous underbelly—a constellation of ‘symbolic locations’ existing outside of society, physically proximate but culturally removed from their better-heeled surrounds. (Upon Thatcher’s first visit to 11 Hambledon Place, her private secretary, Robin Butler, thought it best to point out that she had ‘arrived through Dulwich Park and had therefore not seen the much less pleasant route which she would have to take through Brixton to Westminster if she were to live there.’)<sup>211</sup> In all, this was the stuff of stigma, and of myth-making. Distanced from reality, the Aylesbury and estates like it existed only as spectacle or cipher, to be gawped at or ignored.<sup>212</sup>

The shock headlines and lurid generalisations masked an inner world on the Aylesbury that was inevitably more even. But this is not to diminish or make light of the violent crime that did occur on the estate. Several respondents were either prey or witness to violent crime, including Julia Lindmeyer, who was robbed twice in her 40 years living in Taplow. The first incident, in the late 1980s, was ‘in the lift, by two youths, who did not harm or attack me in any way, but “just wanted my money.” I gave them my purse which had very little money as I had just spent most of it shopping.’ The second, in the mid-1990s, took place at night, on the 12th-floor corridor of her block:

A young boy of about ten years, who had followed me, and whom I did not think a threat, jumped on my back and pulled me over to the ground. He ran off as soon as my purse slipped out of my bag, and I was thankfully unharmed.<sup>213</sup>

Lindmeyer added that two women (in separate incidents) were raped in the block in the early hours of the morning, on their way either to or from work: 'A security guard was provided by the council to patrol the flats at regular hours.'<sup>214</sup> Moments such as these were punched, indelibly, into the victims' experience of the estate. They changed the way they thought about their surroundings, and how they negotiated them daily: 'I always felt fear on using the lifts and walking along the corridors from the 1980s onwards.'<sup>215</sup> This, to be sure, was a period in which a fear of crime had settled pall-like over many Aylesbury tenants, and women in particular. By 1999, just under 40 per cent of tenants on the estate claimed they were scared for their personal safety.<sup>216</sup> Carol Vincent:

You're frightened you're going to get mugged, people can't even wear—mind you I do wear a lot of jewellery, but I'm okay—but a lot of people out there are frightened they'll get mugged, they get pulled up for their jewellery, pull your necklace off or steal your bag for drugs.<sup>217</sup>

But fear of crime was hardly a phenomenon local to the Aylesbury. As Jerry White noted, nearly half of Londoners worried about leaving their homes after dark during the 1980s, and the proportion was even higher in the capital's inner districts.<sup>218</sup> In Southwark, in 1988, 32 per cent of residents said crime or a lack of safety was the thing they liked least about living in the borough. 'Many people said they didn't go out as much as they'd like,' reported the *Sparrow*, 'because of fear of being attacked.' (On the other hand, 15 per cent of residents surveyed said there was 'nothing bad about living here.'<sup>219</sup> There is of course a strong correlation between patterns of fear and the criminal profile of an area. But as Susan Smith argued, fear of crime might be better seen as an articulation of the inequality and powerlessness so often experienced as a part of urban life.<sup>220</sup> So too can it mask deeper anxieties about changes to the social order, of which, as we have seen, there were many.<sup>221</sup> Then there is the effect of the media to consider. Flooded by panicked headlines and violent imagery, it is not surprising that many women on the Aylesbury—and indeed all across London—harboured feelings of insecurity. For Rachel Pain, this

sensationalist deluge was just one more way in which women and other more vulnerable members of society were marginalized in public spaces.<sup>222</sup> Harry Matthews said:

I think what's gone wrong is their journalism. You've got to balance out things because you'll get people that had no problems, all of a sudden you've given them something to fear. Like my Mum ... she's a pensioner, right, and she loves to read the news, and I said to her, 'look, if you're going to read the news read it last thing at night, don't read it during the day' because then it affects her all day, right, and ... she'll ring me and say, 'Harry did you hear what happened on the estate, this happened', and I don't see it, I don't. And it's not that I'm being complacent, it's not that I'm blind, right, I know things are going on anywhere and everywhere, right. I'm very much aware of it. But ... I don't feel I need to be on my guard every time I come out my door, I don't need to, it's not there ... It's not as bad as they make it out to be, you know.<sup>223</sup>

It must be noted that neither crime nor the fear of it was all-consuming. Donna Grant has lived on the estate since 1971: 'I've never actually seen any trouble at all and I don't want to either.'<sup>224</sup> Pat Davies, another resident of more than 40 years, also survived relatively unscathed:

*Pat Davies:* Oh, I've always felt safe here, yeah. I mean I've been burgled a couple of times, but!

*Interviewer:* Was crime an issue for you?

*Pat Davies:* Not really. You hear lots of things. There's not been much round here. This part is quite quiet actually.<sup>225</sup>

Damion Brown added:

There was no fear of the estate, ever, and it did change in appearance, in a sense that there were people moving in and out, so, but there was always that constant sense of community.<sup>226</sup>

Others tenants, like Harry Matthews, believed the estate was unfairly singled out for its problems; that it did not stand alone in its notoriety, but existed as a part of a wider situational ecosystem:

I have had no problem in going anywhere on the estate, no problem ... I know some of the high rises because I know there are drug addicts in those

high rises and stuff. But ... what is happening there is happening everywhere, so it's not, it's not confined to any particular area, you know. There's those addicts, they're in Brixton, they're in Peckham, they're in Camberwell, they're all over the place, you understand what I mean? It's not confined to any particular area.<sup>227</sup>

The available data is too meagre to tell the full statistical tale, but it is likely that levels of recorded crime on the Aylesbury were roughly comparable with the surrounding area and inner London generally. Rising crime was both symptom and scourge of the economically polarizing Thatcher years. It was a manifestation of hopelessness; a consequence of being without a wage. Southwark, like Hackney, Tower Hamlets, parts of Lambeth and Haringey, and elsewhere, sat squarely in the upturned end of the bifurcated economy. By 1988, its mortality and hospitalization rates had outpaced the UK average, half its residents took home less than £100 per week, and unemployment was higher than anywhere else in London. 'In this context,' wrote the council, 'the incidence of violent crime is significantly above the national average. A worrying trend in the borough shows an increase in the reported crimes of violence against the person, sexual offences and burglaries.'<sup>228</sup> Despite various preventative schemes and crime-reducing strategies ('New plans to cut crime mean: SAFETY FIRST'), it was a trend that spiralled well into the new decade.<sup>229</sup> In 1991, Southwark tallied the highest number of murders in the capital, and, in December 1992, you were more likely to get robbed at knifepoint in Peckham than anywhere else in the country.<sup>230</sup> In 1999, the council identified a 'high crime area,' stretching from London Bridge down to Camberwell and Peckham, and including all in between—the Elephant and Castle, Walworth Road, the Old Kent Road, the Aylesbury. Here, the rate of crime was the fourth highest in London, and more than double that found in the rest of the borough. Vehicle crime was the most common, followed by violence against the person, residential burglary, robbery, theft and criminal damage.<sup>231</sup> By 2003, Faraday was ranked sixth out of 21 wards in Southwark for vehicle crime, drugs offences, and violence against the person. It ranked fifteenth overall for residential burglary.<sup>232</sup>

It seems crime on the Aylesbury was no greater—or indeed not much different—from anywhere else in neglected inner London. What marked the estate out was its physical attributes—the brawny slabs with the 'comfortable Betjeman names,' the circuitous geography of elevated walkways.<sup>233</sup> (See Fig. 4.5.) Immediately expressive of the 'gritty' inner city, the



Fig. 4.5 A ‘notorious’ Aylesbury walkway, 1980. (Courtesy of Su Braden/WACAT, *Annual Report*, 1981.)

estate distilled many of the fears and fantasies of urban life embedded in the popular imagination. The conventional wisdom hampered it, too. Spouted from the start was the idea that the walkways spelt trouble. ‘It is perfect for muggers,’ said TA leader, Alf Langley, in 1977. ‘A lot of hooligans come round here at night from off the estate ... there are so many nooks and crannies where kids can have fun and games.’<sup>234</sup> The council latched on early, proposing the ‘breaking of the pedway system’ in 1979.<sup>235</sup> By 1988, the bridges and landings were discussed as culprits in their own right: ‘Many of our estates facilitate violent crime owing to certain design features.’<sup>236</sup> This sort of thinking was no doubt infected by the theories of Alice Coleman, as put down in her 1985 work, *Utopia on Trial*. For Coleman, like Newman before her, ‘vicious’ overhead walkways were one of several crime-inducing ‘design disadvantages’ common to modern estates. She wrote: ‘... walkways increase crime by enabling offenders to dodge from block to block.’<sup>237</sup> Matters of unemployment, racial discrimination, disadvantage, and budgetary cuts were conveniently swept under the carpet. That Coleman was ‘warmly embraced’ at Number 10 is of no great surprise.<sup>238</sup>

In 1994, Southwark embarked on the dismantling process. Framed as a scheme to ‘design out crime,’ two 25 ft bridges were taken down.<sup>239</sup> A further three ‘BRIDGES OF FEAR’ were removed in 1996.<sup>240</sup> Speaking about it to the *South London Press*, Councillor Eileen Neale proffered a conspicuously slight rationale: ‘Admittedly they were seen as a convenience, which saved residents from having to negotiate the roads to get around the estate. But they also provide access for anyone who wants to get onto the estate, including criminals.’<sup>241</sup> It is impossible to gauge how far Aylesbury’s walkways and footbridges actually contributed to the realization of criminal activity. The fact that crime remained a steady aspect of estate life *after* the footbridges came down suggests Coleman’s thesis was a simplification, and that their ‘notorious’ reputation was overblown.<sup>242</sup> For Keith Harber, who worked as a police inspector in Southwark in the early 1980s, the walkways were primarily escape routes rather than preying grounds:

It was almost a given that any stolen car being pursued by police would be driven into and abandoned within the maze of roadways and entrances on the various estates, with the miscreants making good their escape on foot ... It was said that just as a squirrel could once travel from one end of England to the other without touching the ground, so a fleeing suspect could travel halfway across Southwark without crossing a main road.<sup>243</sup>

Less ambiguous were the dark and daunting parking areas in the under-crofts between the pilotis:

*Robert Millward*: Originally the estate had car parks under the blocks and they were ... you’ve got cars being blown up, you’ve got yobs going in there ....

*Lisa Baxter*: I got exposed at in the car park by that man.<sup>244</sup>

Deemed unsafe and largely avoided from the start, these spaces were eventually fenced off or converted into garages.<sup>245</sup> The lack of a door entry system on the blocks was another significant minus. Entry phones were uncommon when the estate was constructed, prone to vandalism, and expensive to install. Yet their absence stretched what was for many an already tentative sense of security: ‘My immediate neighbours and those on the twelfth floor certainly seemed good citizens, and for this I was thankful. The violence and drugs seemed to be from vagrants and addicts

wandering in, not tenants of the estate.’<sup>246</sup> Open corridors, stairwells, and even storage cupboards were a relatively attractive prospect for rough sleepers, addicts, and unmoored youths. Michelle Porter moved to the Aylesbury in 1989:

I was on the end at 141 Bradenham, and next to it was like a cupboard where you can put all your knick-knacks ... They decided just to move in and call it their home, you know what I mean? And I found drug needles in there ... I used to have my kids over when they were little, and I weren’t letting them out of my sight. I used to let them play in the little cubby hallway but not no more.<sup>247</sup>

Florence Essien (Wendover) added:

One morning the lift wasn’t working, I was going to work and when I opened the door that leads to, from the lift area, takes you down, there was this women with a mattress, cover, with a can of beer, she was just snoozing away! I just walked past, she was sleeping ... fast asleep with blankets, with cans of beer!<sup>248</sup>

Media sensationalism, the easy conflation of fear and actuality, and a lack of localised data make it hard to tell where the rhetoric on crime stopped and reality started. Clear, however, were the many mythifying narratives raised into optimal focus. We will examine below the contested existence (or non-existence) of ‘gangs’ on the estate—another media-proliferated trope of the ‘inner city’ that further bloated the Aylesbury’s corpulent reputation from the late 1990s. We will also examine how these often fanciful narratives fed and legitimized the regeneration machine. The Thatcher years were hard ones for council housing. A combination of Right to Buy and targeted disinvestment left it wounded, immobile and exposed to acquisitive impulses. An estate of scale like the Aylesbury only magnified the bumps and bruises. By the time Labour returned to power in 1997, the tenure was popularly synonymous with immorality, fecklessness and the crime-torn landscapes ubiquitously depicted in gritty police procedurals. Tony Blair promised to roll back the decline. To revive the ‘forgotten’ estates to some of their original glory. What materialised instead was a ruthlessly logical—if outwardly more anodyne—progression of that which came before it. ‘With the legislation of Thatcher’s “right to buy” the council housing system began to implode,’ wrote urban

geographer, Loretta Lees. ‘New Labour’s “new urban renewal” was the final death sentence for monolithic council estates in Britain.’<sup>249</sup> Young in years but ailing nonetheless, the Aylesbury was deemed a terminal case. It was to be a slow and painful departure.

## NOTES

1. Southwark Council Housing Committee, *Community Plan—Reactions to the Borough Strategy* (31 January 1979), Box 663, Folder 1/79–3/79.
2. *Southwark Sparrow*, September 1985; Charles Moore, *Margaret Thatcher: The Authorized Biography, Volume Two: Everything She Wants* (London: Penguin, 2016), 669.
3. Moore, *Thatcher*, 669.
4. SS, September 1985.
5. SS, September 1985.
6. Great Britain Historical Geographical Information System, *A Vision of Britain Through Time: Southwark Metropolitan Borough*, (Portsmouth, University of Portsmouth), [http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10039680/cube/TOT\\_POP](http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10039680/cube/TOT_POP), accessed 14 December 2016.
7. SS, December 1982. The council-run *Sparrow* filled the vacuum left by the closure (1979) of the *Southwark Tenant*. Starting out in 1981 as a monthly newspaper, it turned weekly as of 1988—‘The only weekly newspaper in the country produced by a local authority.’ SS, 20 August 1993.
8. SS, March 1986.
9. Southwark Council Service Committees, *The Development of Service Action Plans and Strategic Priorities* (1 October 1986), Box 775, Folder 5/86–11/86.
10. SS, February 1992.
11. SCHC, *Community Plan—Reactions to the Borough Strategy* (31 January, 1979); SCSC, *The Development of Service Action Plans* (1 October, 1986); Sue Goss, *Local Labour and Local Government: A Study of Changing Interests, Politics and Policy in Southwark, 1919–82*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1988), 85–6.
12. SCHC, *The Development of Service Action Plans* (1 October 1976); Goss, *Local Labour*, 5–6; Harold Carter, ‘Building the Divided City: Race, Class and Social Housing in Southwark, 1945–1995, in *The London Journal: A Review of Metropolitan Society Past and Present*, vol. 33 (2008), 174.
13. Moore, *Thatcher*, 669.

14. SCHC, *Aylesbury NDC Draft Delivery Plan* (8 September 1999), Box 20,348,628, Folder 6/99–10/99.
15. Paul Harrison, *Inside the Inner City*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), 21.
16. Suzanne Hall, *City, Street and Citizen: The measure of the ordinary*, (London: Routledge, 2012), 40–41.
17. Out of 2000 applicants as of 1983, only 701 were accepted as homeless between January and June (compared to the inner-London average of 517). See: SCSC, *Programme Area Status* (October 1984), SCA, Folder 12/84–4/85.
18. The 1976 report, *Moving Out of Southwark*, found residents leaving the borough were higher up the socio-economic scale than those who remained: of 167 movers surveyed, a fifth occupied professional and managerial grades (compared to less than a tenth of the 2073 non-movers surveyed), while only 13 per cent of departing households earned less than £1500 per year, compared to 32 per cent of families staying put. Evelyn Fernando and Barry Hedges, *Moving Out of Southwark*, (London: Social Community and Planning Research, 1976), 8–20.
19. Martin Gainsford, 5 March 2015.
20. Walworth and Aylesbury Community Arts Trust, *WACAT Annual Report, 1980*, (London: Aylesbury Estate, 1980), 1.
21. Donna Grant, 9 February 2015.
22. Anne Lorraine, 5 June 2015; Sandie Read, 5 June 2015.
23. Inner London Education Authority, *The Aylesbury Estate: An Action Research Project on the Aylesbury Estate, South East London*, by I.L.E.A.'s *Community Education Workers* (London: Southwark Institute of Adult Education, 1982), 76–84.
24. ILEA, *The Aylesbury Estate*, 76–84.
25. Carter, 'Building the Divided City', 173–4.
26. ILEA, *The Aylesbury Estate*, 76–84.
27. Damion Brown, 1 June 2015.
28. Damion Brown, 1 June 2015.
29. Linda Cleverly, 13 April 2015.
30. *Today*, BBC Radio 4, 24 April 1983.
31. 'Petty crime and not so petty flourishes,' Cape continued. 'Muggings, sexual assaults, burglaries and vandalism are part of everyday life.' Absent from these claims was any statistical underpinning. *Today*, BBC Radio 4, 24 April 1983.
32. *Today*, BBC Radio 4, 24 April 1983.
33. Department for Communities and Local Government, *Annual Right to Buy Sales: Sales by Local Authority, 1979–80 to 2015–16*, (8 December 2016), <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live->

- [tables-on-social-housing-sales#right-to-buy-sales](#), accessed 11 January 2017.
34. Margaret Thatcher Foundation, 'House of Commons Speech: Debate on the Address', 15 May 1979, <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/104083>, (accessed 11 January 2017).
  35. Even in poorer districts, where demand for council housing was always going to be high, any thinning of the municipal stock through take up of the policy only backed up waiting lists further. (Particularly as local authorities were prohibited by central government from reinvesting Right to Buy sales receipts in the building of new homes.)
  36. Alan Murie, 'A New Era for Council Housing?' in John English (ed.), *The Future of Council Housing*, (London: Croom Helm, 1982), 50.
  37. SS, October 1982.
  38. Lynsey Hanley, *Estates: An Intimate History*, (London: Granta Books, 2007), 136.
  39. Treasury papers released by the National Archives at Kew in 2016 revealed the extent to which Thatcher pursued plans, drawn up by the Central Policy Review Staff (CPRS), to break up the welfare state, including charging for education, and scrapping free universal healthcare. See: Gavin Cordon, 'Margaret Thatcher's secret plans to dismantle welfare state almost prompted "Cabinet riot"', *The Independent*, 25 November 2016, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/margaret-thatcher-welfare-state-plans-cabinet-riot-a7438196.html>, accessed 12 January 2017.
  40. The general subsidy, credited to housing revenue accounts, subsidised (held down) the rents of all tenants irrespective of their individual circumstances.
  41. Peter Malpass, *Housing and the Welfare State: The Development of Housing Policy in Britain*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 107–8.
  42. Malpass, *Housing and the Welfare State*, 108; SCSC, *The Development of Service Action Plans* (1 October, 1986).
  43. Peter Malpass, *Reshaping Housing Policy: Subsidies, Rents and Residualisation*, (London: Routledge, 1990), 20.
  44. Brown, 1 June 2015.
  45. Alison Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture*, (London: Routledge, 2001), 201.
  46. SS, February 1984.
  47. Frank Pemberton, 15 July 2015.
  48. SS, February 1984.
  49. SS, February 1984.
  50. SS, April 1982. In considering this sharp rise, it must be noted that the council's housing stock increased from 38,000 to more than 62,000 in

- 1980 when the GLC transferred its stock to the boroughs (thus relinquishing its role as a primary housing authority). With these additional 24,000 homes and families came an additional backlog of repairs and renovation work, and a substantial strain on the council.
51. SS, January, 1986; SCHC, *Policy and Performance Review: Income Collection—Rent Arrears*, (15 January 1990), Box 781, Folder 11/89–4/90.
  52. *Roof*, January–February 1987, 24.
  53. SS, January 1986.
  54. SS, January 1986.
  55. SCHC, *Policy and Performance Review*, (15 January 1990).
  56. SCHC, *Rent Arrears: Letter to Southwark Council from the District Auditor, Metropolitan District*, (24 July 1987), Box 780, Folder 1987/88; SCHC, *Policy and Performance Review*, (15 January 1990).
  57. SCHC, *Policy and Performance Review*, (15 January 1990).
  58. SS, February 1992.
  59. SGTO was originally formed as the Southwark Group of Tenants Associations.
  60. SS, December 1989.
  61. SCHC, *Community Plan*, (31 January 1979).
  62. SCHC, *Community Plan*, (31 January 1979).
  63. Malpass, *Reshaping Housing Policy*, 17–19.
  64. Peter Malpass and Alan Murie, *Housing Policy and Practice*, (London: Macmillan Education, 1990), 93.
  65. Malpass, *Reshaping Housing Policy*, 17–19; Ravetz, *Council Housing*, 202.
  66. Ravetz, *Council Housing*, 202.
  67. Greater London Council, *The Greater London House Condition Survey*, (London: GLC, 1981).
  68. SS, December 1981.
  69. SS, December 1981.
  70. SS, December 1981.
  71. Tony Ritchie, 17 February 2015.
  72. SCHC, *HIP Bid*, 1987/88, (8 July 1976), Box 775, Folder 5/86–11/86; SCHC, *HIP Bid Allocation*, 1987/88, (10 February 1987), Box 780, Folder 11/86–5/87.
  73. SCHC, *Homelessness Policy and Practice* (20 February 1985), Box 781, Folder 12/84–4/85.
  74. SS, February 1984.
  75. SS, February 1983.
  76. *WI*, October 1983.
  77. See: Jerry White, *London in the Twentieth Century: A City and Its People*, (London: Vintage, 2008), 397–99; Susan S. Fainstein, *The City Builders*:

- Property Development in New York and London, 1980–2000*, (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2001), 90.
78. F.W.S. Craig (ed.), *British General Election Manifestos, 1959–1987*, (Aldershot: Dartmouth, 1990), 339.
  79. Tony Travers, *London's Boroughs at 50*, (London: Biteback, 2015), 122.
  80. SS, February 1985.
  81. SS, April 1985.
  82. John Synnuck, 17 December 2014.
  83. Pemberton, 15 July 2015.
  84. Ritchie, 17 February 2015.
  85. SS, February 1985.
  86. WI, November 1980.
  87. WI, November 1980. The *Inprint*, established in November 1978, was a voluntary and non-profit community-run newspaper, funded by both the borough council and sales.
  88. WI, November 1980.
  89. SCHC, *Report of Policy and Resources Committee—Housing* (24 November, 1976), Box 773, Folder 5/76–12/76; SCHC, *Letter to Tenants from Director of Housing Re: Repairs/Tenants' Responsibility* (6 July 1989), Box 639, Folder 5/89–11/89.
  90. Lisa Baxter, 5 March 2015; Martin Gainsford, 5 March 2015.
  91. SCHC, *Aylesbury Estate* (6 September 1989), Box 639, Folder 5/89–11/89.
  92. SCHC, *Aylesbury Estate* (6 September 1989); SS, 16 October 1992.
  93. SCHC, *Estate Lighting* (3 June 1989), Box 774, Folder 11/88–5/89.
  94. Oliur Rahman, 21 June 2015.
  95. SCHC, *Aylesbury Estate* (6 September 1989).
  96. SCHC, *Care and Upkeep* (6 September 1989), Box 639, Folder 5/89–11/89.
  97. What emerged in their stead was a pared down service of private contractors and council employed 'estate superintendents,' who undertook minor repairs. SCHC, *Care and Upkeep—Transfer of Staff* (11 September 1990), Box 755, Folder 5/90–11/90.
  98. SCHC, *Care and Upkeep* (6 September 1989).
  99. Synnuck, 17 December 2014.
  100. Read, 5 June 2015.
  101. Grant, 9 February 2015.
  102. WI, June 1988.
  103. Baxter, 5 March 2015.
  104. SS, March 1987.
  105. *South London Press*, 20 June 1989.

106. Brenda Lipson, 6 November 2014.
107. Robert Millward, 5 March 2015.
108. SCHC, *Report for Information: Cockroaches on Housing Estates* (6 January 1988), Box 780, Folder 1/88–4/88.
109. Baxter, 5 March 2015. A particularly intractable infestation in Chiltern block in the summer of 1990 saw a court order served on the council to remove it. See: SCHC, *Chiltern, Bradenham, Aylesbury Estate: Improvement to above ground services, asbestos removal and cockroach eradication* (13 June 1990), Box B18, Folder 5/90–11/90.
110. SCHC, *Estate Cleaners* (20 March 1991), Box 20,286,699, Folder 2/91–5/91.
111. SS, November 1986
112. SS, November 1986; WI, November 1986.
113. Read, 5 June 2015.
114. SCHC, *Aylesbury Estate—Laundry Charges* (4 July 1989), Box 20,286,682, Folder 5/89–11/89.
115. WI, November 1986.
116. WI, March 1986. Ritchie said: ‘I always remember once a survey was done on naming your local councillor, and the one who came out on top was John O’Brien ... everywhere was John O’Brien, you know, 15 per cent of the population thought he was leader of the council.’ Ritchie, 17 February 2015.
117. Goss, *Local Labour*, 102.
118. Alex Jarosy, 20 January 2015. See also: Goss, *Local Labour*, 93–4.
119. Carter, ‘Building the Divided City’, 181.
120. WI, March 1986.
121. Where elderly patients were routinely assaulted and abused by staff as councillors and union leaders drank together at a bar in the same building. Allegations of mistreatment and misbehaviour surfaced as early as 1979, but an enquiry was not established until the election of the new council in 1986. See: Stewart Lansley, Sue Goss, Christian Wolmar, *Councils in Conflict: The Rise and Fall of the Municipal Left* (London: Macmillan Education, 1989), 108; Carter, ‘Building the Divided City’, 175.
122. Goss, *Local Labour*, 150.
123. Cynthia Cockburn, *The Local State: Management of Cities and People* (London: Pluto Press, 1977), 82.
124. Sue Goss quoted in SS, October 1982.
125. Aubyn Graham, 4 March 2015.
126. Southwark Council, *Southwark Can Deliver*, 1989, London Screen Archive, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2SKAtF-FTi4>, (accessed 6 February 2017).

127. Jeremy Fraser, 12 May 2015.
128. Jeremy Fraser, 12 May 2015.
129. Southwark Council General Purpose and Finance Committee, *Public Opinion in Southwark—The MORI Report* (1 October 1980), Box 633, Folder 5/80–10/80.
130. Southwark Council, *Public Opinion in Southwark*, (1 October 1980).
131. In step with wider international trends, and following the lead taken by Walsall's housing service in 1980, roughly 40 Labour-run local authorities throughout the country explored decentralisation as a means of improving service provision and empowering local people. See: Lansley, Goss, Wolmar, *Councils in Conflict*, 98–104; Jane Wills, *Locating Localism: Statecraft, Citizenship and Democracy*, (Bristol, Policy Press, 2016), 65–6.
132. SCHC, *Alternative Decentralisation Proposals* (6 September 1989), Box 639, Folder 5/89–11/89.
133. SS, 22 February 1991. The idea of the tenant as a 'customer' or 'consumer' began to infiltrate local authority thinking in the 1980s. Borrowed from the Right, it belonged to a language and ethos of individualism, and of local government presenting itself as more market orientated and user friendly. 'Tenants as consumers or clients should have more control of the services they receive,' said Chair of Southwark's Housing Committee, Mark Howarth, in 1991. See: *Southwark Sparrow*, 22 February 1991. For a wider discussion around the consumerist model, see: Liz Cairncross, David Clapham and Robina Goodlad, *Housing Management, Consumers and Citizens*, (London: Routledge, 1997).
134. On the Aylesbury, Housing Manager Harry Marshall and his team were based in the Taplow Neighbourhood Office—a repurposed garage on Merrow Walk. See: SS, 22 February, 1991.
135. SCHC, *Balancing the Housing Revenue Account* (16 September 1992), Box 20,286,686, Folder 5/92–11/92.
136. Cris Claridge, 5 March 2015.
137. SCHC, *Community Participation Structures* (5 September 1990), Box B18, Folder 5/90–11/90.
138. Ian Ritchie, 5 March 2015; Pemberton, 15 July 2015; Synnuck, 17 December 2014.
139. Pemberton, 15 July 2015.
140. Ritchie, 5 March 2015
141. SS, 22 February 1991.
142. In August 1992, for example, the Taplow Neighbourhood Forum (which encompassed the Aylesbury), vented its disapproval of a forthcoming rent rise by registering a 'lack of confidence in the Director of Housing.' The

- rent was duly raised. See: SCHC, *Balancing the Housing Revenue Account* (16 September 1992).
143. Tony Taitte, 16 October 2014.
  144. Taitte, 16 October 2014.
  145. Linda Edwards, 7 October 2014.
  146. Edwards, 7 October 2014.
  147. Florence Essien, 19 November 2014.
  148. Julia Lindmeyer, 'My Memories of Life on the Aylesbury Estate, 1970–2011', (Unpublished Memoir, 2015).
  149. Derek Way, 23 October 2014.
  150. SS, March 1986.
  151. Cockburn, *The Local State*, 72–3.
  152. Ritchie, 17 February 2015.
  153. SS, September 1987.
  154. WI, March 1983.
  155. WI, October 1983.
  156. Pemberton, 15 July 2015.
  157. SS, January 1986.
  158. Synnuck, 17 December 2014.
  159. Bonnie Royal, 26 February 2015; Sue Herrod, 10 August 2015; *The Telegraph*, 30 November 2005.
  160. Brown, 1 June 2015. The council sought to collude with tenants on the matter by establishing an 'Empty Property Hotline' service in March 1987: 'We hope ... the council and tenants can act together to help solve this problem.' Southwark Council, 'Empty Property "Hotline" Service Launched,' News Release, 16 March 1987.
  161. Emily Robinson, Camilla Schofield, Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, Natalie Thomlinson, 'Telling Stories about Post-war Britain: Popular Individualism and the "Crisis" of the 1970s', *Twentieth Century British History*, vol. 28 (2017), 300.
  162. WI, May 1981.
  163. SLP, 20 June 1989.
  164. SS, 16 October 1989; SCHC, *Aylesbury Estate* (6 September 1989).
  165. WI, February 1988; SS, November 1987.
  166. WI, October 1980.
  167. WI, June 1984.
  168. Southwark Council Race Equality Committee, *Final Report on the Pan African Organisation* (22 June 1992), Box 20,285,370, Folder 1992/1993.
  169. Lipson, 6 November 2014.
  170. SCREC, *Aylesbury Cypriot Women's Group* (22 June 1992), Box 20,285,370, Folder 1992/1993.

171. SS, February 1984.
172. WI, October 1980.
173. WI, October 1980.
174. Su Braden, 6 March 2015.
175. WACAT, *Annual Report, 1980*.
176. Tony Dowmunt, 5 January 2015.
177. WI, November 1987.
178. WI, April 1988.
179. WACAT, *Annual Report, 1982* (London: Aylesbury Estate, 1982).
180. WI, October 1987.
181. WACAT, *Annual Report, 1980*; WACAT, *WACAT Annual Report, 1981*, (London: Aylesbury Estate, 1981); WACAT, *WACAT Annual Report, 1983*, (London: Aylesbury Estate, 1983).
182. WACAT, *Annual Report, 1982*.
183. Royal, 26 February 2015.
184. As originally conceived in 1968, the Urban Programme (UP)—also known as Urban Aid—was envisaged as a way of supporting innovative schemes in deprived areas by means of 75 per cent grants from the Exchequer.
185. SS, April 1985.
186. SS, December 1985.
187. WI, April 1984.
188. It is hard to pin down when exactly WACAT and other local initiatives folded (the Aylesbury Crèche was reportedly under threat in 1988)—because the two main organs of community news, the *Walworth Inprint* and the council-run *Southwark Sparrow*, were themselves shut down in 1988 and 1993 respectively. The *Inprint* lost its council grant while the *Sparrow* was sacrificed in the face of ‘huge financial cuts.’ See: WI, February 1988; WI, August 1988; SS, August 1993.
189. Baxter, 5 March 2015; Gainsford, 5 March 2015.
190. SLP, 6 December 1977.
191. *The Guardian*, 15 March 1976.
192. *Evening News*, 3 March 1978.
193. *The Guardian*, 15 March 1976.
194. SLP, 6 December 1977.
195. Carter Street police officer David Biss (between 1965 and 1978) saw no radical spike in crime after 1970. Burglaries were already ‘quite high’, and ‘car crime was quite high because it was so easy to nick a car.’ David Biss, 7 September 2015.
196. SLP, 6 December 1977.
197. *Evening News*, 3 March 1978.
198. Alan Rusbridger, ‘A place in Peckham’, *The Guardian*, 17 February 1988.

199. Rusbridger located the Aylesbury in Peckham (it is in Walworth), and Liddle Ward (Faraday); Rusbridger, 'A place in Peckham', 17 February 1988.
200. Rusbridger, 'A place in Peckham', 17 February 1988.
201. *Today*, BBC Radio 4, 24 April 1983.
202. Stuart Hall, Brian Roberts, John Clarke, Tony Jefferson, Chas Critcher, *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order*, (London: Macmillan, 1978).
203. Tony Samstag, 'Flats where fear has become a way of life in muggers' paradise', *The Times*, 18 January 1983.
204. *The Times*, 18 January 1983.
205. This was no more apparent than during the spring and summer of 1981, when disturbances in Brixton, Handsworth, Chapeltown, and Liverpool 8 (nominally Toxteth) were strip-mined by the media for maximum affect. See: Jacquelin A. Burgess, 'News from Nowhere: The Press, the Riots and the Myth of the Inner City', in Jacquelin A. Burgess and John R. Gold (eds.), *Geography, the Media and Popular Culture*, (London: Croom Helm, 1985), 192–228.
206. *The Times*, 18 January 1983.
207. *Evening Standard*, 8 March 1993. 'This is a landscape of predator and prey,' the story continued, 'where crack dealers are king and fear rules.' The article did not go unnoticed. In a March 1993 edition of the *Southwark Sparrow*, Peckham residents 'hit back ... at "propaganda" painting a grim picture of life in the area.' 'North Peckham has been my home for the last twenty-five years,' said Becky, a 46-year-old laundrette assistant. 'I have no problems living here. You get trouble everywhere in London. It's the unemployment. This is just propaganda, it's disgusting.' Another resident, seemingly unaware of the irony, added: 'This is no Moss Side.'
208. *SLP*, 12 March 1980.
209. Hall, Roberts, Clarke, Jefferson, Critcher, *Policing the Crisis*, 52.
210. Kenneth Newman, 'Policing London, post Scarman', Sir George Bean Memorial Lecture, October 24 1983, cited in David Rose, *A Climate of Fear*, (London: Bloomsbury, 1992), 32.
211. Moore, *Thatcher*, 669.
212. For more on the representation of 'inner city' London, see: Michael Romy, "'London Badlands': The Inner City Represented, Regenerated", *The London Journal*, vol.44 (2019), 133–50.
213. Lindmeyer. 'My Memories'.
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216. SCHC, *Aylesbury NDC Draft Delivery Plan* (8 September 1999).

217. Carol Vincent, 7 October 2014.
218. White, *London in the Twentieth Century*, 283.
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220. Susan J. Smith, 'Social relations, neighbourhood structure, and the fear of crime in Britain' in David Evans and David Herbert, (eds.), *The Geography of Crime*, (London: Routledge, 1989), 193–227.
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228. Southwark Council Civil Liberties and Community Safety Strategy Team, *Community Safety—Towards a Corporate Approach* (6 May 1988), Box 774, Folder 5/88–10/88.
229. SS, 30 May 1988.
230. SS, 7 February 1992; SS, 26 February 1993.
231. SCHC, *Aylesbury NDC Draft Delivery Plan* (8 September 1999).
232. Christian Castle and Phillip Atkinson, *Aylesbury NDC Community Health Profile*, (Southwark: Southwark Primary Care Trust, 2004), 51.
233. Rusbridger, 'A place in Peckham', 17 February 1988.
234. SLP, 6 December 1977.
235. SCHC, *Aylesbury Development—Breaking of Pedway System* (7 November 1979), Box 633, Folder 11/79–3/80.
236. SCHC, *Estate Design and Security* (6 January 1988), Box 780, Folder 1/88–4/88.
237. Of the Aylesbury's walkways she said: 'In the Aylesbury Estate ... a single entrance gives access to no fewer than 2268 dwellings without having to emerge at ground level en route.' Alice Coleman, *Utopia on Trial: Vision and Reality in Planned Housing*, (London: Hilary Shipman, 1985), 35–6.
238. *The Spectator*, 4 July 1987.
239. SLP, 20 May 1994.
240. SLP, 16 January 1996.
241. SLP, 16 January 1996.
242. SLP, 13 December 1996.
243. Keith Harber, personal correspondence with author, 30 September 2015.
244. Millward, 5 March 2015; Baxter, 5 March 2015.
245. Borough Architect's Division, *Aylesbury Development in Use* (Peckham Road: Borough Development Department, 1973), 29; WI, March 1984.

246. Lindmeyer. 'My Memories'.
247. Michelle Porter, 16 February 2015.
248. Essien, 19 November 2014. Essien added that the situation was much improved after 1997 owing to efforts undertaken by the police and council: '[Wardens] came in in 1997. They're really good, yeah, they work with the Faraday police ward, some of the time the police patrol the blocks as well.'
249. Loretta Lees, 'The Urban Injustices of New Labour's "New Urban Renewal": The Case of the Aylesbury Estate in London', *Antipode*, vol. 46 (2014), 925.

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## New Deal? Aylesbury Regenerated, 1997–2010

The Aylesbury community, which is overwhelmingly made up of low-income households should become progressively better-educated, more prosperous, healthier and safer. That there should be a gradual shift from the perception of the Aylesbury as the home of hopelessness and wasted talent, to the perception of the Aylesbury as a place of self-fulfilment and happiness. In short, the Aylesbury should become, and remain, the envy of London.

—*Southwark NDC Delivery Plan, 3 September 1999.*<sup>1</sup>

The above quote, as plastered in bold on the inside cover of Southwark's *Aylesbury Plus: New Deal for Communities* (NDC) plan, was attributed to 'Graham, Resident.' Yet whether or not 'Graham, Resident' and his overdone blurb were creations of the borough council seems an obvious question to ask. Aspirational, tepidly politicised and preoccupied with outward appearances ('the perception of the Aylesbury'; 'the envy of London'), Graham's was the language of groupthink, culled from the Third Way handbook. If guilty, one could almost excuse the council of its small cunning, for this was a heady time in the borough. Cleared of much of the Old Left detritus and seemingly jaded with the dirigisme of state provision, Southwark had pivoted Right, and refashioned itself as a 'model of Blairite enterprise.'<sup>2</sup> Where it previously resisted the speculative creep of market-led redevelopment—exemplified by its tussle with the LDDC in the 1980s<sup>3</sup>—the council now courted such outside investment. 'In Southwark there's now a genuinely metropolitan buzz,' wrote Paul Barker in the *New Statesman* in 1999. 'Capitalist wealth from the City was sucked

across the river. The cavernous wine vaults of Vinopolis recently opened on Clink Street...along from the ANZ Investment Bank and the Minerva House river-view “residences.”<sup>4</sup> Jeremy Fraser, leader of the council between 1993 and 1997, was the man accredited by Barker with changing the outlook of this once ‘stupidest borough in London.’<sup>5</sup> He said:

We had turned Southwark round from being a south London borough that was inward looking to a central London borough with our riverside and everything, the Tate, Globe, Jubilee Line, all those sort of things, being the engine that created the jobs and, you know, just changed the borough really.<sup>6</sup>

But it was more than just Shakespeare and riverside wine bars. The interminable tracts of neglected council housing in the middle of the borough were open for business, too. Southwark’s architects and planners had redrawn Walworth some 30 years earlier. Now, there was a new borough map, and it was ‘ringed and dotted with regeneration schemes, action zones, partnership projects.’<sup>7</sup>

New Labour swept to power in 1997 on a platform of ‘Urban Renaissance.’ In London, the liberalising trajectory of the City was to continue unchecked: the wealthy were only encouraged to get wealthier. But equally, Labour was eager to raise the fortunes of those areas hung out to dry by Thatcherite urban policy. ‘What use a refurbished Leicester Square if we turn away from the problems of the Aylesbury Estate,’ wrote architect and New Labour visionary Richard Rogers in 1992.<sup>8</sup> The thinking ran thus: if London was to achieve true cultural and financial pre-eminence in the world, there could be no estate-shaped blot on its resume; there could be ‘no new London unless these areas are renewed.’<sup>9</sup> But what exactly did ‘renewal’ entail? And what did it mean for the inhabitants of the estates and neighbourhoods earmarked for attention? In December 1997, at the launch of the government’s social exclusion unit (SEU)<sup>10</sup> at Stockwell Park School, Lambeth, Tony Blair adumbrated his vision of the future, in which Britain’s ‘excluded’ communities would rise happy, ‘engaged’ and ‘stronger’ from the mire.<sup>11</sup> Months later, in the autumn of 1998, the SEU announced its area-based, partnership-powered, ‘New Deal for Communities’ (NDC) initiative, to ‘turn around the poorest neighbourhoods.’<sup>12</sup> Initially targeting 17 ‘pathfinder’ areas nationwide—of which the Aylesbury was one—the programme sought to effect ‘holistic’ change in matters of health, crime, housing, education and employment, and thus bring about ‘inclusion’ where ‘exclusion’ held fast. With

community ‘at its heart,’ and through ‘value for money transformation,’ the NDC would ‘close the gaps’ between these worst-off neighbourhoods and the ‘rest of the country.’<sup>13</sup>

Driving this jargonistic rhetoric was what Ruth Levitas described as a moral underclass discourse.<sup>14</sup> This, she argued, pointed to imputed deficiencies in the values and behaviour of those who were supposedly excluded—‘an underclass of people cut off from society’s mainstream, without any sense of shared purpose,’ in Blair’s own words.<sup>15</sup> Invoking language favoured by nineteenth-century moralists (e.g. substitute underclass for ‘residuum’ or ‘undeserving’), it projected blame on the poor for their own situation.<sup>16</sup> It inevitably contained a spatial dimension, too, linking ‘problem people’ to ‘problem places,’ not least of which were the ‘crime-ridden housing estates.’<sup>17</sup> Speaking at the opening of the Centre for the Analysis of Social Exclusion in 1997, MP for Camberwell and Peckham, and then Minister for Social Security, Harriet Harman, waded into this imagery of spatial segregation:

There are some estates in my constituency where: the common currency is the giro; where the black economy involves much more than moonlighting—it involves the twilight world of drugs; and where relentless anti-social behaviour grinds people down... They inhabit a parallel world where: income is derived from benefits, not work; where school is an option not a key opportunity; and where the dominant influence on young people is the culture of the street, not the values that bind families and communities together.<sup>18</sup>

In the span of just a few short years, Harman had gone from defending her Southwark constituents against ‘extremely unfair’ Tory policies to stigmatising them in blanket terms.<sup>19</sup> The notion of a ‘twilight world’ or a ‘parallel world’ drove estates ever further into conceptual relegation and suggested there was something woefully amiss with *all* people living within them. For New Labour, the council estate was an evocative metaphor for what had gone wrong, and a useful, grungy counterpoint to its shining vision of ‘urban renaissance.’<sup>20</sup> In this sense, it was language, not reality, that saw ‘project renewal’ romp inexorably forward; it was language, not reality, that demanded policy interventions, such as that of the NDC. ‘Comfortable Britain... knows the price it pays for economic and social breakdown in the poorest parts of Britain,’ said Tony Blair in 1997. ‘There is a case not just in moral terms but in enlightened self-interest to

act, to tackle what we all know exists.<sup>21</sup> The challenge, then, was to bring about a ‘radical change of culture’<sup>22</sup> in these ‘poorest parts,’ to purge or discipline their undesirable elements, to make them ‘inviting’ and ‘live-able’ once more.<sup>23</sup>

Enter here the concept of ‘mixed and sustainable communities.’ Championed by the Urban Task Force in 1999—‘Whether we are talking about new settlements or expanding the capacity of existing urban areas, a good mix of incomes and tenures is important’<sup>24</sup>—and the SEU a year later—‘communities function best when they contain a broad social mix’<sup>25</sup>—the act of breaking up mono-tenure estates into ‘mixed-income neighbourhoods’ was viewed as a key plank in the process of urban renewal. In 2003, the government launched its ‘sustainable communities plan,’ of which social mixing was a central component. This was followed by its ‘mixed communities initiative,’ which came to the fore in 2005.<sup>26</sup> The implication was blunt: council tenants had to be rescued from themselves, and only a greater, wealthier, middle-class presence would do. For many critics, the notion of ‘mixed and sustainable communities,’ like the notion of renewal generally, was first and foremost a state-led gentrification strategy. Rather than addressing structural inequalities in any meaningful way, it would see estates demolished and council tenants shunted from their homes. It was a ‘*revanchist* form of social engineering,’ in the words of Loretta Lees, ‘the goal being a new moral order of respectable and well behaved (middle-class) residents.’<sup>27</sup>

The gusto with which Southwark took up the task of social mixing was well personified by its Director of Regeneration, Fred Manson. ‘Intelligent,’<sup>28</sup> ‘much admired’<sup>29</sup> and ‘unafraid of challenging convention,’<sup>30</sup> the Michigan-born architect, who had been in the council’s employ since 1986, was looked upon in Southwark as something of straight-shooting, if outspoken, visionary. In a 1999 *Estates Gazette* article entitled, ‘Labour Demolishes Council Housing to Woo Better-Off,’ Manson was startlingly upfront about the borough’s contentious intentions:

We need to have a wider range of people living in the borough and that has been accepted as a principle by the council...[Council housing] generates people on low incomes coming in and that leads to poor school performances, middle-class people stay away. The case is very strong that we need to try to do this for stability.<sup>31</sup>

Undeterred by accusations of ‘social cleansing,’ nor the motion of censure brought against him for these very remarks—they were ‘a slap in the face to residents of Southwark,’ said the council’s Tory members<sup>32</sup>—Manson only leaned harder into his abrasive approach. In comments made to the *New Statesman* that same year, he implied that large swathes of the borough population were not simply problematic, but culturally deficient, too. ‘We have to believe we can change attitudes,’ he said. ‘We’re trying to move people from a benefit-dependency culture to an enterprise culture. If you have 25 to 30 per cent of the population in need, things can still work reasonably well. But above 30 per cent it becomes pathological.’<sup>33</sup> Manson’s analysis was inescapably joined up with the proportion of socially rented homes in the borough—60 per cent of the total stock at this time, of which 50 per cent was council housing. Despite evidence (and good sense) to the contrary, Southwark was suggesting that its estates were filled, almost exclusively, with deviant, apathetic and ‘pathologically’ dependent people. It was imperative, said Fraser, that at least some of them go:

Well it’s not workable, it’s not workable if it doesn’t have a societal mix. That was the problem...on the Aylesbury. If doctors and nurses could live on the Aylesbury then...you just get a different societal mix. But when it’s only people who are, well, huge chunks of groups who are unemployed...what are you doing? It didn’t feel like it was an area, it wouldn’t feel like an area that you’d want to grow your kids up in.<sup>34</sup>

It was a proposition advanced not just by Southwark, but by Labour councils across London. In Newham, for example, head of housing policy, Bob Young, said this in 1999: ‘What we have is a concentration of benefit-dependent people in the area. Social housing attracts people that are challenged economically who can’t support local shops and services. We don’t want to see any more social rented housing.’<sup>35</sup> The thrust of local authority housing provision had curdled in a way perhaps few envisaged. Southwark, for one, turned its back on the egalitarian principles that saw Aylesbury rise in the first place. In accordance with government policy, it embraced exclusionary market processes—and more, it compounded media hysterics over ‘scary’<sup>36</sup> estates with its own generalities and moral distinctions. This was a period in London in which the dispossession of council housing was enacted and worked through. The Aylesbury was in line to be pumped and primed, ready for erasure.

## THINGS CAN ONLY GET BETTER

The Aylesbury has received more than its fair share of notable visitors. In March 1986, Prince Charles and a retinue of architects and academics, including Alice Coleman, stole into the estate in a ‘battered orange minibus hired from a left-wing community group.’<sup>37</sup> In 1999, it was the turn of his son, Prince William, who, accompanied by a batch of his Eton classmates, was bussed in ‘to see how the other “arf live.”’<sup>38</sup> If there was a touch of ‘ghetto tourism’ to these royal visits, then the heavy hand of political point-scoring was clearly visible whenever a leader of the opposition came through: Neil Kinnock, Michael Howard, David Cameron and Ed Miliband all found time to stop in and look aghast for the cameras.<sup>39</sup> By far the most famous visit of all, however, was that of Tony Blair, on 2 June 1997. ‘Bronzed and beaming’ and just elected, he delivered his maiden speech as prime minister on the estate, in an IT training centre in Wendover block.<sup>40</sup> He was later photographed smiling and waving to a modest crowd of ‘around 85’ from an external staircase especially ‘perfumed’ for the occasion (Fig. 5.1).<sup>41</sup>

Much has been made of this now ‘infamous’ visit.<sup>42</sup> Ben Campkin and Loretta Lees in particular have dissected the ways in which Blair and his team exploited the Aylesbury on this day for political effect. The monotonous blocks and rugged concrete were calculatedly used to ‘encapsulate ruined Britain at the end of an era of Conservative government, and to place in those ruins a vision of future “regeneration.”’<sup>43</sup> So too were the inhabitants of the estate seized upon to represent a ‘spatially concentrated, dysfunctional underclass.’<sup>44</sup> The immediate recipients of Blair’s grin and glad-handing were in this regard also its unwitting victims: by sheer dint of their residency, Aylesbury tenants, as a proxy for council tenants across Britain, were tarred and feathered with an imagery of shame:

I have chosen this housing estate to deliver my first speech as prime minister for a very simple reason. For eighteen years, the poorest people in our country have been forgotten by government. They have been left out of growing prosperity, told that they were not needed, ignored by the government except for the purpose of blaming them...Behind the statistics lie households where three generations have never had a job...There are estates where the biggest employer is the drugs industry, where all that is left of the high hopes of the post-war planners is derelict concrete.<sup>45</sup>



**Fig. 5.1** Tony Blair, accompanied by PC Keith Holland, waves to a modest crowd, 1997. (Courtesy of PA Images.)

The Aylesbury's past, Blair posited, was lamentable, valueless, worthy only of being scrubbed: all that counted now was the 'desperate need for urban regeneration.'<sup>46</sup> Fraser, who was present on the day, maintained that the 'heart of [the speech] was right,' but saw how: 'some of the language was probably ill-advised...probably six months later he wouldn't have made that kind of speech.'<sup>47</sup> He also suggested that the Aylesbury was chosen as a backdrop for logistical reasons as much as it was for its 'run-down'<sup>48</sup> furnishings: 'How far down out of central London would you go before you hit an estate that people generally were saying was not good, that you could bring the cameras onto, do you know what I mean? How far would journos travel?'<sup>49</sup> The merry-go-round of visiting politicians and the ensuing rash of media attention thrust the estate (and its residents) onto a platform for all to see. It became an unwitting symbol of urban renewal from Blair's visit onwards and a de facto yardstick against which the failures and successes of regeneration policy were measured. And to

think that much of this—the exposure, the import, the notoriety—was a simple corollary of its proximity to Westminster.

The Aylesbury was awarded NDC status on 25 January 1999, securing £56.2 m of government funding as a result. This, the fourth largest payout under the pilot scheme,<sup>50</sup> was to be divvied up over a ten-year period on a programme of ‘physical renewal’ (£36 m) and ‘social interventions’ (£20 m).<sup>51</sup> Both the grant and the improvements wrought were envisaged as the groundwork in a metamorphic, two-step, £234 m regeneration scheme. The first goal was to transfer all 2400 homes on the estate out of council ownership and into the hands of a ‘community-based housing association’—at this stage the Faraday Housing Association, a specially created subsidiary of the Horizon Housing Group (formerly the South London Family Housing Association).<sup>52</sup> The second was to oversee a ‘comprehensive demolition/redevelopment programme for all the system built blocks’—only the brick-built Faraday, Arklow and Gaitskell Houses would be spared.<sup>53</sup> On top of NDC money, the £256 m outlay would be furnished through bank loans, funds from the housing maintenance programme, an anticipated £8 m Housing Corporation grant and an £8 m commitment from Horizon. Significant financing (as much as £50 m) was also expected from the private sale of between 1000 and 1500 Faraday-built homes, including—in a plan drawn up by the award-winning architect of the nearby Peckham Library, Will Alsop—a 30-storey tower block (a totem, perhaps, to the transformative power of capital). Densities would rise accordingly, as would the proportion of the much-coveted middle classes.<sup>54</sup>

This was not the first attempt at regenerating an estate in Southwark. Nor was it the first attempt at regenerating the Aylesbury. In 1995, a voluntary organisation known as the Walworth Triangle Forum sought and failed to secure government funding for various renewal projects in Walworth, including on the Aylesbury. The Forum had applied, specifically, to the newly set-up (1994) single regeneration budget (SRB). In many ways a precursor to the NDC, the SRB was predicated on leveraging in outside investment through ‘local partnerships,’ with housing associations, private developers and other interested parties.<sup>55</sup> That same year, a Southwark-led consortium called the Peckham Partnership won a £60 m SRB bid for the regeneration of the Five Estates (a titular grouping of Sumner, North Peckham, Gloucester Grove, Willowbrook, and Camden estates). Ten years and £290 m later, the project ended up as one of the largest, and, in some estimates, one of the most successful regeneration

schemes to that point—it was hailed as a ‘shining example’ by the then Deputy Prime Minister, John Prescott, in 2000.<sup>56</sup> Naturally, a large swathe of council stock was relinquished in the process—some 2160 homes—so as to ‘unlock the potential for private investment.’<sup>57</sup>

With Five Estates up and running, attention turned to the Aylesbury once more. In 1997, the Aylesbury Plus initiative, spearheaded by the Aylesbury Plus Community Forum (APCF)—a group of tenants, leaseholders, councillors, council officers, police and representatives from several voluntary organisations, including St Peter’s Church and the Walworth Triangle—was created as a means of exploring regeneration. It put in for £50.8 m of Estate Renewal Challenge Fund (ERCF) money in August 1997, and a relatively modest—due to significant cuts in the programme—£4.9 m SRB grant a month later: the ERCF application was declined, but the smaller bid was successful.<sup>58</sup> The majority of the funding was initially set aside for education and skills training (£1,585,600), health schemes (£495,000), and the removal of walkways (£1,760,000). Once the NDC was green-lit in 1999, however, priorities shifted, and the six-year programme was recast to ‘ensure full complementary and added value’: there was little use in demolishing the walkways when the blocks they were attached to were now scheduled to come down.<sup>59</sup>

It was imperative to Southwark that its efforts at regenerating the Aylesbury were seen and understood as ‘community led.’ From the mid-1990s until the stock transfer ballot in 2001 (more on this later), the estate was awl with newsletters, questionnaires, interviews, open days, ballots, public meetings, individual block meetings and surveys. In October 1997, an ‘Aylesbury Plus Information Bus’ did thrice-weekly rounds of the estate, while in May 1999, the APCF put on a series of ‘Have Your Say Days.’<sup>60</sup> ‘A key element of the [regeneration],’ said the council, ‘is partnership with the local community.’<sup>61</sup> Clearly, there was inherent rhetorical value to such a ‘bottom up’ approach. But the strategic utility of ‘community partnership’ did stretch somewhat further. Consultation with tenants generated data from which issues were defined and outcomes prioritised: a 1999 MORI survey on the issue of work and training, for instance, identified reasons for the 16 per cent unemployment rate on the estate (a shortage of affordable childcare, health problems, a lack of skills), and thus precipitated actions needed to address them.<sup>62</sup> But consultation also tended to affirm pivotal decisions that went beyond the control or even consideration of residents. In the council’s mind, regeneration was always going to culminate in demolition, and of this—given

subsequent events—there seemed to be no question. Tenant opinion could, and did, influence timings and affect change on the ground, but only ever in the context of centrally defined limits and restricted choices. Fed through the channels of Southwark's own choosing, rarely did tenant feedback misalign with overarching attitudes and top-down assumptions. 'Even when funds are set aside for urban renewal study,' wrote Jane Jacobs in 1958, 'the study almost invariably begins with standardized preconceptions about what is wrong and what will be a desirable result, and takes off from there.'<sup>63</sup> SGT0's Cris Claridge said of the council's consultative processes: 'They only hear the bits that fit into their own way of thinking.'<sup>64</sup>

At least one study, though, was less easy to reconcile. In 1999, Southwark commissioned the consultants Lemos & Crane to carry out a 'mutual aid survey' on the estate, to identify the extent of help and support between residents. The results, said APCF member, Giles Goddard, were 'surprising.'<sup>65</sup> Ninety per cent of residents knew and helped their neighbours; 81 per cent had received help or support from a neighbour; 20 per cent gave or received help from a relative also living on the estate; 35 per cent had friends or relatives nearby; and 75 per cent were in 'some sort of regular, routine, informal helping relationship.'<sup>66</sup> It further showed that nearly half of residents had lived on the estate for more than ten years; 18 per cent were involved with their TA, 18 per cent attended a place of worship locally and 63 per cent wanted to return to the Aylesbury after it had been redeveloped. The study also counted 26 community-based organisations operating in and around the estate.<sup>67</sup> It was an illuminating and inspiring snapshot of community life, coming just as the council was preparing to wind the estate down. Interestingly, the NDC Delivery Plan had comparatively little to say about the report, dwelling instead on matters of 'isolation' and 'disunity.'<sup>68</sup> Goddard, who was the rector at neighbouring St Peter's Church at the time of the survey, wrote of its findings in his 2008 book, *Space for Grace*:

The Aylesbury did not conform to the stereotype of a run-down, inner-city estate. While for some people the sense of isolation was strong, there also existed a diverse, confident and supportive community, unsung and unacknowledged. A community that had not had the chance to raise its head above the parapet; it had been characterised by struggle rather than success, by crime instead of creativity.<sup>69</sup>

Goddard worked extensively on the Aylesbury, both in his capacity at St Peter's and as a member of the NDC partnership board—a partially tenant-led body set-up by the APCF in 2000 to oversee the regeneration. Arriving in Walworth in 1998, it quickly became apparent to Goddard that the Aylesbury's problems were largely skin-deep:

It was quite clear as soon as we got to know the Aylesbury that even though it didn't look great, behind the doors there was a lot of really good stuff going on...I actually didn't come across anything anti-social in all my time there, but I used to talk to people who lived on Liverpool Grove and they'd say, 'Oh yes, of course Aylesbury is the gun capital of south London,' and I'd say, 'Well, no, it's not actually, you know, it just isn't, it doesn't happen'...<sup>70</sup>

There were residents who felt the same way. Enoch Offe Baffour was seven when he moved onto Wolverton block with his mother, sister, and twin brother, from nearby Marcia Road. It was 1997, not long after Blair had delivered his damning oratory. He said:

in terms of growing up, it was quite a pleasant one. Definitely the friends I made in the area, obviously the whole environment in terms of the multicultural aspect of the estate, much more than Marcia Road...the neighbours were much more friendly...if you're out and about and you look a bit lost or you fall and you graze your knee there's always someone that comes and picks you up, you know, 'Are you alright?' that sort of stuff. So yeah, very, very good upbringing in the estate.<sup>71</sup>

As a newcomer to the Aylesbury, Baffour was less acquainted with the notorious reputation many long-term tenants were wearingly familiar with:

It was only when I started going to college outside from the area and I would tell people that I lived on the Aylesbury, that I realised how it was perceived. People would have this intake of breath and ask if it was a rough place to live, but I never saw anything like that. The perception of this estate is nothing like the reality.<sup>72</sup>

Damion Brown was 17 when Blair visited the Aylesbury. He also believed the estate had been miscast:

*Interviewer:* Did you recognise the estate Blair was describing?

*Damion Brown:* No, no, that was never the case. It was the case for some families on the estate, but not many, not many, not as many as he was making out. It was never a place of hopelessness, there's so much good that has come out of the estate, so many success stories.<sup>73</sup>

### ‘SOFT’ SUCCESSES

If its reputation seemed confected to some and unrecognisable to others—Baffour and Brown among them—the broad fact remained that change on the Aylesbury was not inessential:

I'm not saying it was perfect, of course it had its trouble... I mean of course there was trouble because turnover was relatively high, you know, of course you occasionally have people who are quite troublesome.<sup>74</sup>

At 7.3 per cent, turnover in 1999 was in fact not remarkably high<sup>75</sup>—5 per cent was deemed quite an ordinary rate of movement, and one that sustained a mean length of tenancy of around 20 years.<sup>76</sup> But other indices revealed a less orderly picture. Of the 16 per cent unemployed on the estate at this time, 48 per cent had been out of work for over ten years. Educational attainment was flagging—just 20 per cent of Aylesbury school children achieved five Cs or above compared to 46 per cent nationally. Health-wise, women on the estate were twice as likely to suffer from heart disease, while the mortality rate for respiratory diseases among men under 75 was double the national average. Fear of crime was second-highest among all NDC areas, even if actual crime rates fell outside the top ten.

Health, education, community, employment and crime: these, then, were the ‘soft’ issues with which the NDC was tasked.<sup>77</sup> Working groups were appointed, priorities were drawn-up and significant amounts of money were spent. As we shall see, the outcomes were often encouraging, and in some cases transformative, but it seems instructive to remember here that the Aylesbury was in a significant funding hole to begin with. It stands to reason that the patient would improve with the proper course of medicine.

Educational improvements were widely cited as the programme's major achievement.<sup>78</sup> By 2004, a total of £650,000 had been spent in this area—on learning support assistants in local schools (£135,000 in 2003–2004), on transition support for primary to secondary (£70,000), on a nursery at St Peter's (£42,000 between 2000 and 2003), among others.<sup>79</sup> In 2005,

it contributed £600,000 to a Sure Start nursery, and, in 2006, £1.9 m to the Aylesbury Learning Centre. It was here that a then unemployed Florence Essien completed her computer literacy qualification:

NDC made it available on the estate for free. I was going to university at the same time. I used to go to there in the morning and go to my masters in the evening, so I wasn't working, I'd lost my job at that time so I took both of them on, and I passed. So computer literacy...that helped, especially for people my age, it really helped, they knew how to do job search online and fill out application online, so that helped, that brought down unemployment on the estate as well.<sup>80</sup>

GCSE results rose. By 2008, 68 per cent of Aylesbury pupils received at least five grade Cs, just below the national average.<sup>81</sup> (Michael Faraday Primary School was rebuilt—and reopened in 2010—with £12 m from Southwark's Primary Capital Programme.) Elsewhere, the NDC ploughed £210,000 into better lighting and paid £125,000 in 2003–2004 for the hire of seven community wardens (increasing to 12 a year later). Kickstart, a youth intervention programme that began life in 1997 as an after-school club on the nearby Rockingham Estate, worked extensively on the Aylesbury, and, from 2000, in tandem with Positive Futures, a crime-diversion project funded by the Home Office. Soye Briggs managed Kickstart between 2002 and 2007:

We were running programmes every day of the week...some of them were youth clubs, some of them were educational...we were running employment and training groups, we were running sports based sessions...we were doing one-to-one work, direct one-to-one counselling with young people, we were doing home visits to families, fun days, a lot of work in the school across the way.<sup>82</sup>

Similar work was undertaken by Active Communities when it succeeded Kickstart in 2007. High on its agenda was recruiting into its ranks young people from the estate, like Damion Brown, for instance, who took up with Kickstart as a project coordinator, and with Active Communities as a sports coach.<sup>83</sup> Seemingly overnight, then, 'gangs'<sup>84</sup> of 'bored'<sup>85</sup> teenagers, 'hanging around the streets',<sup>86</sup> 'their presence enough to make many residents feel unsafe',<sup>87</sup> had at their disposal all manner of diversions. As the *Southwark News* put it: 'Intimidating grannies with fire-crackers suddenly seems a whole lot less attractive when you could be learning how

to break-dance, put on a fashion show or get involved with sport or music.’<sup>88</sup> The effects, both of the youth work and the money invested in lighting and safety, were readily apparent: a 2007 MORI survey revealed a sharp reduction in the number of residents who considered teenagers ‘hanging around on the estate to be a problem’—from 56 per cent in 1999 to just 21 per cent. Meanwhile, fear of crime on the estate fell from 51 per cent to 23 per cent; and there was a 22 per cent drop in tenants who felt ‘drug use and drug dealing was a serious problem.’<sup>89</sup>

As already noted, the NDC granted the Aylesbury little in the way of immediate physical improvements. And with demolition stalled in 2001 (see below), the lack of tangible change may have appeared interminable to some. ‘I never hear about the NDC or see anything they do,’ said resident and Hour Glass barmaid, Tina Wade, in 2004.<sup>90</sup> The playground adjacent to Missenden was spruced up to the tune of £200,000, space was made for a community garden,<sup>91</sup> and a semi-derelict, half-forgotten crypt at St Peter’s (a soup kitchen, air raid shelter and social club, in previous incarnations) was brought back to life as a community space and café, to be known as InSpire.<sup>92</sup> But awareness was certainly an issue—as of 2002, some 44 per cent of Aylesbury residents knew next to nothing about the NDC or its projects compared to 65 per cent in NDC areas elsewhere.<sup>93</sup> Naturally, there were those too who viewed the regeneration—protracted at ten years—as something nebulous, peripheral to their daily lives: ‘When they actually started I wasn’t even paying attention. I mean letters kept coming through the door and I never paid attention to them.’<sup>94</sup> Jean Bartlett, who was both chair of the APCF and an NDC board member, said: ‘Out of 10,000 people on the estate, only 40 are involved. People are only interested in what is going to happen to their homes and until they see something going on, they are not going to take notice.’<sup>95</sup>

Bartlett’s analysis raises into question the extent to which the NDC board—framed, of course, as ‘a broad and representative set of local stakeholders’<sup>96</sup>—was indeed representative. Much like the TAs or the Tenants’ Council before it, the board could well have been accused of being a narrow band of enthusiasts, limited in age, number and ethnicity. There were, in fact, just 12 tenant members when first comprised, and every one of them was drawn from the estate’s four TAs.<sup>97</sup> Tony Taitte, a Thurlow Lodge representative, said he was one of the few black residents to participate:

*Tony Taitte:* At that time there was no black people getting involved at all. I was the only one as a black person that actually went there and joined up.

*Interviewer:* On the whole estate?

*Tony Taitte:* On the whole estate. The only people here—there was a black woman’s group that was based round the corner there and with their help, right, I was the only black person, man, woman or child...after that, just one or two black people got involved in the whole regeneration, and that’s it...black people’s never encouraged, or empowered, right, to get along, to do such things. There’s another side to it as well that people are working, right.<sup>98</sup>

The residents who *were* involved were apt to feel overworked and underappreciated, particularly in the crucial formative stages (‘Jean Bartlett, chair of the Aylesbury Plus Community Forum, says she has had meetings almost every night for the past six weeks...She says that, although she had gained lots of experience, she is “stressed out”’).<sup>99</sup> Pigeonholed as overwhelmingly pro-regeneration, members, too, were considered patsies by some, co-opted by Southwark to do its dirty bidding, and kept sweet with community awards, audiences with Tony Blair and senior councillors, and invitations to fancy corporate events.<sup>100</sup> And again, like representatives on the Tenants’ Council, participating residents were sometimes ill-equipped for the board’s not inconsiderable pressures and bureaucratic demands. Goddard said:

The board was, you know, at times it was completely dysfunctional, and we had some not very helpful people as directors, but there were other times when it worked quite well. You kind of expect those kind of boards to be difficult because you have people who haven’t necessarily got experience of being on them, and there’s high expectations about money being available and that kind of thing.<sup>101</sup>

To be sure, mixed in with the successes were stumbling blocks aplenty—and none so big as that which occurred at the stock transfer ballot in December 2001.

## DISPOSSESSION DEFERRED

In 1985, housing associations accounted for just 13 per cent of the nation's social housing stock. Municipalities owned the rest. By 2007, the number had swelled to half; by 2012, it had leapt ahead: 2.4 m homes versus 1.7 m that remained in council hands. Stock transfer was the instrument that made this shift possible. Legislated for in the 1985 Housing Act, the first wave of stock transfers began in earnest in 1988 (there were just a few minor-scale antecedents), in predominantly rural, predominantly Conservative districts. Chiltern, aptly, was the first council to shed its stock—all 4650 of its homes.<sup>102</sup> The process only accelerated after 1997, but with an added urban dimension: in London, there were 52 large-scale stock transfers until 2007, and all but one (Bromley, in 1992) took place under New Labour.<sup>103</sup> Finance was the pretext: council estates could only be improved through transfer out of the public sector, went the argument. Borrowing for improvements, on the other hand, was ruled out of the question.<sup>104</sup> Of course, there was no necessary link between investment and stock transfer. It was simply an artifice; a smokescreen for wider intentions. Peter Malpass said: 'The loss of the local authority role was not a sacrifice from the point of view of the government—it was the point of the exercise, and finance for investment was merely a device for driving this through.'<sup>105</sup>

Built-in to stock transfer were two significant peculiarities. First, that local councils themselves had to initiate the process. Second, that progress was contingent upon a positive tenant ballot—a clause, as James Meek pointed out, 'grudgingly added after parliamentary pressure.'<sup>106</sup> What materialised, then, was a situation in which councils were exhorted by government to dump their estates and tenants, and tenants were exhorted by councils to vote in favour of being dumped: "Yes" campaigns got public money; "no" campaigns didn't. It was made clear to tenants that a "yes" vote would result in money being made quickly to renovate their homes, while a "no" vote would put refurbishment in doubt.<sup>107</sup> That the game was rigged was plain to see. But the results were often surprising. Nationally, a quarter of transfer ballots were rejected by tenants, while in London the rate was a third—Aylesbury, emphatically, included.<sup>108</sup>

It was supposed to be easy: a straightforward transfer of stock, welcomed—and instituted—by long-suffering residents' eager for something better. Instead, following a hard-fought and often acrimonious battle, Aylesbury tenants voted, resoundingly, to stay with the borough council: 73 per cent voted 'no' to the proposed transfer on a 75.8 per cent turnout

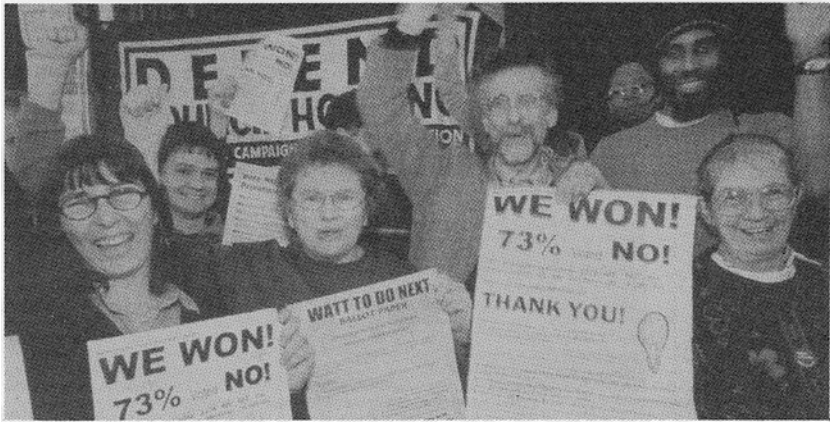


Fig. 5.2 Tenants and campaigners celebrate the stock transfer ballot result, 2001. (Courtesy of Aysen Dennis.)

(Fig. 5.2). It is hard to gauge how far the decision spoke to the loyalty and general satisfaction residents felt towards the estate. Apparent, though, was that the scheme—marked by a significant increase in housing density, the potential loss of gardens and open space, and an ever-spiralling price tag—left tenants wholly unconvinced. Many of their fears were affirmed by Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE), the architectural watchdog, whose report on the proposal found it ‘rushed’ and ill-communicated: ‘There is a real risk that residents have been shown designs for buildings that do not sufficiently relate to the masterplan...the impact of high-density has not been sufficiently analysed and taken into account.’<sup>109</sup> Even man behind the plan, Will Alsop, was unhappy with aspects of the scheme. He said: ‘You do not need to knock the buildings down. Some of the blocks are OK—they are good concrete frames...If you added a lot more glass, a few more funny extensions and vary the rooflines a bit a lot of people would be very happy to live in the flats.’ Alsop later claimed that his hands had been tied by Horizon.<sup>110</sup>

It was the ghoulish spectre of privatisation, however, that really struck at the heart of resident uncertainty. Tenants were worried about rising rents, and diminishing flat sizes.<sup>111</sup> They were worried about gentrification (‘The council used to represent the interests of council tenants. Now it’s only interested in bringing the rich in’), and the number of unaffordable

flats for sale.<sup>112</sup> They were worried about the council's motives and about developer profiteering. But most of all they were worried about losing their homes. The prospect of being evicted and never being allowed back did not sit well with many tenants. Goddard said: 'There were lots of questions...people kept saying "I want to know where I am going to go," and we said "well we can't tell you that yet," and they said "in that case we're not going to vote for you", so.'<sup>113</sup> Anti-regeneration campaigners, including those from the Southwark branch of Defend Council Housing, did well to communicate the plan's faults, and to stoke tenant's fears. But it was a home-grown action group, Working Against Tenant Transfer (WATT), that did most to ruffle feathers. Wendover resident, Aysen Dennis, served as the group's chair (Fig. 5.3):

We were endlessly discussing, putting the leaflet out, fly-posting, and then the door-knocking, you know...All the information we gather, we just put it to the tenants, because everything the council was doing, you know, behind closed doors, and the many things they were not explaining to people—and some people English is not their first language, and they don't know what it

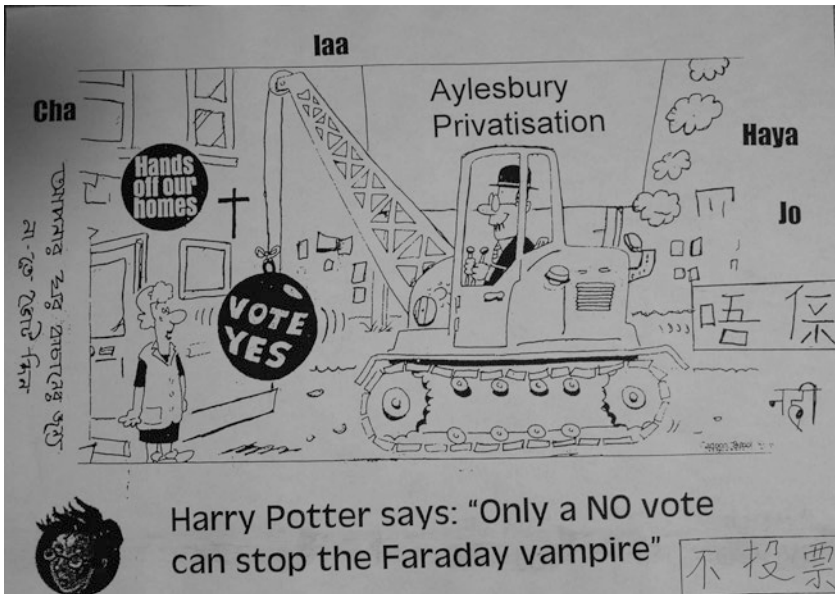


Fig. 5.3 WATT anti-transfer poster, c.2001. (Courtesy of Aysen Dennis.)

means—and we knock every single door, you know, if it's Turkish people I explain in Turkish, if it's Spanish, Victoria, you know, we kind of get all information to tenants and in a way empower our community to make their own decision.<sup>114</sup>


It was, by many accounts, a 'horrid' campaign, fraught with acrimony.<sup>115</sup> The council were accused of spreading 'blatant and big' lies, while the 'doctrinaire' anti-regeneration camp was accused in turn of intimidating tenants.<sup>116</sup> But for Goddard, at least, the tenor of the campaign was of no great consequence: 'It wasn't positive, but I don't know, I don't think that was the reason the vote didn't go through, I think it was more about tenants and security and what would happen to them.'<sup>117</sup>

Piers Corbyn, who fought against the stock transfer, and later stood for election in Faraday ward on an anti-transfer ticket (see Fig. 5.4), labelled the vote a 'big blow to the gentrification of Southwark.'<sup>118</sup> It was unquestionably a significant setback for the council, and, considering it had hoisted the Aylesbury atop a public platform, one that left the government red-faced. Yet politicised as the regeneration was, it is perhaps not surprising that the celebrations proved short-lived:

Even on the ballot day, when all the votes were counted...one of the person come from NDC, I don't remember his name but he was kind of a fat cat type, he said to me: 'If you think you win, we are coming back.' I mean, I was so excited, we win the campaign, but later on I realised what he meant...we knew that they are not going to give up...I mean, basically, they already made the decision.<sup>119</sup>

Tenants were correct to be sceptical. Just months after the vote, Nicholas Taylor, who headed up Southwark Land Regeneration—the council's partner in development—said he 'still intends to press on with a transfer to the private sector.' He further implied that 73 per cent of residents did not fully grasp what they had voted for: 'The message that comes out of Aylesbury is you have to allow enough time for people to understand what's being offered.'<sup>120</sup> This was top-down thinking at its rawest and exposed the concepts of a 'community partnership' or 'a community-led redevelopment' for the gesture politics that they were. For Taylor, and many at Southwark, the realistic prospect of keeping the estate in council hands did not enter their computations.<sup>121</sup>

**COUNCIL ELECTIONS 2002**  
**Faraday Ward**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> MAY**



**VOTE**

<b>Piers CORBYN</b>	Tenant Aylesbury Plus Area	<b>X</b>
<b>Margot LINDSAY</b>	Aylesbury Estate Faraday Ward	<b>X</b>
<b>Theresa WILLIAMSON</b>	Aylesbury Estate Faraday Ward	<b>X</b>

**WATT!**  
**A MESSAGE**

**Working Against Tenancy Transfers & Privatisations!**

Printed by Tom Maguire Southwark, Working Against Tenancy Transfers & Privatisations c/o 359 Wandsworth, Thadlow St SE17. Printed by Wardsman (TU) 4 Forster Rd, N17  
Not For Hyposting.

Fig. 5.4 WATT election poster, 2002. (Courtesy of Aysen Dennis.)

To be sure, following a period of wound-licking and reflection, during which time stock retention and refurbishment were brokered as an alternative—an alternative favoured to this day by many on the estate—fresh plans for demolition were tabled in September 2005. No tenant input was sought this go around.<sup>122</sup> The exorbitant cost of improvements—between £315 m and £350 m for ‘full and effective refurbishment,’ by Southwark’s reckoning—was presented as the crux of the argument, and one disputed by campaigners and experts alike.<sup>123</sup> The system-built blocks, meanwhile, were deemed by the council to be nearing the end of their ‘anticipated life expectancy’ and ‘may expect to be demolished within say 20 years in any event.’ (Never mind that this failed to explain why the red-brick buildings were also schemed for demolition, nor why, in 2015, Southwark’s in-house architect, Catherine Bates, said the ‘condition of the buildings does not itself present a case for demolition and redevelopment.’)<sup>124</sup> As well as stock handover to an as yet unidentified housing association, Southwark envisaged an even greater preponderance of private units for sale than the binned 2001 proposal—approximately 2700 homes, up from the previous figure of 1500. And at 2200, the proposed number of housing association units fell more than 500 short of the number of existing flats.<sup>125</sup>

Residents viewed this reheated plan with outrage. It was, in plenty of people’s minds, a flagrant dismissal of the general will, and another poorly veiled attempt to cheat them of their homes. Eric Camfield said:

I voted along with loads of others, and it was overwhelming that we all wanted to stay with the London Borough of Southwark, and they completely ignored it and gave it to the Housing Association anyway, so really it was just an exercise I think. I think most of the people living here are of the opinion they like living here, and they would sooner have had the money spent doing it up. Like I say, I’m not particularly pally with my immediate neighbours, but I suppose some people who have been here since it was built have built up friendships, relationships, you know.<sup>126</sup>

If Blair’s grand promises meant anything to residents of the Aylesbury in 1997, the store of optimism was all but empty eight years on. Labour had already fallen from favour in the borough by this point; the Liberal Democrats had narrowly taken most seats and a minority executive in the elections of 2002 (with no overall control). The reasons for this break in an otherwise unchallenged Labour run are numerous, ideological divisions within the Labour party and the popularity of Simon Hughes and

the Liberal Democrats in Bermondsey among them. But the disliked regeneration agenda undoubtedly played its part. ‘It is beyond belief that we are in this position of so little being achieved after so long,’ said Harriet Harman, mere months before the demolition plans were resurrected. ‘I am bound by Tony Blair’s promise to deliver for Aylesbury tenants...The ballot-vote must be respected with the whole estate staying with the council—we must find the money for that.’<sup>127</sup> As tenants would soon recognise, however, neither a politician’s assurances nor a municipal regime change could stem the tide of privatisation. The London Olympics were in sight, the ‘transformation’ of the Elephant and Castle was in the pipeline, and Thurlow Street had been identified as a ‘strategic transport corridor’ in the Cross River Tram proposal. At this stage in Southwark’s modernising trajectory, and at this proximity to central London, the ‘commercial priorities’ were too great, and the ‘economic opportunities’ too enticing for the estate to remain intact.<sup>128</sup> Human considerations, it seems, were of secondary importance. ‘They all want to turf me out of the place I’ve lived in for 33 years, and demolish the ramps and walkways that me and the other old ladies need to get out and around,’ said 78-year-old tenant Violet Rogers, in 2005. ‘And they want to charge me an extra £10 a week for a concierge I don’t want.’<sup>129</sup>

This was a period in which the estate, as ‘under-capitalised’ urban space, was hotly contested. A site steeped in history, lived experience, social meaning and material importance was seized upon by the powers that be in order gratify commercial appetites and fulfil political objectives. But tenants did push back: by leafleting, door-knocking, fly-posting and organising around the stock transfer ballot generally, embattled residents and activists in the form of WATT and Southwark DCH attempted to re-appropriate the Aylesbury as a space of representation (voting against transfer alone was enough to subvert the dominant discourse). Even so, the layers of meaning ascribed to the estate from the outside were too numerous to cast aside; the narrative of failure was immovable, and its architects had other weapons yet.

### A DEADLY NARRATIVE

On 24 June 2007, the *Sunday People* published a stirring urban redemption story. The ‘notorious’ Aylesbury Estate had turned a corner, it said. Once a violent ‘hell hole,’ where ‘spent drugs needles littered stairwells, vice girls were found slumped in doorways and hoodies prowled the alleys

seeking victims,’ it was now ‘transformed’ into a ‘beacon of hope for crime-ridden estates everywhere.’<sup>130</sup> It was a story of individual redemption, too. In the late 1990s, a teenage Oli Rahman ‘led a violent Asian gang which “owned” the Aylesbury Estate.’ But Rahman, having seen the ‘error of his ways,’ renounced his gang membership in 2006 and from then on ‘vowed to make a difference.’ By the time the article ran a year later, he was employed as a youth worker, ‘educating youngsters about how to live their lives happily and crime-free.’<sup>131</sup>

It was on first glance a winning piece of reportage. At once lurid and inspiring, it married the seductive image of a ‘dangerous’ inner-city estate with the human drama of underdog success. It was not, however, entirely accurate, as Rahman’s reaction to the piece, as told eight years later, revealed:

So if a group of young men grow up on an estate they’re labelled a gang? Anywhere you go in the world, a group of young men or women are friends will be together as a group, you can’t call them gangs, so I wasn’t happy with that...that’s the only article I ever done and I’m never doing it again. I lost my trust in the whole news media thing...because the journalist that interviewed me just totally changed it...I mean my Dad was unhappy because he heard about it. He’s a very old, traditional man.<sup>132</sup>

The discourse surrounding ‘gangs’ in modern Britain has been strangled somewhat by the absence of a universally applied definition: as used today, the term has an unmistakably permissive quality. Interpolated with all manner of meaning and agency, and promiscuously applied across mass media, it is hard to know what a ‘gang’ really is. ‘When is a group of young men not a gang?’ wondered Simon Hallsworth and Tara Young. ‘Does it apply only when they are poor? If so, are the “gang-like” qualities observed conferred or self-ascribed? And just how many crimes do not involve group activity of some kind? Are the groups also gangs and if not why not?’<sup>133</sup> Then, there is the troubling matter of ethnicity to consider, namely: how the ‘gang’ label has been applied indiscriminately and incommensurately to young black and Asian people.<sup>134</sup> While the definition may be hazy, the absence of proportion with which so-called gangs have been treated is easier to parse. For journalists and filmmakers, the notional gang is catnip; a modern-day folk devil boring directly into the public imagination. For the governing class, it has served as a catch-all explanation for urban disturbances—the 2011 riots, notably<sup>135</sup>—and other violent or

disruptive instances that often held little relation to the caricatures presented. Indeed, if politicians are to be believed, this undefined but rapidly developing quantity is a threat to civilised society unparalleled in its graveness: 'The modern gang is perhaps the best illustration of how broken Britain's society is,' declared Iain Duncan Smith in 2009.<sup>136</sup>

The mania around gangs did not pass through the Aylesbury quietly. More than just the *Sunday People* article, gangs were referred to numerous during the period in question—infelicities, ambiguities, hysteria and all. In 2007, the *South London Press* said the NDC had helped tackle the estate's 'gang problem';<sup>137</sup> in 2010, the *BBC* ran a story on the Aylesbury entitled: 'How Gang Terrorised Doomed Estate';<sup>138</sup> in 2012, *The Telegraph* reported on an 'apparent gang-related killing' on the 'notorious council estate.'<sup>139</sup> Nowhere was the Aylesbury's 'gang problem' delineated, nor, in the case of *The Telegraph* and *BBC* articles, was it made clear how the crimes described were gang-led or affiliated: that the assailants and victims were young, male and non-white seemed to be enough. It is as Hallsworth said: 'Explanations for the violence attributed to gangs can be made without having to invoke the gang as a key explanatory variable.'<sup>140</sup> Elsewhere, John Heale's 'inside' look at gang culture in Britain, *One Blood*, linked the Aylesbury to the established Peckham Boys gang ('This area belongs to the Peckham Boys'), yet failed to explain the connection.<sup>141</sup>

As stated, crime and the fear of crime was down on the estate in the NDC period, thanks in part to the work of Kickstart and Active Communities, and the presence of uniformed security guards.<sup>142</sup> For Damion Brown, it was 'rare that you had real serious crime,' and as of 2001, Natalie Secka 'hadn't seen a syringe for about a year.'<sup>143</sup> Nevertheless, the Aylesbury was part of a designated 'high crime area' (see Chap. 4), and drug dealing, muggings,<sup>144</sup> a stabbing,<sup>145</sup> and even a shooting, did tragically occur.<sup>146</sup> It is also true that a large chunk of reported crime on the estate was committed by young males between the ages of 10 and 17 (26 per cent compared to 20 per cent in Southwark as a whole).<sup>147</sup> But this, in and of itself, did not presuppose the existence of a rampant and violent gang culture, as described so ubiquitously in the press. Damion Brown said:

There were no gangs on the Aylesbury, nah, no way. I don't know where that got mentioned or why it got mentioned? That's not true at all. People roaming through the estate. You have groups, like you said, people that—I wouldn't even say from different blocks...I think it's a generational thing—so you'd have myself and my friends who are around my age and then I've

got an older brother...and his friends were his ages. I suppose that's possibly what they mean, but going around causing trouble, nah.<sup>148</sup>

A little critical interrogation was perhaps too much to expect of the media in light of its treatment of crime on the estate to this point. Applying the 'gang' label was an easy and evocative swipe, and an effective means to shift papers. But there were lasting consequences to its repeated usage—for the young people it vilified, and for the estate's already beleaguered reputation.

Any damage done was exacerbated by the estate's fictionalisation. Endowed with dramatic leading lines and contours, the Aylesbury was by nature telegenically accomplished, and immediately expressive of a 'gritty' inner-city environment. It was used between 15 and 20 times per year to depict stories of violence, drugs and gang culture—most notably in police procedurals such as *The Bill*, in the gang drama, *Top Boy*, and in the 2009 vigilante thriller, *Harry Brown*, in which actor Michael Caine, playing a pensioner and ex-marine, locks horns with a murderous gang on his misery-swept estate. Film companies, paying Southwark handsomely for the privilege, would festoon the estate with rubbish bags, litter, graffiti, abandoned cars and washing lines to create the desired effect.<sup>149</sup> Fed up with the way in which their home was portrayed—as well as living with ever-revolving encampments of cast and crew—tenants exhorted Southwark to call time on the film-makers. 'I don't want to see any filming on the Aylesbury that portrays violence and all the things that are not right for the estate,' said Jean Bartlett in 2012.<sup>150</sup> Southwark did eventually implement guidelines on what could and could not be shot (in what amounts to another example of tenants coming together and staking out the representational space). By this point, however, the overproduction of dystopian, Aylesbury-based images had long-told outsiders that this was what estate life was really like. Florence Essien, for example, spoke of friends being afraid to visit her—'so they come with that fear of crime and when they come here it's nice and quiet'—and of various awkward encounters:

I've been to a [job] interview once and somebody started going on about the Aylesbury and I had to end the interview, and I leave. Cause she now wanted to switch the interview to the lifestyle of people living on the Aylesbury and I said no, I'm not having this and I just left.<sup>151</sup>

It is also likely that such images, and the societal attitudes they provoked, had a bearing on residents themselves. As Jo Dean and Annette Hastings argued, negative representations of council estates can confer on tenants the idea that they are somehow different, lesser and more unlikely to succeed.<sup>152</sup> 'They seem to think everybody that lives on a council estate must be negative to one degree or another,' said Dean Porter. 'They must be a drug addict, they must be a Benefits Street-style character.'<sup>153</sup>

Aylesbury's burgeoning mythification was welcomed by many proponents of regeneration. Criminal narratives shaped and negotiated the estate's public meaning which in turn acted to legitimise policy. They were a prerequisite to the process in this sense, necessitating the estate's destruction.<sup>154</sup> As for Southwark, it did all it could to parrot these gloomy accounts: 'The estate lends itself to crime. Dark, isolated walkways and a maze type pattern of high rise blocks and corridors are the perfect hiding places for drug dealing, robbery and harassment.'<sup>155</sup> Aysen Dennis said:

This estate does have major problems—the heating and the lifts keep breaking down. But the council is talking these issues up to justify its scheme, saying we're crime ridden, that people are scared to leave their homes. That's rubbish. I live here and come home at any time of night, and I've never seen anything serious happening. They're just trying to stigmatise us, especially the black population living here. It makes me so angry.<sup>156</sup>

It was not just disparaging remarks; Southwark fed the narrative machine in more proactive ways, too. In 2008, just months after Harriet Harman sent out a clear message by touring her constituency in a stab-proof vest,<sup>157</sup> it was revealed that the council had been putting on a private bus service for its Aylesbury-based workers to 'ensure [they] do not have to cross the notorious estate and risk being mugged.' The half-hourly 'shuttle' ran between the estate and Elephant and Castle tube station between 4 pm and 7 pm, at a cost of £650 per week.<sup>158</sup> Bonnie Royal, who worked for the council at that time, was appalled:

Now can you imagine being a resident and seeing staff being bussed out like you were some kind of vermin...it's disgraceful, the idea of ferrying staff out, just disgraceful. The very people that are paying their salaries. But they did stop it, there was a hoo-ha in the end and they did stop, but by then I think the damage was already done.<sup>159</sup>

To Dennis' point, it seems incontestable that Aylesbury's deadly narrative contained a racist component. Much like the 'mugger' before it, the assumed existence of an arbitrarily defined 'gang' reflected the racial composition of the community within which the 'gang' was supposed to exist.<sup>160</sup> On the Aylesbury, black residents made up 35 per cent of the estate's population in 2004, compared to 25 per cent in Southwark and 2 per cent nationwide. Just under half its population comprised ethnic minority tenants.<sup>161</sup> Media coverage of the estate of course tapped into the idea of 'gangs' and street crime as racialised constructs. So too did policing strategies—'getting stopped and searched, not on the estate but on the Walworth Road. Every week. Every week'<sup>162</sup>—and, to some extent perhaps, residents' own opinion of the young people living around them. Teenagers, for instance, had always socialised in groups on the estate:

about six or so of us used to hang around at the bottom of one of the blocks each night for about three hours with a little transistor radio and chatting and that.<sup>163</sup>

For some of the older tenants, the sight of groups of youths hanging about on the walkways is itself a threat.<sup>164</sup>

Only latterly, though, were these groups referred to by tenants as 'gangs' more often than not, even if they seemed to present no immediate threat or nuisance:

You come back from work and you find a gang of youths in the night, standing in this corridor and having a view of London...Some of them are just socialising, drinking, smoking...they don't want any problem with you, they just want to be left alone, and sometimes they help you open the door.<sup>165</sup>

There may well have been young people on the estate who identified as part of a gang, and who caused trouble, or broke the law, as part of a named collective—for material gain, reputational standing, out of boredom ('a creative adaptation to the mundane reality of street life' in the words of Hallsworth and Young), or any number of other reasons.<sup>166</sup> If they did exist, however, they were evidently a small minority. The 'gang' label was just that—a label, applied indiscriminately, and applied to the disregard of more complex personal and social issues and structural

inequalities. The reality was more nuanced, more mixed, more life-like, as things tended to be:

A couple of friends made some bad choices, yeah, and they went to prison, I'm not going to beat around the bush, but I think that's maybe four or five of them I know. But yeah, well over twenty, thirty [friends] from the estate went to college, some of them went to uni, so.<sup>167</sup>

### THE LONG GOODBYE

Change was a matter of course on the Aylesbury. Neighbours changed. Housing officers changed. Social amenities wound down. New ones opened. For the appreciable number of tenants who remembered the cos-termonger culture and snug streets of yesteryear, permanence seemed particularly illusory. Gone were their old jobs, and with them their grown-up children. Gone too were many of the pubs that had ringed the estate and that had once focused sections of the community. Westmoreland Road market was uttering its dying gasps.<sup>168</sup> And East Street market, of waning renown by 1997, was unrecognisable to some:

East Street market's changed completely, which is understandable because markets cater to the people that live there...there's no point in having Pearly Kings and Queens down there selling jellied eels because there's no cockney people to go and buy it.<sup>169</sup>

Regeneration spelt the greatest change of all, even if its cogs turned unhurriedly. Simmering since the mid-1990s, by 2010 it felt protracted, and with projections for completion running into the late 2020s, increasingly far-off.<sup>170</sup> The intervening years saw it assume various forms, inveigle numerous developers, flit in and out of public consciousness, and, for brief moments, appear poised to disappear. For many at Southwark, though, the plans were always freighted with certainty; tenants and leaseholders, on the other hand, were left groping in the dark. Sandy Stewart said:

When I moved in here we were going to be refurbished, then we were going to be demolished, and that was part of the transfer and the vote and all of that. Then we were going to be refurbished again, and now we're going to be demolished...But with the result that I've never done my bathroom or kitchen because I couldn't do them when my mother was alive, and I thought I was going to refurbished after that so I thought 'great! I'm going

to have a new kitchen', and then we were going to be demolished, so I still don't have a new kitchen.<sup>171</sup>

In an attempt to put paid to some of this ambiguity, the council took it upon itself to tear down the still-beating heart of community engagement on the estate, the Amersham Community Centre, in 2007. It appears the act of demolishing this dishevelled but much-used centre—which housed the Aylesbury Youth Club and the Aylesbury TA tenants' hall—was treated by the council as something of an occasion: a 'launch day' was held ahead of the works, during which 'local people were given a chance to visit the site, sit in the long reach machine and then watch as the first bricks of their estate's long awaiting redevelopment came tumbling down.' One unnamed resident, according to a press release, described it as a 'wonderful but emotional event.'<sup>172</sup>

Amersham's demolition might be seen as a gesture more than anything—an effort to douse any ambiguity over the forward-thrust of things; an explosive confirmation of regeneration's materiality. But it was also a significant loss of a valuable resource. Hundreds of tenants—the majority of whom would remain living on the estate for years to come—would now have to go without. This was especially dispiriting for young people:

I mean the main thing that they should have never have done, and I say it to this day because it's proven, was knock down the Amersham, because that was the main place for all the young people to come, and once it went there was nowhere, no indoor facility for them to go to...I still can't get to the bottom of it. I've got no real answers. It made no sense to me.<sup>173</sup>

A much smaller centre, 2InSpire (an offshoot of InSpire), was made for young people (and only young people) in 2005, in a disused space in Wendover. A modest replacement—'You couldn't do any kind of sports there, I mean we used to run a youth night in there on Friday nights, it was well attended but, yeah, nothing like the Amersham'<sup>174</sup>—it nevertheless laid on activities like the youth night, drama and singing workshops, and a media and film club.<sup>175</sup> Dropped atop the scrubbed earth upon which Amersham once stood was a village of blue portacabins, housing such things as parent and toddler group, Tykes Corner (closed in 2016),<sup>176</sup> and the offices (now moved) of Creation Trust, a 'community development' organisation established as a successor to the NDC when the ten-year project wound down in 2009.<sup>177</sup>

Symbolism aside, levelling the Amersham did little in practical terms to allay the confusion felt by many tenants. Indeed, with prescient echoes of the sort top-down finagling witnessed by Ungerson during comprehensive redevelopment only 40 years earlier (see Chap. 2), uncertainty and fear continued to abound. Each shiny new masterplan and public engagement session only obfuscated further:

[Southwark] are worried about people being engaged and things like this, well actually, if...you're probably not going to be moved for fifteen years, how much engagement is healthy? Because...people do get terribly anxious, we've had some people who have made themselves so anxious they've been ill, especially elderly leaseholders.<sup>178</sup>

In March 2007, Southwark, the NDC, and design company, Urban Initiatives, began preparing the Aylesbury Area Action Plan (AAP)—the sixth such scheme of regeneration in under ten years.<sup>179</sup> Formally adopted by the council in January 2010, and administered to this day with few changes, this was the document expected to steer Aylesbury on its way for the next two decades. Yet for all its boasts of ‘wholehearted’ community engagement, and its claims that residents were fully on board, the new masterplan did little to soothe the general fever of uncertainty. Would tenants be offered a right to return? How would this be possible with a reduction of between 778 and 1166 social rented units? Where would tenants go if return was not granted? When would the blocks be demolished? When would tenants in blocks due to be demolished be required to leave their homes? Would returning tenants be charged social rent (around 50 per cent market rent) or affordable rent (up to 80 per cent)? Questions surrounding the scheme’s ‘financial viability’ raised a further cause for concern. Notwithstanding public funding worth more than £200 m, the AAP showed a funding gap of £169 m (mysteriously reduced from the £299 m shortfall originally indicated in 2009). It was anticipated that the difference would be met with £180 m of private finance initiative (PFI) funding, but this was unceremoniously pulled by the new coalition government in December 2010.<sup>180</sup> Frustrated, but undeterred, the council vowed that it ‘will in no way be defeated by this decision’<sup>181</sup>—itself enough to give any discerning tenant pause: as the Southwark-centric anti-regeneration group, 35% Campaign, pointed out, the AAP stipulated that any funding snag would be bridged by ‘delivering different and more financially viable tenure mixes.’<sup>182</sup> In the name of viability, that is to say, an

even greater reduction in the proportion of social rented homes had not been ruled out.<sup>183</sup>

Leaseholders, too, were plunged into greater uncertainty following the publication of the AAAP: from a previous figure of £130 m, the estimate for leasehold acquisitions (approximately 500 flats) was revised down, with no explanation, by a staggering half. Leaseholders—some of whom were original tenants who had exercised their right to buy and some of whom were still paying off their mortgage—braced themselves for a forthcoming injustice. Like May Wood, for example, a 73-year-old Wolverton resident, who was offered £100,000 (£130,000 on second try) by the council for her two-bedroom flat—little more than half its estimated worth at that time, as reported by the *Southwark News*. She said:

They're trying to bully us out on the cheap. When it started, they said we wouldn't be any worse off when we had to move. It's all been broken promises. Every time someone from the council comes round, they say 'clock's ticking...' Then they said to me, 'you might get something cheaper if you move out of London, Mrs Wood.' 'Who said I wanted move out of London?' I said. I'm a Bermondsey girl. I've lived in this area all my life. In the end I said, 'right, pay me my money. I'll go and buy a caravan.'<sup>184</sup>

Or like Harry Arpino, a 95-year-old 'World War II hero,' who was offered a similar 'pittance' for his two-bedroom flat: 'I wake up in the morning thinking about it and go to bed at night thinking about it. We just don't know what's going to happen to us. The council haven't told us anything.'<sup>185</sup> These early stresses and strains foreshadowed some of what was felt during the Compulsory Purchase proceedings to come, of which many freeholders only found out about 'from a notice on a lamppost,' according to the *Southwark News*.<sup>186</sup> (By this point, however, tenants and leaseholders only had to look up the road to the Heygate for a window onto prospective wrongs.)<sup>187</sup>

Residents' questions about their future, and Southwark's inability or unwillingness to provide answers, created a situation in which fear, suspicion and distrust were allowed to fester. Viewed as meddlesomely close and overbearing in better days, the council now not only appeared distant but also loomed large in some people's minds as a greedy and duplicitous foe. 'They call it a regeneration, they just want the location to put up apartments,' said Damion Brown. 'This location is a prime location and that's why they want us gone. It's a gold mine.'<sup>188</sup> But the informational

void brought about more constructive outcomes, too. As with other estates around the country, the hardships of regeneration opened up supportive and communicative channels. Bound by a common cause (and opposition), residents found strength and succour in one another, and at times assembled an organised front: where TAs lacked or appeared beholden to the regeneration agenda, Aylesbury residents established their own campaigns and alliances. These included the Heygate and Aylesbury Leaseholders Action Group (HALAG), formed in 2010, and Aylesbury Tenants and Leaseholders First (ATLF), which came together a year earlier. While defending Aylesbury homes was the telos of both groups, ATLF was particularly concerned with the way in which representations of the estate had been weaponised against them. By posting on its website photographs of cheerful home interiors and pretty-looking gardens, of peaceful balconies and limitless views, of residents relaxing among their things, and socialising with family and friends, it strove to counter these thin depictions and tell its own visual story, of ‘Aylesbury from the inside.’ It told of an already ‘mixed community,’ made up of teachers, nurses, researchers, nannies, professional artists, systems analysts, musicians, cleaners, decorators, builders and many others, who ‘live here now...and love [their] homes.’<sup>189</sup> It showed how residents had built up a sense of place and belonging over the years, how they had invested in the estate both materially and emotionally, and how the estate had shaped their own lives and identities in turn (‘many owe their careers to having an affordable, spacious home this close to London’).<sup>190</sup> Theirs was not simply a symbolic defence of representational space, then, but a ‘defence of place, its customs and its identity,’ in the words of Katrina Navickas.<sup>191</sup>

Demolition of the blocks began on 21 September 2010. ‘Little Bradenham,’ or 1–41 Boyson Road, in the south-west corner of the estate, was the first to go in this inaugural stage (phase 1a) of redevelopment. The works, administered by L&Q housing association, also encompassed 1–12 Red Lion Close; commercial units at 6–28 Westmoreland Road; and the Aylesbury Day Centre, a valued resource for local elderly people (the new development included a scaled-down replacement). While levelling proceeded with ‘less dramatic methods than used in the past’—no explosives or wrecking balls—the same cannot be said of the rhetoric used to describe it. ‘This development marks a milestone for social housing of national significance,’ declared Councillor Fiona Colley, ‘both in its physical size and in the extent of the change.’<sup>192</sup>

Given its heightened density, the loss of the day centre, and the significant amount of green space it absorbed, the new development—to be split over four blocks and compounds, and to be completed in 2013—was to comprise significantly more homes than it replaced, at 261. Of these, 101 were earmarked for social rent (L&Q would assume landlord duties), while 127 would be up for private sale (routinely advertised for more than £500,000 in 2017). Former Walworth Councillor, Dan Garfield—he stepped down from the council in 2015 after being found guilty of assaulting his wife—bought a two-bed flat in the new development, off-plan from L&Q, in 2009).<sup>193</sup> It is unclear exactly when the affected tenants and residents were forced to leave their homes (the Compulsory Purchase Order was signed in December 2008). Nor is it known how many displaced persons were rehoused on the Aylesbury, or how many eventually returned to live in the new build (a ‘handful,’ according to Oli Rahman).<sup>194</sup> Michelle Porter, who had lived in the ‘big Bradenham’ block adjacent to the site, watched the demolition unfold:

First it was the little Bradenham...the old people’s home, when that started being knocked down I thought ‘where are they gonna go?’ you know what I mean? And this other building was getting transformed in front of me and I’m thinking ‘oh my God’, you know what I mean because what the council say and council do is totally different.<sup>195</sup>

Porter herself, along with fellow Bradenham dwellers, and those living in Arklow, Chiltern and Chartridge, were required to leave their flats from 2010, in preparation for demolition in 2015 (pushed back until 2017).

They don’t sit you down and say ‘right, we’re sorry we have to inform you that this is gonna happen’. You get a little letter through the door: ‘You’re gonna have this done regardless’, and you’re like ‘what? What do you mean we have to move? What’s going on?’ And half the people were in uproar because half of them bought their property, half of them had their lives in that flat, you understand? And half of them were scared, vulnerable, you know what I mean? And they didn’t know where to go, what to do. They didn’t get help. They had to search like I did on my own to get somewhere else, or we’d be on the street, or make ourselves intentionally homeless, that’s the problem we had...What about the memories? What about the lives you’ve made in here? What about the friends you’ve made? What about the people, you know, your neighbours?’ You can’t replace that.<sup>196</sup>

There were of course residents who felt decidedly more mixed about the move. Having lived there for 42 years, Derek Way said goodbye to his tenth-floor flat in Chiltern in 2012, to take up a tenancy in the newly built Totters Court (named after the old totters, or rag and bone men, of Westmoreland Road market)—part of the phase 1a redevelopment: ‘It was lovely when we lived there and I quite liked living there, but, like, I come home from the pub sometimes and the lift ain’t working, you know. It’s a bit strong, ten floors, you know what I mean?’<sup>197</sup> Then there were tenants, like Natee Puttapipat and family, who were positively eager to leave their Wendover flat, and who looked on with some envy at those residents caught up in the early stages of redevelopment:

We were initially grateful and, you know, it was actually a nice change for us, but the longer we lived there the more uncomfortable we became. And obviously things were starting to fall apart. Most recently my roof leaked constantly, in spite of report after report to get it repaired...And I did wonder if in part it was just because of the planned demolition and so they didn’t give it much priority or because the building was in such a state that repairs soon became worthless anyway, I don’t know, but that was just one of the problems. And just a lot of small accumulative things that just eventually became intolerable.<sup>198</sup>

But the Puttapipat family would have to wait—‘we more or less just waited...our thinking chiefly was we couldn’t afford somewhere better anyway, and if we went to another council flat it would probably be much the same’<sup>199</sup>—as would hundreds of others, whether or not they wanted to go. Secure tenants like the Puttapipats were at least safe in the knowledge that Southwark had a duty to rehouse them: even if they fretted about losing their homes, leaving their friends (‘We’ve got very nice neighbours. That’s why I worry about moving, about being separated from all these people I’ve lived with for all these years’), or moving in itself, a guaranteed roof above their heads awaited them, in some way, shape or form.<sup>200</sup> The same could not be said of non-secure tenants—generally homeless families or asylum seekers, for whom the estate was a valuable refuge—whose situation, and future, appeared more nebulous than ever.

After its opening in 1970, it took little more than 40 years for Aylesbury’s dissolution to commence. This was a place whose demise was championed as the borough was raising it up—perhaps, under such circumstances, it is a wonder it took so long. Demolition was far from a

necessary road to take, and one, according to many, best avoided. Even if the case for its refurbishment was outlandish, however, and the evidence for its infirmity withstood, and the ground it was built upon was forever destined to be a palimpsest, repeatedly scrubbed and worked up into more modish configurations, was it too much to ask to retain the estate's egalitarian principles and original social purpose, regardless of the form it took? Regeneration was nominally about improving the lives of residents. In reality, it throbbed with destructive potential and exposed a political fealty to the market that at this point seems ingrained. As the machines moved in, so the threat of dispossession and the break-up of a community appeared closer, and ever more unjust:

You feel like you have this ownership in the area, somehow, even though you don't. It doesn't belong to you but you feel ownership, you feel you're part of that change that's taken place...And then you have to be pushed out because you've no choice. You couldn't go to Dulwich and say 'we're building here'—they'll say 'it's my land, it's freehold land.' You can't do that on the Aylesbury, can you? I've seen a lot of people upset. I've seen people that are really old, in their nineties that are the white, English, that have really been through it; people in their eighties, they just feel sad, they feel heart-broken. You've got communities that have come in there, migrants that have come in there, and live there, and feel part of that community. Again, they feel sad because they were living next to family and friends...So all these things, these broken promises, and you're upset with the council about it, this whole trust that was lost. People that were elected to support you. And I think that's what has made people think again, believe there is no trust in this whole system. It's sad, it's sad for me because I see it as a con, a big con.<sup>201</sup>

## NOTES

1. Southwark Council Housing Committee, *Aylesbury NDC Draft Delivery Plan* (8 September 1999), Box 20348628, Folder 6/99–10/99.
2. Paul Barker, 'The New Statesman Profile—Southwark Borough', *New Statesman*, 13 December 1999.
3. Assembled in 1981, the London Docklands Development Corporation (LDDC) was a quango tasked with reviving the depressed Docklands. Hugely powerful, it exercised almost total control over its 8.5 square mile designated area, with no recourse to local democracy, or the distrusted Labour councils. It wrested large tracts of riverside Bermondsey from

- Southwark's control to build mostly office buildings and luxury housing (with significant sums of public money). The plans were fiercely resisted by local residents, and it took until the mid-1980s for the council to cooperate with the Tory-led body. See: Harold Carter, 'Building the Divided City: Race, Class and Social Housing in Southwark, 1945–1995, in *The London Journal: A Review of Metropolitan Society Past and Present*, vol. 33 (2008), 176; Anna Minton, *Ground Control: Fear and Happiness in the Twenty-First Century City* (London: Penguin Books, 2012), 9–11.
4. Barker, 'The New Statesman Profile'.
  5. Barker, 'The New Statesman Profile'.
  6. Jeremy Fraser, 12 May 2015.
  7. Barker, 'The New Statesman Profile'.
  8. Richard Rogers and Mark Fisher, *A New London* (London: Penguin Books, 1992), 156. Rogers was later (1998) appointed by then Deputy Prime Minister, John Prescott, to lead the party's Urban Task Force—a body charged with identifying the causes of urban decline, and finding ways of bringing people back to the cities.
  9. Rogers and Fisher, *A New London*, 127.
  10. The SEU was established in the Cabinet Office in December 1997, so as to remedy problems faced in impoverished districts. This was to be achieved through coordination between government, local councils, business, and the third sector—'joined up thinking for joined up problems', in New Labour-speak.
  11. Tony Blair, 'Bringing Britain Together', *British Political Speech*, [website], 1997, <http://www.britishpoliticalspeech.org/speech-archive.htm?speech=320#banner> (accessed 5 April 2017).
  12. Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions, *New Deal for Communities: Phase 1 Proposals, Guidance for Pathfinder Applicants* (London: DETR, 1998), 1.
  13. Elaine Batty, Christina Beatty, Mike Foden, Paul Lawless, Sarah Pearson and Ian Wilson, *The New Deal for Communities Experience: A Final Assessment, Volume 7* (London: Department for Communities and Local Government, 2010), 5.
  14. Ruth Levitas, *The Inclusive Society: Social Exclusion and New Labour* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998).
  15. Blair, 'The Will to Win', Speech Given at the Aylesbury Estate, 2 June 1997, (London: Office for the Deputy Prime Minister, Social Exclusion Unit, 1997).
  16. For a wider discussion on moral discourse, nineteenth century or otherwise, see, for example: Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London: A Study in the Relationship Between Classes in Victorian Society* (London: Verso,

- 2013); John Welshman, *Underclass: A History of the Excluded Since 1880* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).
17. Blair, <http://www.britishpoliticalspeech.org/speech-archive.htm?speech=320#banner> (accessed 5 April 2017); Charlie Johnston and Jerry Mooney, “‘Problem’ People, ‘Problem’ Places? New Labour and Council Estates”, in Rowland Atkinson and Gesa Helms (eds.), *Securing an Urban Renaissance: Crime, Community, and British Urban Policy* (Bristol: The Policy Press, 2007).
  18. Harriet Harman, quoted in Norman Fairclough, *New Labour, New Language?* (London: Routledge, 2000), 57.
  19. *Southwark Sparrow*, November 1987.
  20. Johnston and Mooney, “‘Problem’ People, ‘Problem’ Places?”, 125.
  21. Blair, ‘The Will to Win’.
  22. New Labour Press Release, February 1999, quoted in Fairclough, 61.
  23. Michael Parkinson, Tony Champion, Richard Evans et al., *State of the Cities: A Research Study* (London: Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2006), 156; Craig Johnstone and Gordon Macleod, ‘New Labour’s “Broken” Neighbourhoods: Liveability, Disorder, and Discipline?’ in Atkinson and Helms (eds.), *Securing an Urban Renaissance*, 77–81.
  24. Urban Task Force, *Towards an Urban Renaissance* (London: E.F.N. Spon, 1999), 65.
  25. SEU, *National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal: A Framework for Consultation* (London: Social Exclusion Unit, 2000), 53.
  26. Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, *Sustainable Communities: Building for the Future* (London: TSO, 2003); Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, *Sustainable Communities: People, Places and Prosperity* (London: TSO, 2005).
  27. Loretta Lees, ‘The Urban Injustices of New Labour’s “New Urban Renewal”: The Case of the Aylesbury Estate in London’, *Antipode*, vol. 46 (2014), 926. Questions of what to do with London’s poorest districts were met with similar solutions in the nineteenth century: demolitions, evictions, the intervention of ‘wealthier and better’ neighbours. See: Jerry White, *London in the Nineteenth Century: A Human Awful Wonder of God* (London: The Bodley Head, 2016), 28–35.
  28. *The Guardian*, 15 March 1999.
  29. Barker, ‘The New Statesman Profile’.
  30. Rowan Moore, *Slow Burn City: London in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Picador, 2017), 200.
  31. Edward Simpkins, ‘Labour Demolishes Council Housing to Woo Better-Off’, *Estates Gazette*, 6 March 1999.
  32. *Estates Gazette*, 24 April 1999.
  33. Barker, ‘The New Statesman Profile’.

34. Fraser, 12 May 2015.
35. *Estates Gazette*, 13 March 1999.
36. *The Guardian*, 15 March 1999.
37. Patrick Wright, *A Journey Through Ruins: The Last Days of London* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 297.
38. *South London Press*, 12 February 1999.
39. Hugh Muir, 'Deliberately Demoralising', *The Guardian*, 18 May 2005; Andy Beckett, 'The Fall and Rise of the Council Estate', *The Guardian*, 13 July 2016; Ben Campkin, *Remaking London: Decline and Regeneration in Urban Culture* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013), 97.
40. *The Guardian*, 3 June 1997; *The Independent*, 2 June 1997. The CAD/CAM training centre (set up in 1991) provided vocational training in subjects such as IT and graphic design. In 2000, it became the Aylesbury Learning Centre—managed by an organisation called Elephant Jobs and funded by Southwark Council—which similarly provided free computer access, IT training courses, and other drop-in services to the local population. Wendover resident since 1996, Eric Camfield, was a volunteer at the centre until its 'inexplicable' and much-protested closure in 2014: 'There were some people that went in there genuinely trying to put a CV together or fill in an application form on the computer...and a lot of the people didn't have English as their first language, so I'd help them and correct their English on the application form and all the rest of it.' Eric Camfield, 2 October 2014. See: 'Aylesbury Learning Centre Closes Down', *People's Republic of Southwark*, [website], 31 July 2014, <http://www.peoplesrepublicofsouthwark.co.uk/index.php/hold-news/news/3534-aylesbury-learning-centre-closes-down> (accessed 15 May 2017).
41. *The Guardian*, 3 June 1997; *The Independent*, 2 June 1997.
42. Lees, 'Urban Injustices', 926.
43. Campkin, *Remaking London*, 97.
44. Lees, 'Urban Injustices', 924.
45. Blair, 'The Will to Win', (1997).
46. Blair, 'The Will to Win', (1997).
47. Fraser, 12 May 2015.
48. *The Guardian*, 3 June 1997.
49. Fraser, 12 May 2015.
50. Only Liverpool (£61.9 m), Hackney (£59.4 m), and Tower Hamlets (£56.6 m), were bigger. National Audit Office, *An Early Progress Report on the New Deal for Communities Programme* (London: TSO, 2004), 2.
51. SCHC, *2000/01 Investment Programme—First Report* (13 March 2000), Box 20348596, Folder 12/99-3/00; *The Guardian*, 28 November 2001; *Public Finance*, 8–14 February 2002.

52. David Blackman, 'Where did it all go wrong?', *Inside Housing*, 22 February 2002; SCHC, *2000/01 Investment Programme—First Report* (13 March 2000).
53. Southwark Council, *The Aylesbury Estate: Revised Strategy* (27 September 2005), <http://modern.gov.southwark.gov.uk/Data/Executive/20050927/Agenda/Item%2007%20-%20The%20AylesburyEstate%20Revised%20Strategy%20-%20Report.pdf>, accessed 18 May 2017.
54. *Public Finance*, 8–14 February 2002.
55. SCHC, *Aylesbury Plus Initiative* (18 June 1997), Box 20348625, Folder 5/97–7/97.
56. *BBC News*, 29 November 2000, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/1046662.stm> (accessed 19 May 2015); John Boughton, 'The Five Estates, Peckham, Part III: Back to the Future', *Municipal Dreams*, 25 October 2016, <https://municipaldreams.wordpress.com/2016/10/25/the-five-estates-peckham-part-iii/> (accessed 30 April 2016).
57. SCHC, *Aylesbury Plus Initiative* (18 June 1997).
58. The government's ERF was engineered to promote the transfer of council estates to registered social landlords (generally housing associations) by providing a subsidy to the new landlord for improvements and other revenue costs. Southwark's Dawson's Heights estate, in East Dulwich, won a £3.3 m ERF bid when it transferred to the Samuel Lewis Housing Trust in 1997–1998. SCHC, *Aylesbury Plus Partnership Board* (22 June 1998), Box 20332892, Folder 5/98–11/98.
59. SCHC, *Aylesbury NDC Draft Delivery Plan* (8 September 1999).
60. SCHC, *Aylesbury Plus Update + Questionnaire* (17 November 1997), Box 20348625, Folder 9/97–1/98; SCHC, *Aylesbury Plus SRB* (13 July 1999), Box 20348628, Folder 6/99–10/99.
61. SCHC, *Aylesbury Plus Initiative* (18 June 1997).
62. SCHC, *Aylesbury NDC Draft Delivery Plan* (8 September 1999), SCA.
63. Jane Jacobs to Chadbourne Gilpatric, 1 July 1958, in *Brick*, vol. 78, (2006).
64. Cris Claridge, 5 March 2015.
65. Giles Goddard, 27 January 2015.
66. Goddard, *Space for Grace: Creating Inclusive Churches* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2008), 130.
67. SCHC, *Aylesbury NDC Draft Delivery Plan* (8 September 1999); Goddard, 130; Gerard Lemos, 'Forgotten No Longer', *The Guardian*, 29 September 1999.
68. SCHC, *Aylesbury NDC Draft Delivery Plan* (8 September 1999).
69. Goddard, *Space for Grace*, 130.

70. Goddard, 27 January 2015.
71. Enoch Offe Baffour, 31 October 2014.
72. Baffour quoted in 'Your Story', *Creation*.
73. Damion Brown, 1 June 2015.
74. Goddard, 27 January 2015.
75. Of course, this did not account for the proliferation of unlawful subletting; a borough-wide problem difficult to stamp-out or quantify.
76. Alison Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture* (London: Routledge, 2001), 149.
77. SCHC, *Aylesbury NDC Draft Delivery Plan* (8 September 1999).
78. 'The NDC did great work with education,' said Sandy Stewart. 'I mean they had breakfast clubs and they had after school coaching and things at the weekend.' Sandy Stewart, 3 December 2014.
79. *SN*, 8 January 2004.
80. Florence Essien, 19 November 2014.
81. Capita, *Aylesbury New Deal for Communities (NDC) Programme* [no date], <http://35percent.org/img/capitandc.pdf>, accessed 30 May 2017.
82. Soye Briggs, 9 September 2011.
83. Brown, 1 June 2015; Tim Crabbe, Adam Brown, Matthew Brown, Imogen Slater, *Breaking Barriers: Community Cohesion, Sport, and Organisational Development* (London: Active Communities Network, 2010).
84. *SLP*, June 19 2007.
85. *SN*, 8 January 2004.
86. *Times Educational Supplement*, 22 September 1997.
87. *SLP*, June 19 2007.
88. *SN*, 8 January 2004.
89. *SLP*, June 19 2007.
90. *SN*, 8 January 2004.
91. 'It's really quite a nice communal thing...it's brought in the Chinese and the Bangladeshis, two of the groups who never come to any other kind of meeting, because gardening is a mutual interest, you're bringing people together without saying "you will be brought together and have fun."' Stewart, 3 December 2014.
92. InSpire, which opened at a cost of £118,000, was seen by Goddard as a 'place of continuity in the midst of massive change.' In *Space for Grace*, he described a lantern procession that snaked through the Aylesbury to mark the centre's birthday: 'The drummers led the procession...Following them, as darkness fell, was a long line of lanterns glowing in the dusk...All constructed carefully by people of all ages...carried by mums and grans and kids and dads. African and English, Turkish and Canadian. Taxi drivers, unemployed people, classroom assistants, health workers. We walked

- slowly from InSpire along the streets on to the Aylesbury, between Missenden and Latimer blocks, stopping in the new kids' play area to pick up more from the Aylesbury Youth Project...This, I thought, was what we made InSpire for.' Goddard, 127.
93. *SN*, 8 January 2004.
  94. Brown, 1 June 2015.
  95. *SN*, 8 January 2004.
  96. SCHC, *Aylesbury NDC Draft Delivery Plan* (8 September 1999).
  97. Creation Trust, *Ten Years of Working on the Aylesbury Estate* (London: Creation Trust, 2017), [http://cdn.creationtrust.org/assets/file/user\\_3/10YearAnniversaryPDFversion.pdf](http://cdn.creationtrust.org/assets/file/user_3/10YearAnniversaryPDFversion.pdf), accessed 2 June 2017.
  98. Tony Taitte, 16 October 2014.
  99. *Building*, 2000 (12), <http://www.building.co.uk/coming-up-roses/2855.article>, accessed 2 June 2017.
  100. 'The Partnership Board, which represents all four TRA's on the estate and has a resident majority, has accepted that redevelopment is probably the only viable option.' Southwark Council, *The Aylesbury Estate: Revised Strategy*; Jerry Flynn, 6 September 2016; Aysen Dennis, 24 November 2014.
  101. Goddard, 27 January 2015.
  102. James Meek, *Private Island: Why Britain Now Belongs to Someone Else* (London: Verso, 2014), 215.
  103. Accounting for approximately 68,000 homes. Paul Watt, 'Social Housing and Regeneration in London', in Rob Imrie, Loretta Lees, and Mike Raco (eds.), *Regenerating London: Governance, Sustainability and Community in a Global City* (London: Routledge, 2009), 219.
  104. Local authority spending on housing continued to be counted as public expenditure, and thus government debt, under New Labour. Borrowing by housing associations, meanwhile, was not accounted for in this way.
  105. Peter Malpass, *Housing and the Welfare State: The Development of Housing Policy in Britain* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 193.
  106. Meek, *Private Island*, 213.
  107. Meek, *Private Island*, 214.
  108. Malpass, *Housing and the Welfare*, 193; Watt, 'Social Housing', 219.
  109. See: *Building*, 2002 (2), <http://www.building.co.uk/a-breakdown-of-trust/1014845.article>, accessed 6 June 2017.
  110. Alsop, in *Building*, 2002 (1).
  111. 'People, rightly or wrongly, are renting a flat like this off ...of Southwark for maybe a hundred and ten, hundred and fifteen a week, it includes the heating, hot water. That's what they're used to paying. You can't suddenly put them in somewhere and say you've got to pay two hundred pounds a week, you know.' Camfield, 2 October 2014.

112. Julia Onley, an Aylesbury resident of more than 30 years, in *Building*, 2002 (2).
113. Goddard, 27 January 2015.
114. Dennis, 24 November 2014.
115. Stewart, 3 December 2014.
116. Stewart, 3 December 2014; Goddard, 27 January 2015; Frank Pemberton, 15 July 2015.
117. Goddard, 27 January 2015. Ironically, the manifold improvements brought about by the NDC may well have helped harm the 'yes' vote. WATT campaigner Ricky Rennalls said: 'A lot of people here are in work, they've got decent homes, they pay a good rent and they have good facilities close by.' See: Blackman, 'Where did it all go wrong?', *Inside Housing*, 22 February 2002.
118. *The Guardian*, 27 December 2001.
119. Dennis, 24 November 2014.
120. *Building*, 2002 (2).
121. The partnership between Southwark Land Regeneration and the borough council eventually disintegrated in April 2002.
122. The council did cobble together a quantitative study of 300 households, in which a 'consistent majority' of 54 per cent said they favoured demolition. 'It is clear,' said the council, 'that residents will be naturally cautious of new proposals.' Southwark Council, *The Aylesbury Estate: Revised Strategy*.
123. Notably, in 2015, Professor Jane Rendell from the Bartlett School of Architecture accused Southwark and its consultant architects of inflating the estimated cost of refurbishment by nearly £150 m. She said the £300 m-plus price tag was 'exorbitant', and the case presented to council in 2005 was 'wholly inadequate' and 'misleading.' *Architects' Journal*, 19 November 2015.
124. Southwark Council, *Inquiry into the London Borough of Southwark (Aylesbury Estate Sites 1b-1c) Compulsory Purchase Order 2014*, March 2014.
125. Southwark Council, *The Aylesbury Estate: Revised Strategy*.
126. Camfield, 2 October 2014.
127. *The Independent*, 11 April 2005.
128. Walworth Road, for example, would 'enjoy a considerable uplift from a new mixed tenure community on its doorstep.' Southwark Council, *The Aylesbury Estate: Revised Strategy*.
129. *The Independent*, 11 April 2005.
130. *Sunday People*, 24 June 2007.
131. *Sunday People*, 24 June 2007.

132. Oliur Rahman, 21 February 2015.
133. Simon Hallsworth and Tara Young, 'Getting Real About Gangs', *Criminal Justice Matters*, vol. 55, (2004), 12.
134. Robert Ralphs, Juanjo Medina, Judith Aldridge, 'Who needs enemies with friends like these? The importance of place for young people living in known gang areas', *Journal of Youth Studies*, vol. 12, (2009), 483–500.
135. The then prime minister, David Cameron, promised a 'concerted, all-out war on gangs and gang culture' as a response to the nationwide riots. Tom de Castella, *BBC News Magazine*, 16 August 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-14540796> (accessed 22 June 2017).
136. Iain Duncan Smith, quoted in Charlotte Pickles, *Dying to Belong: An In-depth Review of Street Gangs in Britain* (London: The Centre for Urban Justice, 2009), 9.
137. *SLP*, 19 June 2007.
138. *BBC News*, 29 October 2010, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-eng-land-london-10943044> (accessed 22 June 2017).
139. *The Telegraph*, 31 December 2012.
140. Simon Hallsworth, *The Gang and Beyond: Interpreting Violent Street Worlds* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 140.
141. John Heale, *One Blood: Inside Britain's Gang Culture* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2012), 60.
142. *Evening Standard*, 6 March 2001.
143. Brown, 1 June, 2015; *Evening Standard*, 6 March 2001.
144. Brown, 1 June 2015; Rahman, 21 February 2015.
145. *Daily Mirror*, 15 February 2007. There were several more stabbings after 2010.
146. *The Independent*, 19 October 2008.
147. SCHC, *Aylesbury NDC Draft Delivery Plan* (8 September 1999).
148. Brown, 1 June 2015.
149. *The Times*, 20 October 2008.
150. *BBC News*, 3 February 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-16858535> (accessed 26 June 2017).
151. Essien, 19 November 2014.
152. Jo Dean and Annette Hastings, *Challenging Images: Housing Estates, Stigma and Regeneration* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2000), 21–2.
153. Dean Porter, 16 February 2015.
154. Michael Romy, "'London Badlands': The Inner City Represented, Regenerated", *The London Journal*, vol. 44 (2019), 133–50.
155. SCHC, *Aylesbury NDC Draft Delivery Plan* (8 September 1999).
156. Aysen Dennis quoted in *Socialist Worker*, 'Housing democracy denied by demolition plan', 1 October 2005.

157. *The Telegraph*, 1 April 2008.
158. *Daily Mail*, 26 August 2008.
159. Royal, 26 February 2015.
160. Patrick Williams, 'The police, gangs and racism', *Centre for Crime and Justice Studies* (29 April, 2014), <https://www.crimeandjustice.org.uk/resources/police-gangs-and-racism>, accessed 28 June 2017.
161. Christian Castle and Philip Atkinson, *Aylesbury NDC Community Health Profile* (London: Southwark Primary Care Trust, 2004), 23–5.
162. Brown, 1 June 2015.
163. Newman, 15 October 2015.
164. *Evening News*, 3 March 1978.
165. Essien, 19 November 2014.
166. Hallsworth and Young, 12.
167. Baffour, 31 October 2014.
168. SS, 12 July 1991.
169. Martin Gainsford, 5 March 2015.
170. Southwark Council, *Revitalise: Aylesbury Area Action Plan* (January 2010), 78.
171. Stewart, 3 December 2014.
172. Cantillon, *Regeneration Plans Get Underway* (undated press release), [http://icb-news.co.uk/news\\_item.php?ID=2](http://icb-news.co.uk/news_item.php?ID=2), accessed 6 July 2017.
173. Brown, 1 June 2015.
174. Brown, 1 June 2015.
175. An additional youth centre, offering activities like table tennis, pool, a cooking club, and a film night, was later installed on the first floor of Taplow. *Aylesbury Echo: A Creation Trust Publication*, Autumn 2013.
176. Other childcare services existed in Taplow, Bradenham and on Beaconsfield Road. *Aylesbury Echo*, Spring 2013.
177. Creation was set up as an advocate for Aylesbury tenants and residents during regeneration. The charity implemented numerous projects, such as youth groups; a one-to-one support programme for vulnerable residents; events for the over 50s; and a scheme (SE17 Working) to get people into employment. While lauded by many, including some tenants, Creation was also criticized by those who saw it as a depoliticized proponent of the privatisation agenda, and a cynical extension of the NDC (as Lees highlighted, a number of ex-NDC affiliates are or have been involved with the trust). It has also been pointed out that its symbiotic relations with Southwark and L&Q (the borough's chosen housing developer for Phase 1a of regeneration) compromised any neutrality it had during the tenant consultative stage of the AAP's development (see below), of

which it played a part. Lees said: ‘The Council and the NDC/Creation Trust were able to mobilise the strategy that they wanted and a post-political governmentality replaced real debate and proper disagreement.’ Lees, 932.

178. Stewart, 3 December 2014.
179. Even in 2008, Urban Initiative’s Kelvin Campbell, who drew up the masterplan, and whose low opinion of the area was not well-disguised (he said of Burgess Park, cherished by countless locals, that ‘Even people who live right next to it never go there—there’s no ownership. Instead, there’s joy-riding and burnt-out cars; it’s a shocker.’), stated that the refurbishment of the estate’s larger buildings ‘makes more sense to me.’ *Building Design*, 3 October 2008, <http://www.bdonline.co.uk/buildings/technical/urban-initiatives-remodels-south-london%E2%80%99s-aylesbury-estate/3124017.article> (accessed 15 September 2014).
180. *The Guardian*, 26 December 2010.
181. Councillor Fiona Colley, then cabinet member for regeneration, quoted in *The Guardian*, 26 December 2010.
182. Southwark Council, *Revitalise*, 168; 35% Campaign, *Aylesbury Estate* (undated web page), <http://35percent.org/aylesbury-estate/#fn:2>, accessed 13 July 2017.
183. A phenomenon seen across London, born of the regeneration circus. Developers, eager to boost profits, use ‘viability assessments and the dark arts of accounting’ to consistently bypass planning policy, and to salami-slice the nominally required number of affordable units. For context, London saw the loss of 8000 social-rented homes between 2005 and 2015. *The Guardian*, 25 June 2015.
184. *SN*, 26 July 2012.
185. *SN*, 26 July 2012.
186. *SN*, 26 July 2012.
187. Just 79 of 2535 new homes on the Heygate redevelopment site were earmarked for social housing (the demolished estate was once home to more than 3000 council tenants). According to *Vice*, all of its flat for sale were sold to foreign investors. *Vice*, 13 April 2017, [https://www.vice.com/en\\_uk/article/qkq4bx/every-flat-in-a-new-south-london-development-has-been-sold-to-foreign-investors](https://www.vice.com/en_uk/article/qkq4bx/every-flat-in-a-new-south-london-development-has-been-sold-to-foreign-investors) (accessed 9 September 2017).
188. Brown, 1 June 2015.
189. *Aylesbury Tenants and Leaseholders First*, 7 February 2011, [website], <https://aylesburytenantsfirst.wordpress.com/> (accessed 18 July 2017).
190. *Aylesbury Tenants and Leaseholders First*, 7 February 2011.
191. Katrina Navickas, *Why I am Tired of Turning: A Theoretical Interlude* (London: History Working Papers Project, 2011).

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194. Rahman, 21 February 2015.
195. Porter, 16 February 2015.
196. Porter, 16 February 2015.
197. Derek Way, 23 October 2014.
198. Natee Puttapipat, 26 August 2015. Here Puttapipat alluded to the so-called ‘managed disinvestment’ of council estates on the regeneration timeline, of which Southwark has stood accused. See: Romyne, ‘The Heygate: Community Life in an Inner-City Estate, 1974–2011’, *History Workshop Journal*, vol. 81 (2016), 215–16.
199. Puttapipat, 26 August 2015.
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## Conclusions

Aylesbury's coda unfolded in predictable fashion in the years after 2010. The timeline was mutable—prone to extend into new decades—but the endgame was always in motion: more tenants were shooed out; more structures of meaning and refuge shuddered into rubble. In January 2014, Southwark appointed Notting Hill Housing Trust as its preferred development partner, and simultaneously announced its renewed 'determination to drive [its plans] forwards.'<sup>1</sup> The project and others like it were lent further credence in early 2016 when David Cameron (then still safely in office) called for an all-out 'blitz' on a hundred post-war 'sink estates.' 'I believe we can tear down anything that stands in our way,' he said.<sup>2</sup>

Clearly, there were few reasons at this stage to believe that what was left of the estate would survive intact, and indeed, resignation was the primary tendency. Yet opposition to the regeneration continued to body-forth (in stark contradiction to the 'feckless' and 'anomic' labels with which the community had been tarred). Residents kept up the Sisyphean task of shaking off accumulated slanders—see their response to the Channel 4 ident, most notably—and, in more demonstrable manoeuvrings, helped thwart the closure of Thurlow Lodge community hall, in 2017.<sup>3</sup> For a few months in the winter of 2015, housing activists 'occupied' a number of empty buildings on the estate, to protest Southwark's dealings.<sup>4</sup> And in September 2016, Aylesbury homeowners fought and won a 'rare victory' when the government blocked a compulsory purchase order, citing human

rights concerns, and precluding the flattening of several blocks.<sup>5</sup> All of this was supplemented by marches, meetings, and ‘angry’ demonstrations.<sup>6</sup>

The nostrums either proved or will likely prove ineffective: the 2016 compulsory purchase decision was overturned; spiked fencing and possession orders put paid to any repeat of the ‘occupation.’<sup>7</sup> Regeneration as a force seems unassailable at the time of writing<sup>8</sup>—and unreturnable on the estate to be certain. For some activists and tenant objectors, the Aylesbury cause, if not totally lost, has alchemised into something more general: ‘I may lose this house, that’s fine, but I mean I am fighting against ... the idea, the privatisation, you know, the dividing communities. I will always fight for this cause, wherever I go.’<sup>9</sup> There is certainly a growing awareness of the wider regeneration reality. In London predominantly, but also in cities across the UK, crucibles of resident activism, wise to the contortions of ‘community-led’ development, have sprung up in defence of their estates. Predictably, the tragic fire at Grenfell Tower triggered a splenetic outpouring against council blocks. ‘It may well be the defining outcome of this tragedy,’ said London Mayor Sadiq Khan, ‘that the worst mistakes of the 1960s and 1970s are systematically torn down.’<sup>10</sup> At the same time, however, the fire dramatically laid bare the many failures of British housing policy—of cost-cutting, of mismanagement, of historical neglect—and indeed the many failures of the current political and economic dispensation as a whole. If the social injustices of regeneration have yet to penetrate the national consciousness, Grenfell was a stark reminder of the class lines etched into the physical landscape of the city.

It is hoped that this book has at least partly explained our arrival at this pitiable moment, in which a needless disaster like Grenfell could occur. From a position of relative approval—even esteem—in the 1950s and 1960s, council housing would go on to endure a ruinous trial in the decades after, culminating in efforts to all but dispense with it: once seen as a major solution to the post-war housing problem, it was later redrawn as a major problem in itself. As described in the second chapter, the housing problem in Walworth was considerable: desirous of scale, both in output and architecture, the borough set about solving it in a comprehensive manner. That residents were shoved and shunted around during slum clearance is a testament to the authoritative mores of municipal socialism. Yet to equate their displacement with the profit-driven social engineering of today would be mistaken. Materially speaking, moving to the Aylesbury was a significant step up in life, and as the reminiscences made clear, a decidedly welcome one.

As we saw in Chap. 3, Aylesbury's first tenants transplanted well enough. The estate's size and dimensions could prove bewildering, and the government-imposed cost yardstick set conditions back years, in some cases never to catch up. But the material detriments were largely outweighed by the practical benefits modernism afforded. The community, meanwhile, closely regulated by the strictures of municipal paternalism, was comprised of the same social components as that which existed before it, and thus glued in expected ways. Untroubled for the most part by the estate's 'anonymous' design,<sup>11</sup> groups of residents were sometimes compelled together by their new environment; the time-honoured ways of the pub, the workplace, and the market, however, remained the social taproot. All of this, of course, mattered little to those outside observers offended by Aylesbury's existence, and hungry for revenge: few were the critics and journalists who viewed the estate as anything less than a transgression.

The accusations were many: that the estate had an inbuilt tendency to isolate, to preclude the establishment of community; that it was a breeding ground for vandalism and other petty crime; that it was unsafe, a 'mugger's paradise,' overrun by gangs; that its residents were feckless and anti-social. Built upon an armature of fear, exaggeration and plain untruth, such representations, when received uncritically, were Aylesbury's public face; its mythopoetic front. They sold papers and political projects. They gratified class-based value judgements. They presented the estate as an ongoing index of Britain's 'unravelling' social order. Language and narrative were inescapably linked with Aylesbury's material fate (the oft-used labels and stereotypes were parroted by the agents of its destruction). But more insidiously, language and narrative diminished its tenants: for many on the estate, the Aylesbury they read and heard about was unrecognizable, a bizarre reflection in a funhouse mirror.

The Thatcher years were tough ones for the estate (as described in Chap. 4), and for council housing as a whole. Thrown up relatively quickly and cheaply, the Aylesbury's fortunes would always track to the level of upkeep it received. Yet sapped of funding, and overwhelmed by the size of its deteriorating stock, Southwark largely failed to supply what was needed. Residents bemoaned their reduced surroundings while the council scrambled to adapt. Meanwhile, the estate grew poorer. Rising unemployment, and the substitution of better-off tenants with consignments of 'priority homeless'—as designed by the 1977 Housing Act—put even greater demands on the borough's stretched resources. The proportion of

lone-parent families rose, as did the number of pensioners living alone, as did the rate of residents in receipt of housing benefit. The estate grew less white, more transient, and thus increasingly unfamiliar to those remaining original tenants (not so rare as to be relics). These could be disorientating years, then, and precarious years, too, for they saw in a growing array of problems, not least of which was crime. The majority of residents, however, seemed to have lived on the Aylesbury perturbed but untroubled. Community groups and more traditional tenants' organisations were prized assets for many, while the estate itself, like most council estates, continued to 'generate strong loyalty and attachment,' to borrow the words of Ravetz.<sup>12</sup>

Under strained social and economic circumstances, ideals of belonging and urban identity in the city become increasingly tricky to sustain. Nevertheless, the health and prevalence of 'community'—the very thing threatened by, inter alia, Right to Buy, slashed budgets, and an absence of adequately remunerative jobs—was invariably the standard with which places like the Aylesbury were judged ('The pulse of community life on the estate is weak but not terminally so,' etc.).<sup>13</sup> As Polly Toynbee pointed out, the obsession with community is unfairly and disproportionately focused on the working class: 'It is always people with the fewest resources, struggling the hardest against the odds, who are the ones who are expected to galvanise themselves into heroic acts of citizenship.'<sup>14</sup> Where, for example, was the insistence that middle-class residents in Dulwich—another of Southwark's 'mono-tenure' zones—come together in active ways in order to validate their lives? Defending the Aylesbury regeneration in the *Southwark News*, in 2017, leader of the council, Peter John, recalled a visit Harriet Harman paid the estate: '[She was] in a lift and a man was injecting drugs into his penis. That's not a sign of a successful community. That's not the kind of community we want to see.'<sup>15</sup> John's comments amply demonstrate how a working-class area can be written off on the basis of a single occurrence in a way that a middle-class district never could (by similar logic, could one not make the case for shutting down the City on the basis of its 'rampant drugs culture?').<sup>16</sup> Reducing the estate to a single, devastating image, remarks like these deny the reader any sense of history or complexity and, clear of this extraneous clutter, help create the necessary space for the forces of capital to unfurl.

Who was Southwark to resist the inevitable wash of market-driven change? Bruised and wearied by the political defeats of the 1980s, by 1997, the borough had little left to defend against the new public-private

orthodoxy. Achieving social goals with the assistance of corporate enterprise was one thing, however. An orgy of demolition and rebuilding was quite another. As we saw in Chap. 5, the successes of the Aylesbury NDC—in educational attainment, crime reduction, public health and so forth—offered a glimpse of what the estate may have looked like if it had received the ongoing funding it needed and deserved. That the estate’s failures were inseparable from the shape of its blocks or the pedigree of its tenants, meanwhile, was an argument greatly diminished. Yet Southwark, under the auspices of the NDC, had other goals in mind. Simply improving the lives of its tenants was not enough—nor, apparently, was refurbishing its blocks. The Aylesbury had to be a gentrification project, bestowing middle-class ‘respectability’ at a cost of displacement; transforming the estate, but not for the people who lived there, or who continue to live there (often under miserable conditions) as the regeneration trundles on.<sup>17</sup>

Microhistories such as this are a way of reading broader trends. Certainly, in the widespread privatisation of state housing in Britain, the Aylesbury is just one example on a dreary list. Sustained by the profit motive, and the dominance of short-term thinking, estate regeneration in this country has worked as an instrument of dispossession, toiling on the rubble of socialist commitments.<sup>18</sup> Time and again, ‘decanted’ residents, unable to afford to remain living locally, are pushed further from their jobs, schools and communities. It is a process repeated globally. Whether in Cairo, Mumbai, New York or Rio de Janeiro, vulnerable and marginalised populations are increasingly being denied a ‘right to the city,’ in the words of David Harvey.<sup>19</sup> Just as tenants of Southwark’s Heygate Estate were flung far and wide by regeneration, so too have inhabitants of these and numerous other cities been driven to the urban fringes from the spaces they long occupied.

The voices of residents are overwhelmingly incidental to these deracinating processes—in the case of the Aylesbury, to be sure. Induced by irrepressible forces or distant-seeming agents, change is often foisted upon tenants, and well out of their control. But voicelessness was nothing new on the Aylesbury. It was a part and parcel of being a council tenant, of being ignored by representatives, and of being slandered in the press. By staking this inquiry on a more deeply representative range of experiences, values, and perspectives, it is hoped that it has gone some way towards redressing this lack. Certainly, the oral testimony of residents and others has helped expose the yawning gap between what was often a diverse and contented lived experience, and the dominant, largely untested discourse

of failure. In such a context, this book positions tenants as an authority on their own lives, and as unassailable witnesses in this struggle of historical meaning and interpretation, of which housing campaigners are engaged daily. We do well to remember that at the heart of this struggle is something as simple and necessary as homes and communities. At a time when genuinely affordable housing is in short supply, private rents are at exploitative levels, housing waiting lists are growing, and homelessness is spiralling, the correct approach, surely, is to build more council housing, not to tear it down.<sup>20</sup> It is likely too late for the Aylesbury. It is not too late to recalibrate our measurement of worth.

## NOTES

1. Councillor Fiona Colley, quoted in HTA Design, *Aylesbury Estate*, 4 February 2014, <http://www.hta.co.uk/news/posts/hta-to-redevelop-londons-iconic-aylesbury-estate>, (accessed 7 September 2017).
2. *The Sunday Times*, 10 January 2016.
3. *Evening Standard*, 23 January 2017.
4. *Evening Standard*, 16 March 2015.
5. *The Guardian*, 16 September 2016.
6. RS21, 15 March 2015, <https://rs21.org.uk/2015/03/15/march-for-aylesbury/> (accessed 8 September 2017).
7. With regard to the compulsory purchase order, a further public inquiry drew to a close when the majority of objecting Aylesbury Leaseholders reached a mediated settlement with Southwark Council, in April 2018. The agreement was reached once Southwark committed to amending its rehousing policy, allowing leaseholders to own 100 per cent of a replacement property, subject to a charge. The compulsory purchase order was confirmed in November, 2018. Aylesbury Leaseholders Action Group (formerly HALAG) said of the decision: 'A CPO is a failure for everyone.' Luke Barratt, *Inside Housing*, 'Aylesbury leaseholders withdraw CPO objections', 5 April 2018; Barratt, *Inside Housing*, 'Southwark Council wins battle to buy homes on Aylesbury Estate', 19 November 2018.
8. In September 2018, it was reported that 118 council estates face regeneration over the next decade in London alone, including 80 that are scheduled to be either fully or partially demolished. Zack Adesina, Claire Brennan and George Greenwood, *BBC Inside Out, London*, 'Dozens of London council estates earmarked for demolition', (3 September 2018), <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-45196994>, accessed 6 May 2020.
9. Aysen Dennis, 24 November 2014.

10. *The Observer*, 18 June 2017. As one Southwark housing campaigner pointed out, by ‘mistakes’ Khan ‘doesn’t mean the three 42-stories high residential towers of the Barbican, nor the now luxury refurbished Balfron Tower, but those that are still our council estates.’ See: *Southwark Notes* (19 June 2017), <https://southwarknotes.wordpress.com/2017/06/19/the-luxury-of-not-being-burned-to-death/>, accessed 14 September 2017.
11. Alice Coleman, *Utopia on Trial: Vision and Reality in Planned Housing* (London: Hilary Shipman, 1985), 36.
12. Alison Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture* (London: Routledge, 2001), 201.
13. *The Guardian*, 29 September 1999.
14. Polly Toynbee, *Hard Work: Life in Low-Pay Britain* (London: Bloomsbury, 2003), 129.
15. *Southwark News*, 16 July 2015.
16. *The Guardian*, 10 September 2017.
17. In February 2020 *Southwark News* reported that many Aylesbury tenants were without heating and hot water. As part of its response, Southwark told residents they could shower for free in nearby leisure centres, leaving ‘many elderly or immobile people...in the lurch.’ *Southwark News* (4 February 2020), <https://www.southwarknews.co.uk/news/aylesbury-estate-southwark-council-is-looking-again-at-all-the-options-open-to-us-after-southwark-news-probe-into-heating-and-hot-water-failures/>, accessed 6 May 2020.
18. For an examination of the parlous housing situation in contemporary London, see Anna Minton, *Big Capital: Who is London For?*, (London: Penguin, 2017).
19. David Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution* (London: Verso, 2012), 4–25.
20. In August 2018, Theresa May promised ‘a new generation of [council homes](#) to help fix our broken housing market.’ While the announcement marked a significant rhetorical break from previously stated policy, many local authorities and housing activists—pointing to the continued scourge of right to buy, the excessive cost of land, the lack of public subsidy for new social housing, and the ongoing demolition of existing council stock—received it with rightful scepticism. As *Shelter* pointed out, there was a net loss of more than 15,000 social rented homes in 2018 alone. See: Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, *A New Deal for Social Housing* (London: Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2018), 5; *The Guardian*, ‘Meet the councils quietly building a housing revolution’, 10 September 2017; *Shelter*, ‘Social Housing: Theresa May’s Legacy?’ (18 July 2019), <https://blog.shelter.org.uk/2019/07/social-housing-theresa-mays-legacy/>, accessed 6 May 2020.

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## APPENDIX A: ORAL SOURCES

### ORAL SOURCES

*Residents (Name/Age/Place of Birth/Ethnicity/Occupation/Year moved to Aylesbury/Year left Aylesbury/Block lived in/Date of Interview)*

- Enoch Offe Baffour, 25, London, Black African, Project Worker, 1997, N/A, Wolverton, 31 October, 2014.
- Robert Banks, 43, Lambeth, White British, Unemployed, 1972, N/A, Wolverton, 2 October, 2014.
- Jean Bartlett, 64, Southwark, White British, Child Care Provider, 1967, N/A, Gaitskell, 19 September, 2014.
- Lisa Baxter, 49, Southwark, White British, Receptionist, 1971, 1989, Chartridge, 5 March, 2015.
- Damion Brown, 36, London, Black Caribbean, Youth Worker, 1984, 2015, Chartridge, 6 June, 2015.
- Eric Camfield, 68, London, White British, Retired Airline Executive, 1996, N/A, Wendover, 2 October, 2014.
- Roger Carson, 54, Camberwell, White British, Unemployed, 2008, N/A, Taplow, 6 October, 2014.
- Alhaji Gibrill Conteh, 50, Black African, Customer Care Officer, 2009, N/A, Gaitskell, 3 January, 2016.

- Pat Davies, 75, London, White British, Retired Dinner Lady, 1973, N/A, Gayhurst, 27 February, 2015.
- Aysen Dennis, 57, Turkey, Turkish, Support Worker, 1993, N/A, Wendover, 24 November, 2014.
- Linda Edwards, 55, Southwark, White British, Unemployed, 1989, N/A, Wendover/Foxcote, 7 October, 2014.
- Florence Essien, 52, Nigeria, Black African, Unemployed, 1989, N/A, Wendover, 18 November, 2014.
- Martin Gainsford, 51, Southwark, White British, 1971, 1985, Chartridge, 5 March, 2015.
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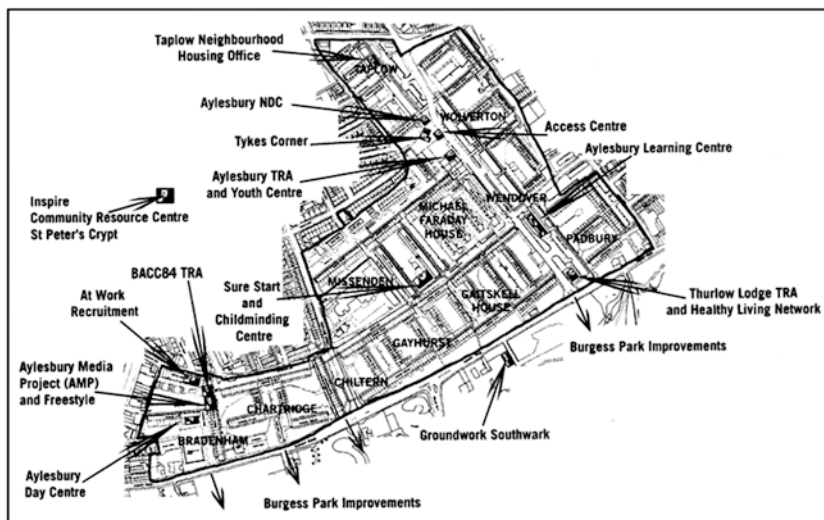
*Put It On The Map! (Creation Trust Oral History Project)*

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Millicent Pemberton, Aylesbury resident (Wendover), 1970s–2000s. Billy Sinclair, Aylesbury resident (Wendover), 1970–2000s.

Cindy Sinclair, Aylesbury resident (Wendover), 1970–2000s.

## APPENDIX B: MAP OF THE AYLESBURY, 2003



Map of the Aylesbury, c.2004. (Aylesbury NDC, 2003)

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