

SPECULATIVE HOUSEBUILDING AND SOME ASPECTS
OF THE ACTIVITIES OF THE SPECULATIVE
HOUSEBUILDER WITHIN THE GREATER LONDON
OUTER SUBURBAN AREA, 1919-39.

VOLUME 2.

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1. Introduction.

Broadly speaking, land development (i.e. the conversion of virgin land into a state of readiness for building purposes, in this case for housebuilding) between the wars, took two forms within the Greater London OSA. This was particularly true within the northern and western sectors. Firstly, there was the process whereby a speculative land developer, who may or may not have been the original owner of the land, would lay out the virgin land with roads, main sewers and drains, gas and water mains, and probably electricity mains, at his own expense. He would then broadly sub-divide the land into frontages and would sell off or lease the 'improved land' (normally at a price per foot frontage) to people wishing to erect buildings, normally housing of some description. This first form of land development can be seen as a continuation, perhaps an extension, of nineteenth century practice.

However between the wars land development took at least one other form. This was where the individual or firm who intended to construct dwellings on the land, themselves acquired the virgin land, laid out the roads and services required, and built or had dwellings built on that site. This of course was not unknown in nineteenth century suburban development,¹ but prior to 1913 it had remained rather an exceptional form of

1. E.g. the activities of Edward Yates in south London, see Dyas (1961), op. cit. pp. 131-2.

speculative residential development. By 1939 it had become a very common and widespread practice within the London suburbs. Indeed one speculative housebuilder at the outbreak of war was in the process of developing an estate in the eastern suburbs for which 7,500 dwellings had been planned; while at the other end of the scale, there were any number of firms buying a piece of land perhaps no larger than three to four acres, putting in a small road with services, and building 20 to 30 houses fronting on to it.

But, like any generalized impression these broad descriptions tend to hide a reality of a multitude of variation in practice. Furthermore, although with the exception of contract builders it was normal after the early 1920s for the individual who actually built the house also to have bought the land on which the dwelling was eventually to be erected, there was no 'normal' stage in the development process when the builder of the dwelling acquired his land. Indeed it would almost certainly be possible to discover examples of house-builders entering into residential development at almost every stage of the process. And variations which occurred within any given area would have depended in part at least upon any number of factors local to that particular area. For example, the size and price of the individual areas of virgin land which became available at any given time, that is, which were released for development by landowners; the size and financial resources of the speculative housebuilders interested in constructing dwellings within the area; the interest of speculative land developers within the area; the relative

ability of the interested speculative housebuilders and land developers to compete with each other for the land available; the activities and connections of the land agents, and the other factors concerned with the transfer of land local to the area; all will have been influential in varying degrees. For once land had been released on to the speculative market for development it would have been the relative strength of factors such as these which would have directly determined how the land was distributed among the various parties interested in speculative development, and here obviously could play a crucial role in determining the form which development might take. ¹

A number of paths will now be examined by which land, between the wars, passed through the residential process and achieved its eventual developed suburban form. Further, during this survey it is hoped to be able to indicate the various types of individuals involved in the process, and how the role, position and relative importance of some of

1. i. Indeed certain of the interested parties may have played, and probably did play, an active role in initially bringing land into the sphere of the residential developer by directly influencing the landowner to release his land in some way, for example by encouraging the landowner to join a syndicate or a partnership for the development of his land, or alternatively by directly persuading a landowner that it was in his best economic interests to sell a particularly 'ripe' piece of land at a particular time. For advice distributed by Hugh Davies to his searchers on the possibilities and possible methods of canvassing for land, see below p. 627.

ii. Also of course it would be expected to have had a direct impact on the structure of the 'housebuilding industry' within that area over that particular period.

these individuals varied according to the path of development through which land passed. In this way it is hoped that the extent to which the speculative housebuilder was involved in this process during these years will also be considered.

The possibility of variation within what might be called the residential development process was of course much greater in respect of the individual parties interested and involved in particular developments, than it was in respect of the actual process of the development of the land itself. However one such variant, indeed exception, in the form of residential development process has been discovered in Shirley, Croydon, in the southern suburbs. This has been studied by Dr R.C.W.Cox.¹

2. The development of the Ham Farm Estate, Shirley, Croydon.

The estate was part of what had been Ham Farm, and the area is still known under the name of Monks Orchard.² Although there were a number of commercial land development firms interested in land development for residential purposes during the 1920s, the company which developed the major part of Ham Farm was not one of them. Percy Harvey Estates Ltd., a City firm, purchased the land late in 1920 with the specific intention of sub-dividing it into lots of sufficient size to be worked as smallholdings. The lots were then to be sold individually. The company laid a limited number of unmade-up roads with services to give access to the various sub-divisions.

1. Cox (1970), op. cit. pp.372-94.

2. Ibid., p.336.

A decade after the sale of Ham Farm therefore the estate had become a collection of poorly planned and haphazardly located smallholdings served by what had become trackways. Some of these smallholdings had depths of one thousand feet but lacked proportionally balanced frontages,¹ while others were of most irregular shapes.² A number of dwellings had been built both by purchasers who had bought plots as smallholdings, and by others who had bought the land to provide a relatively spacious site on which to build their home. The area thus consisted of a collection of home-constructed shacks, and a number of more substantially built, but small houses. The latter dwellings of course had exceptionally large gardens.³

The sub-division of the land during the early 1920s by a land development company which did not consider the land in terms of residential development virtually ensured that the pattern of residential development when it took place could be nothing more than haphazard. The sub-division had made any large-scale residential estate development unlikely. It would have given any large- or even medium-sized speculative house-builder or residential estate developer, considerable trouble and effort in the negotiations for the purchase of the adjacent plots necessary to create a building estate of sufficient size to present them with a sufficiently worthwhile project. And furthermore, at this time, in almost all parts of the OSA which had not already been developed, it was almost certainly

1. Cox (1970), op. cit. p.337.

2. Ibid, p.332.

3. Ibid.

possible to find well-situated areas of land large enough to be developed into a sizeable and profitable housing estates, without any combination being necessary. The existence of the pattern of relatively small, haphazardly located and irregularly shaped plots, each being in different land-ownership, made the resulting unbalanced and inward-looking pattern of residential development on the Ham Farm site almost inevitable.¹

It would appear also that, in respect of the individual parties interested and involved, the residential development of the Ham Farm site may not be taken as a typical example. When the individuals involved and the roles they play in the residential development process are examined a rather complex and atypical picture tends to emerge. First, it appears from Dr Cox's study that the original owner of Ham Farm was not connected in any way with Percy Harvey Estates Ltd. and hence with the sub-division and development of his estate after the sale. Second, however, and rather more unusually, it would seem that the developers of the estate had nothing whatever to do with any of the housebuilding that took place on the estate subsequent to their actions as a development company.²

1. The extent of the imbalance and introverted nature of the eventual estate is indicated by the fact that, of the 27 roads which were built on this estate between 1919 and 1939, nearly half (13) were cul-de-sacs, four more were no-through roads which led only to cul-de-sacs, while three others were crescents. Thus of the 27 roads only seven were through-roads in any real sense of the term. Cox (1970), *op. cit.* p.358.

2. It will be seen later that it was fairly common for interwar speculative land developers (or if a company, an individual or individuals organizing the development) also to carry out the role of speculative housebuilder on the more favoured section or sections of the estate.

Hence the initial development company remained completely divorced from the later housebuilding activity.

The eventual residential development of this estate, was fully in keeping with the uncharacteristic nature of the initial history of the estate's development, as were the individuals responsible for it. The smallholdings and large gardens were developed in a piecemeal fashion, while the 'builders' ranged from a farmer to a housewife, the latter beginning by building a number of bungalows in her back garden before buying and building on land on other parts of the estate.¹ In fact at least three of the individuals who had purchased smallholdings from Percy Harvey Estates Ltd. during the 1920s found themselves building houses on their land during the early 1930s.²

Elsewhere on the estate during the 1930s there could be found housebuilders of what might be called a more 'bona fide' nature. For example, E. & L. Berg Ltd. developed a fourteen acre area which had originally been purchased from Percy Harvey Estates Ltd. during the early 1920s, for use as a poultry farm.³ E. & L. Berg Ltd. purchased this area of virgin land in 1933 and proceeded to lay out and to build a compact estate of 116 dwellings.⁴ In carrying out the complete development from the

1. Cox (1970), op. cit. p.378.

2. i. Ibid. pp. 381, 388, 394.

ii. To some extent these may be considered to be examples of land-owners who eventually built housing on their own land, if a landowner may be defined as a person who purchases an area of land, albeit small, for some purpose other than for building purposes.

3. Ibid. p.397.

4. Ibid.

purchase of the virgin land to completion of the last dwellings, the position and role of E. & L. Berg Ltd. in the residential development process was similar to that of the larger interwar speculative housebuilders. Of course, this may not be thought so remarkable, since E. & L. Berg Ltd. was also developing two larger estates in other areas of Surrey at this time.¹ However, with the exception of those building on the un-made-up frontages laid out by Percy Harvey Estates Ltd. during the early 1920s, all the other housebuilders on the estate were carrying out a similar developer/builder role, albeit on a smaller scale.²

The sub-division of the larger estate during the 1920s had been such that those individuals or housebuilding firms which wanted to build houses had had the alternative of either buying a smallholding from the development company or the occupying smallholder, or purchasing one of the houses with large gardens. Whichever way was chosen it was necessary to lay out a road with services. The earlier sub-division of the estate therefore had a great significance for the position and role of the small builders in the residential development process. Not only did the relatively small size of the sub-divisions³ discourage large- or medium-sized firms from

1. Berg, interview, 21.10.69.

2. There was almost an exception to this which, had the enterprise been carried through, would have added a most interesting variation to the form of residential development process which was more characteristic of this estate. For details, see below Appendix 7.2.

3. Some were as small as $1\frac{1}{2}$ acres and it is unlikely that any individual sub-division was greater than 14 acres.

building on the estate,¹ but it allowed small builders, in this case individuals with little or no previous experience in the industry, to buy single sub-divisions and adopt a similar position and role in the process to that which had become commonplace for firms like NIH Ltd., Geo. Wimpey & Co. Ltd., John Laing & Son Ltd., Taylor Woodrow Estates Ltd., Wates Ltd., and Davis Estates Ltd. It was a position which was certainly not common in this period for small house-builders and one which was probably almost unique in the experience of firms similar in size to, for example, Mrs Pym and E.B.Hart (two builders on the Ham Farm Estate) who in fifteen years housebuilding activity managed to build only 38 and 19 houses respectively. Furthermore the division of the estate into a fairly large number of relatively small sub-divisions made it possible for the small builders who had been relatively successful in developing a smallholding on one part of the estate to find a similar smallholding elsewhere on the same estate for building purposes.² In this way, there could be found small 'estates' of houses, often no larger than a single short road, or cul-de-sac, built by the same builder. In fact between 1930 and 1939, at least six builders laid, or had laid, roads alongside which they built houses on various parts of this particular estate, i.e. R.W.Trent, Paish, Tyler & Crump, Mrs Pym, Wylie & Berlyn, W.J.Connors & Son, and

1. See above pp.423-4.

2. It is a natural reaction for a small private builder who has had even a moderate success in housebuilding in a certain area to attempt to reproduce that success by building the same type of house as close to his first success as possible and thus hopefully reduce the level of risk involved.

W.H. West Ltd. ¹

The activities of Percy Harvey Estates Ltd. on the other hand in no way presents an illustration of the characteristic role of a speculative estate developer in the residential development process of virgin land during the years between the wars. Nor does the residential development of the major part of Ham Farm, Shirley, described above present a characteristic picture of speculative estate development as a whole during these years. More typically speculative estate development during the 1920s followed the lines of the residential estate developments of the inner London suburbs during the later nineteenth century, at least in physical terms. Thus an area of land was taken from agricultural, or horticultural, uses by the developer who would lay it out with roads, sewers, maindrains and other utilities, and then sub-divide the frontages up into sections, blocks and/or plots which he hoped would be taken up by individuals and firms (usually speculative builders) who would erect dwellings. There were however a number of significant differences between the operations of the speculative land developers of the later nineteenth century, and the operations of those active during the middle and later 1920s and the early 1930s.

3. Some differences between the operations of the speculative land developers during the nineteenth century and during the 1920s and early 1930s.

Firstly, between the wars it was rare to find speculative

1. Cox (1970), op. cit. pp. 374, 375, 378, 381, 389, 401.

land developers developing land on which they did not hold the freehold. Similarly it was rare to find such developers selling off plots or lots of their developed land on the basis of any sort of building lease.¹ The primary interest and aim of almost all of those involved in land development after the mid 1920s was to purchase the freehold of an area of virgin land and once having 'developed' it, to sell the freehold of the 'improved' land in individual plots or in lots at a price per foot frontage. In this way they obtained their speculative land and development profit. At this point their connection with those areas of land sold would end.²

A second difference was the apparent direct links between a number of the later nineteenth century land companies and developers with large financial institutions such as freehold land societies, building societies, insurance

1. See below pp.435-6, and Appendix 7.4.

2. i. Unless they were also helping to finance the individual builders either in (a) land purchase or (b) house construction, see below e.g. pp.453-6.

ii. Relatively full and detailed descriptions of the activities of a number of speculative land developers, land companies, and housebuilders in one nineteenth century London area may be found in Dyos (1961), op. cit. pp. 87-122. Prof. Dyos also indicates that there existed a number of freehold land companies which originally purchased the freehold of the land they later developed. It would seem however that later in the development process the practice of these developers varied. Some sold the freehold of the individual plots to the builders themselves, while others retained the freehold selling only the leasehold on a short lease, normally between 70 and 99 years, to the builder, 'whereupon the familiar process of development on building lease was carried on by a score of different builders.' (Ibid. p.18). However it would seem that the incidence of freehold sales to individual builders was minor compared with that of leasehold sales. Ibid. pp. 114-122.

companies. Indeed Prof. Dyos cites a number of cases in his study of Camberwell. For example, on one estate a life assurance, and later a building society, were directly concerned in the organization of a speculative land development project between 1864 and 1896,¹ while in less detail the operation of the better-known British Land Company Ltd. is discussed.² This particular company was created as a subsidiary by the National Freehold Land Society in 1856.³ During the interwar years however examples of the direct involvement of such financial institutions in speculative land development in such a way could only have been an extreme rarity.⁴ Although a number of insurance companies might have been willing to advance a limited amount of finance for such a venture, it is almost certain that none were in any way so directly involved. Similarly, building societies became almost solely interested in the expansion in the demand for mortgages by aspiring owner-occupiers which developed into an extremely safe and a most 'profitable' outlet for their funds during these years.⁵

The third significant difference which will be mentioned here is that it is probable that, on the whole, the individual

1. Dyos (1961), op. cit. pp. 119-21.

2. Ibid. pp. 116-8. This limited land development company was also active to the north of the River Thames prior to 1914, see T. Mason, The Story of Southgate (Enfield, 1948), pp. 31, 35.

3. Dyos (1961), op. cit. p. 117; see also W.C. Marsh, The Centenary of the British Land Company Ltd. 1856-1956 (1956). During the early 1940s the National Freehold Land Society amalgamated with the Abbey Road Building Society to become the Abbey National B.S.

4. No evidence of any such direct links has been found.

5. See below Ch. 11. Section 1; on a very much more limited scale certain building societies also lent to builders for construction purposes. Harston, interview, 25.8.69.

areas and estates being developed prior to 1914 were smaller than those being developed during the interwar years.¹ Such a statement is of course exceptionally difficult, if not impossible, to prove or disprove in any conclusive way, and indeed individual examples might seem to deny this statement. For example, between 1865 and 1878 the British Land Company Ltd. developed the two hundred acre Friern Manor Farm estate in East Dulwich, a large area by any standards.² But an area of such a size tended to be exceptional, even for land companies. On the other hand it has been possible to discover many examples of interwar estates of such a size. For example, in the northwestern suburbs during the late 1920s a land development syndicate purchased an area of approximately 250 acres of farmland with an option on a further 130 acres of farmland adjacent to it,³ while not two miles away, between Harrow and Wealdstone (London, Midland and Scottish Railway) and North Harrow (Metropolitan) Stations, Headstone Manor Estates Ltd. were developing a substantial area of land which they were selling off in lots.⁴ Also in the Harrow area at Rayners Lane, the Metropolitan Railway Country Estates Ltd. in 1932 had developed the Harrow Garden Village Estate and were selling off frontages to speculative builders. This M.R.C.E. Ltd. estate was approximately 213 acres,⁵ while two and a half miles westward along the Metropolitan Railway line the

1. This statement is based primarily on an impression which has evolved during the research.

2. Dyos' (1961), op. cit. p.117.

3. The Times, 4 Oct. 1929, p.11.

4. Interviews with Beckett, 18.11.69; Watson, 14.10.69; Lancaster, 22.1.70; Fairley, 18.11.69; Jackson, 17.10.69.

5. Harrow Observer and Gazette, 15 April 1932, p.7.

M.R.C.E. Ltd. were developing, along similar lines, an area at Ruislip Manor which was only a little smaller.¹ Meanwhile in Ealing the Perivale Park Estate was being developed, on which there was sufficient space for over 1,500 dwellings.² Nor were such large land developments to be found only to the north of the river, for in Ewell an estate of 360 acres was being 'laid out' and sub-divided into plots and lots for sale to a number of apparently very eager speculative house-builders.³ Unfortunately evidence of similar sized developments in the eastern suburbs has been elusive, but it appears that this by no means proves that they did not exist.⁴

It is clear from the small number of examples cited above that very large 'land-developed' estates did exist, furthermore it would appear that in at least some areas during the late 1920s there were being developed estates which were somewhat smaller, but which still provided building space for over 500 houses.⁵ It is, of course, also important to remember that over the whole OSA during the 1920s and early 1930s there were individuals with money, either their own or borrowed, who were willing to speculate in the relatively favourable market which existed in developed land.⁶

Differences did therefore exist between speculative land

1. Leathers, interview, 23.9.69.
2. NB (HS), March 1936, p.10.
3. PB, April 1933, p.94.
4. Interviews with Chaplin, 5.1.70; Jaggars, 20.1.69.
5. E.g. activities of P.H.Edwards Ltd. Interviews with Davies, 26.1.70; Chaplin, 5.1.70; Lancaster, 22.1.70; Fairley, 18.11.69.
6. See below pp. 441-60 for some examples of estate agents, surveyors, solicitors, and financiers involved in this form of activity.

development before and after the 1914-18 war. However, it is probably accurate to suggest that on the whole the fundamental physical process by which land development was carried out remained virtually identical. Physically, land development was a relatively simple and straightforward process between the wars (as indeed it had been earlier). For the firms and individuals who made their living from it, the process from estate to estate became very much one of repetition.¹ Furthermore, there was little variation in practice even between competing developers. It was in the financial organization of any two developments, and in the speed with which it was possible to dispose of the sub-divided estates to builders that variation occurred. Moreover, there was a great variation in the types of individuals and firms who were involved in speculative land development. The structure of the interwar land development of one particular estate has been discussed above. This was, of course, extremely interesting in itself, but in all probability it was exceptional. Below, by reference to a limited number of almost certainly more typical examples, some of the categories of individuals and firms involved in commercial land development will be examined.

4. Some of the agents involved in land development for housing purposes between the wars.

(a) The landowner.

1. As was the speculative development of housing estates. Harston, interview, 25.8.69.

Firstly the landowner; ¹ what part did he appear to play in the development of his own land, either in its development by laying out roads and services, or in the actual construction of dwellings? Traditionally, or at least during the second half of the nineteenth century and up until the First World War, it was most unusual for landowners in the London area to risk their capital by building roads or dwellings on their land themselves. Edward Ryde, a nineteenth century London speculative builder, told the Committee on Town Holdings in 1886 of the risks and dangers involved in development. Ryde stated that only occasionally were landowners known to build the roads on their estates themselves, and that within London itself such an activity was indeed a rarity. As for actually building on the land Ryde told the Committee that "no freeholder would undertake a building operation which, after all, is the most risky operation you can undertake." ² The housebuilder continued, stating how difficult it was to judge the ripeness of any given piece of building land, and that this was a factor which increased enormously the risks a landowner faced if he attempted to invest his capital in any form of development on his land.

It is a most capricious thing. You think building land is as ripe as possible, and to all appearances it is, and presently you build upon it, but no tenant comes, and it remains a howling wilderness for years sometimes . . .

3

1. By this term the author refers to the owner of the freehold just before it passed into the hands of an individual or firm whose aim was the development of that land in some way.

2. Town Holding: A Digest of Evidence (1888), quoted in Olsen (1964), op. cit., p.37. Prof. Dyos was in fact unable to discover a single instance of such activity in Victorian Camberwell. Dyos (1961), op. cit. p.87. See also below Appendix 7.3.

3. Quoted in Olsen (1964), op. cit. p.37.

The risks that landowners would have to face seem to have been no less during the interwar years, and almost all landowners appear to have preferred not to take the risks which might have been involved. Prior to the First World War the majority of freehold landowners had developed their land under building leases. During the years after the Armistice however the last legal constraints on landowners to sell the freehold of their land were removed.¹ And as a consequence of this and other factors, such as the changing economics of landownership, the development and growth in size of financial institutions interested in private residential development, it became the normal practice for landowners to sell the fee simple of their land when they considered it suitably ripe for development.² In this way therefore landowners were able to enjoy the entire benefit of the sale of their land within a relatively short period after the actual point of sale. Agricultural depression, high taxation and relatively attractive alternative investment opportunities elsewhere during the 1920s provided substantial incentives to landowners freed from legal constraints, particularly those landowners with land in or near built-up areas who could hope for capital gains, to sell their land and perhaps reinvest the sale money elsewhere.³

It has been possible to discover only three cases where the landowner or freeholder in the sense noted above was in some way

1. A.A.Nevitt, Housing, Taxation and Subsidies (1965), pp.22-3.
2. For some thoughts on the factors involved and their possible interrelationship, see below Appendix 7.4.
3. Ibid, pp. 513-7.

personally active in the development of his land; ¹ although on none has it been possible to discover much detailed evidence. That other examples similar to these existed seems quite probable, and this is especially probable in the case of the third example mentioned. Furthermore, each example indicates different approaches open to landowners who wished to develop their own lands during this year.

The first example was to be found in Great Stanmore (Middlesex), adjacent to the newly-constructed Stanmore Underground Station. According to an article in the National Builder, the owner of the Warren House Estate retained strict control over the form of the development and the type of housing being constructed. To this end he employed an architect to carry out the design work and to overlook the work on the estate. ²

Roughly to the south of this estate lay the Spenser-Churchill estates in Harrow, known under the single title of the Northwick Park Estate. ³ Captain Spenser-Churchill however

1. This is with the exception of Kings College, Cambridge, and Merton College, Oxford, on their estates in the N.W. suburbs (see e.g. Ashworth, op. cit. p.192), and also any number of smaller landowners who owned land alongside made-up roads which they simply marked off as plots along the frontage and then sold as 'developed land'.

2. Jan. 1935, p.254.

3. The area covered by this land lay in the north-western corner of Wembley U.D. The land included the area lying to the south of Kenton Road and just to the east of Kenton Station, and also Northwick Circle and Northwick Avenue; the area bounded by Watford Road, East Lane, and Harrow playing fields; and the 40 or so acre area which included Pebworth Road, just to the west of Watford Road. This last area was known as Section 8 of the estate (Watson, interview, 14.10.69). In the mid 1920s the estate office was in Kenton Road, the Spenser-Churchill site agent being a Mr Edgar Elliot. Kelly's Trade Directory, Middlesex (1926), p.649.

by no means developed all section of the estate himself. At least one large section, bounded by Watford Road, East Lane and the railway line, was sold to Comben & Wakeling Ltd., a local speculative housebuilding firm, which developed and built upon it themselves.¹ On the other hand, the area now known as Northwick Circle was undoubtedly his creation, as was the Sudbury Court Drive/Pebworth Road section of the estate. On these sections the landowner organized and financed the cutting and laying of builders' road and sewers, while the sub-divided frontages were sold to individual builders per foot frontage on the agreement that the dwellings built would conform to a certain density level and to a certain type and price. All plans and specifications in fact were to be submitted for approval to the vendors before building work on any dwelling could commence.² Hence, the landowner, through his agent, dictated the development over a large part of his estates: he determined the road pattern to be imposed on his land and the types of dwellings speculative housebuilders were able to erect. In this way, the importance of the speculative builder in the residential development of a sizeable area in Wembley U.D. became reduced to virtually nothing more than a responsibility for the superficial variation between the appearance of the individual dwelling units which constituted

1. PBI, Oct. 1934, p.476. An aerial photograph of the half completed Sudbury Court Estate may be seen in an advertisement for the Planet Building Society in PBI, May 1933, p.iv. While an aerial photograph of the completed estate may be found in Coppock and Prince, ed. op. cit. Plate 15.

2. Watson, interview, 14.10.69.

the suburban fabric of the area.

The third example found where the landowner played an active part in the residential development of his land was also in Middlesex: in Whitton within the south-western suburbs. Here is an example of a landowner, already utilising his land (approximately 125 acres) intensively, for market gardening, sensing the potential profitability of developing, and building houses on his land. To this end Barker, the market gardener, formed a limited company (Cranbridge Estates Ltd.) in partnership with a local housebuilder; Barker supplying the land and probably much of the finance while the housebuilder provided the building and organizational knowledge required for the development. The partnership in fact broke up part-way through the enterprise and Barker was forced to employ another builder to complete the estate, but it still remains a clear example where a landowner of an area of perhaps 125 acres was totally involved in the residential development of his land in the search for profit.

In this case Barker was clearly able to direct the development of his land in the way he considered would be most profitable at the level of risk he was willing to take. However in theory at least it was also possible for those landowners who were less inclined to undertake such risks and chose not to develop their land themselves, to influence and direct its development after it had passed from their hands. This could be achieved by the inclusion of some form of

covenant in the sale agreement, or in cases where the owner died, in the terms of a will. On the other hand, the extent that during the interwar years such covenants were effective, once the land had passed out of the direct control of the landowner, is uncertain. The reform of the law of real property during the early and mid-1920s made the annulment by heirs of any restrictive covenant laid down on land in a will, a relatively straightforward process.¹ And it is probable that in the majority of cases where covenants which referred to the form and the type of development allowed to take place on the land sold were written into the actual land sale agreements, their terms were so broad that they were unimportant as a serious constraint on the purchasing developer's and/or housebuilder's freedom of decision. Certainly it was not a point which aroused any passion among the individuals interviewed.²

From the evidence researched it appears probable that the impact of the interwar landowner on, and his involvement in, the actual development of his land was limited.³ But

1. The heirs of Alfred Bean Esq. of Bexley, Kent, used the new legislation to good effect in this respect. This freed them to put up the Danson Estate for sale. Lewisham Public Library, Local History Collection, File No. 3897. The Danson Estate, Kent sold under the Will of Alfred Bean Esq. Sales Particulars; See also below pp. 54-5.

2. And this is an 'industry' in which individuals tend (and tended) to be extremely sensitive to interference with the free-running of their activities, especially when such regulations were thought anachronistic.

3. For some thoughts on the role of the landowner in suburban growth, see below Appendix 7.1.

before more common categories of land developers and forms of land development for housebuilding purposes is considered one point should be made since, as can be seen from the above discussion, the statement made at the beginning of this chapter concerning the existence between the wars of two broad land development processes is not entirely accurate.¹ It is inaccurate inasmuch as there was a third, intermediate, form of land development in addition to the two forms mentioned. Broadly speaking therefore there were cases where speculative developers developed virgin land for sale in plots or lots at a price per foot frontage; cases where speculative housebuilders were usurping the functions of the nineteenth century type of land developer, and were responsible for both the development of, and the construction of dwellings on, land which they had purchased in a virgin state; and intermediate to these two, cases where speculative land developers either organized the construction of dwellings on all or part of the land which they had developed, or alternatively contracted a builder to do so on the basis of a price per dwelling built, either for labour and materials, or labour only.

In reality, of course, many of the boundaries between these distinctions will have certainly been blurred. A land developer who decided to build, or to have built, dwellings on a piece of land which he had developed himself was in practice carrying out the same functions as the speculative housebuilder

1. See above pp. 419-20.

who built an estate on a piece of virgin land. Alternatively there were cases where 'bona fide' speculative housebuilders sold to other builders plots or blocks of land, on estates, which they had laid out with roads etc., and on which they had built dwellings. Clearly these builders were performing the functions of a speculative land developer.¹ It is convenient, and also clearer, however, to consider these more common forms of land development for housebuilding purposes under the three broad headings already noted.

(b) The speculative land developer.

During the interwar years it appears that firms of surveyors and estate agents were frequently involved in this form of activity. The evidence collected is unfortunately insufficient to suggest the degree of their prominence in this form of activity, but it does indicate that at some time during the period such firms had been active in most parts of the OSA. For example, in Perivale, Ealing, a firm of surveyors were developing an area sufficient for approximately 1,500 dwellings;² near Ewell in Surrey, a firm of estate agents were selling plots and frontages on a developed estate of approximately 320 acres;³ while in Ilford in Essex, a firm of London agents had acquired an area of approximately 300 acres with the intention of developing it and selling it off in approximately 3,500 separate house plots.⁴ Between the mid

1. Interviews with Anon., 27.10.69; Jones, 10.10.69; Seaton, 23.1.70.

2. NB (HS), March 1936, p.10.

3. PB, April 1933, pp. 94-6.

4. Ibid, p.183.

'twenties and the mid 'thirties, the Golders Green estate agent, P.H. Edwards Ltd., was developing estates in the Mill Hill, Sudbury, Northolt, Kenton and Queensbury areas; while more geographically widespread, from the later 1920s up to the outbreak of war, the Romford firm of Hilbery Chaplin & Co. and an estate development company, Hilbery Chaplin Ltd., were developing estates of various sizes in Romford, Hornchurch, Enfield, Southgate, Sudbury, Southall, and Hillingdon.

Hilbery Chaplin Ltd. were also active in Kenton, where they purchased the 100 acre or more Stag Lane Aerodrome from the De Havilland Aircraft Company, which they developed for over 1,200 dwellings.¹ Three other examples have been discovered in Southgate where the Monkfrith and Osidge estates were developed during the 1930s by a local estate agent and surveyor; the Oakwood Park Estate was managed by a Palmers Green agent, William Owen-Ward; and the Arnos Estate was developed and managed for its owners by Farrows, a West End firm of land and estate agents.² Just two more examples will be cited, both of which indicate that agents at this time were willing to look far wider than their own particular locality for development opportunities. During the 1920s a City firm purchased and laid out the area of land just to the south-west of Woodford Station (London and North Eastern Railway),³ while late in the following decade a Harrow firm of estate agents and surveyors applied for and secured development

1. PBJ; June 1933, p.137.

2. Davies, interview, 21.1.70.

3. Jaggers, interview, 20.10.69; Charles E. Lee, Seventy Years of the Central (1970), p.30.

permission from Hayes and Harlington UDC for approximately 120 acres of land in Yeading Lane, Hayes, although at that stage no definite building proposals had been made.¹

These then are just a few examples of the activities of land and estate agents and surveyors in this sphere. It is clear that they represent only a very small proportion of the total activity by this group in the OSA. What are, however, not so clear are the stimuli active behind the estate development activities of such firms, in particular to what extent they were developing estates entirely for their own profit, and to what extent they were acting on behalf of a client or clients? This area is likely to remain cloudy until at least one, and preferably more than one, such firm is willing to allow the study of their records and activities and/or the records of firms no longer in existence come to light. However, it has been possible to uncover various pieces of evidence which hopefully will advance to some degree our knowledge on this question.

In various parts of the outer suburbs evidence has been uncovered of firms which laid out estates with drains, sewers, water, gas, electricity, roads and kerbs, for a fee paid to them by an individual or syndicate who were financing the whole project. During the first half of the 1930s Atkinson & Marler, a Ewell firm of estate agents and surveyors designed, laid out, and sold plots and frontages "on behalf of the purchasers of the site."² More explicit evidence on this point has been

1. NB (HS), May 1938, p.10.

2. PB, April 1933, p.94.

derived from an interview with the senior partner in an Essex firm of surveyors.¹ As surveyors, he and his partner were employed on a number of occasions to organize, design and develop estates, and to sell off the resulting frontages for clients, both individuals and groups of individuals, who wished to invest and speculate in land development. For this service the surveyors charged a fee of approximately 5% of the total cost of the project. Their professional code however prevented this firm from taking a leading financial role in the speculative aspect of the developments, neither did it allow them to build houses or develop estates for themselves. In consequence during the late 1920s the principals formed at least one limited estate development company. In the legal sense this company was entirely separate from the professional firm, although of course the identity of the principals and directors of the two concerns was the same. In many ways this development company performed similar functions to the surveying firm, but it allowed the principals far greater freedom of business involvement in the developments undertaken. Where previously the principals may have been able to have had a moderate private interest, as directors of a limited company they were able to take a leading role in any investment where they considered a project to be suitable profitable. And in cases where the private investors or investment syndicates decided to form a limited company for the development of a specific estate, it was possible, and in fact became quite common, for at least one of the directors of the development

1. Anon, interview, 5.1.70.

company to join the board. In this way the partners of this particular firm of surveyors were able to find and organize adequate finance for fairly widespread estate development activity, to reap the pecuniary benefit of actual financial involvement in the projects, and yet not compromise their position as professional surveyors, or the position of their professional practice while doing so.

The only other firm for which it has been possible to uncover direct evidence of agents working on behalf of private investors or syndicates is P.H.Edwards Ltd., a Golders Green firm of estate agents and surveyors, who were active in various parts of the north western suburbs during this period. In both Stanmore and Kenton, Edwards laid out and managed estates for investors. The Glebe Estate in Kenton was developed from the later 1920s until approximately 1933-4, and had frontage sufficient for something over 500 dwellings at a density of between 10 and 12 dwellings per acre. The estate in Stanmore on the other hand was considerably larger. The land was purchased from St. Bartholomew's Hospital late in 1929,¹ by the Hughes Syndicate. In all, this purchase included an area of approximately 250 acres at a cost of just over £250 per acre, and they were also granted the option of an adjoining area of 95½ acres which in the event they failed to take up. From the account of the activities of P.H.Edwards Ltd. during these years given by the firm's sales director, it would appear that Edwards himself was a leading member of this

1. The Times, 4 Oct. 1929, p.11.

syndicate, while his firm organized the laying-out and the sale of the estate in frontages and plots. ¹

From the examples of these two firms, it appears likely that in some areas a number of estate agents and surveyors were performing the function of attracting, organizing and directing private funds into the sphere of land and residential development. At times it is probable that their role in the attraction of funds was passive; that is, where individuals with money interested in speculating in land development approached the surveyors and agents on their own initiative. On the other hand, once land development had shown itself to be a profitable form of activity it is almost certain that the more enterprising surveyors and agents began to take a more active role, not only suggesting land development to individuals looking for profitable investment for their funds, but also introducing interested individuals to each other with the intention of forming syndicates, and in this way increasing the size and the scope of possible projects.

The financial rewards accruing to the estate agent for his actions in such operations were at least threefold. Firstly, his firm would be paid a professional fee for organizing and managing the design and the laying out of the estate, and the resale of the land in its improved form. Secondly, as a member of the syndicate itself, he would be sharing in the profits, if any, which resulted from the

1. Anon, interview, 26.1.70.

speculation.¹

And thirdly, it was the practice for such firms to demand of the builders buying frontage and plots on such estates, the agency rights on the sale of any dwellings built on that site; a clause to this effect invariably being included in all sales agreements made for the improved land.

As with most other aspects of the transfer of, and speculative involvement in, land it has been possible to discover little or no specific or detailed information on the identity of the individuals who were interested in investing in speculative land development, whether they were investing as individuals or in a group or syndicate. The estate agents and surveyors interviewed showed a high degree of reticence when probes were made as to the type of individuals interested in such investment. The most specific example cited was that of an estate in the northwestern suburbs which

1. One agent suggested that a net profit of 15% on a land development in the late 1920s and early 1930s in Greater London was considered to be reasonable, and more important, not uncommon. This particular agent had experience of land development in both the northern and northwestern suburbs, but wishes to remain anonymous. In 1938, in a case before an Arbitration Court, in which the compulsory purchase of 24.949 acres of land by Greenwich BC from a building firm which was reselling the land privately was considered, a surveyor called as a witness considered that a land developer active in the Greenwich/Blackheath area at that time should expect a profit margin of 25% on his investment, and stated that he had seen high profit margins made by land developers even though the development risks involved were negligible. The surveyor agreed that the margin of profit obtained depended to a great extent on the ripeness of the land. NHB, Aug. 1938, pp. 26, 28.

P.H.Edwards Ltd. developed for two engineers who had retired to England after many years' involvement in railway construction in Nigeria.¹ Although no other investors were specifically cited, it would appear that one important type of person interested in this form of speculation could broadly be characterized as being retired and having previously been involved in some form of commercial activity. What is perhaps more certain, however, is that where individuals formed into groups for the purpose of speculative land development, the groups were rarely very large. A syndicate of four or five persons would appear to have been considered as sizeable.²

Clearly, therefore, in certain areas estate agents and surveyors could be, and were, important in the conversion of land from a virgin state into land prepared for building operations. It is clear that at times they were working in a professional capacity for investors, while also at other times they were taking a leading part in the organization of the funds of investors interested in the profitability of land development. However, by no means all the estates developed by estate agents during these years had the finance of a syndicate or an individual investor behind them. Over the Greater London OSA there must have been any number of developed estates between 1926 and the early 1930s which

1. Anon, interview, 21.1.70. It is interesting that Charles Henry Blake, the example of a Victorian estate developer cited by Prof. Dyos, had spent his work in the Indian Civil Service and had involved himself in speculative development and building enterprises only after his return to England on retirement. Dyos (1968), op. cit. p.647.

2. Anon, interview, 5.1.70 and 21.1.70.

resulted from the enterprise, the planning, and the financial background of individual estate agents operating within a relatively limited locality. Although it is to be admitted that as a rule such estates were somewhat smaller than, for example, that developed by the Hughes Syndicate in Stanmore during the early 1930s. Two such examples are to be found adjacent to each other in the Southgate area of north London. These, the Monkfrith Estate and the Osidge Estate, were both developed by Hugh Davies, an estate agent who first came to the area in 1933, drawn by the newly opened Underground extension through Southgate to Cockfosters. On both estates Davies personally raised the finance required for purchase and the laying of roads and services by borrowing.¹

Just as not all estate agents or surveyors who were active in land development were involved in investment syndicates of any shape or form, so by no means all syndicates interested in the profitability of land development were involved with estate agents or surveyors. One such syndicate was for example active in the Harrow² and the Ruislip/Northwood Hills³ areas between the mid 1920s and the later

1. Unfortunately Mr Davies would not reveal the sources of the borrowing, however almost certainly one source was a local bank.

2. A substantial part of the area bounded by Pinner Road, Parkside Way and Headstone Drive, and lying between North Harrow Station and Harrow and Wealdstone Station. It is probable that the area between Marlborough Hill and College Road was not part of this estate. Beckett, interview, 18.11.69.

3. An estate just off Clack Lane, Ruislip (Bldr, 22 Dec. 1933); the estate just opposite Northwood Hills Station which includes Rochester Road, Norwich Road and Highland Road. Interview with Mr J. Johnson, formerly Head of Development Control London Borough of Hillingdon Planning Department, on 17.2.70.

1930s under the name of Headstone Manor Estates Ltd. This land development company appears to have been formed by businessmen from Harrow and St. Albans.¹ Neither the number involved nor their identity is known for certain, although a fact revealed during one interview may spread some light on the latter point at least.² It appears that during the mid 1930s a prominent Ealing housebuilder purchased an area of the northern section of the Harrow Weald estate from Headstone Manor Estates Ltd. The land had sufficient frontage for approximately 130 dwellings and cost the housebuilder £17,000. The interesting point, however, is that the contract was made with H.B.Silver, a builder who had been erecting speculative houses in the northwestern suburbs in and around Harrow throughout the period, and who in 1937 was the Treasurer of The Housebuilders Association of Great Britain, the primary association of speculative housebuilders within Greater London during the 1930s.³ It would therefore seem reasonable to suggest that here was an example of a prominent speculative housebuilder, who, in addition to building under his own name, as H.B.Silver Ltd. (Builders) and Silver Estates Ltd.,⁴ was also active as a member, and perhaps a leading member, of a land development syndicate concerned with developing virgin land and selling off the 'improved' acreage

1. Interviews with Beckett, 18.11.69 and J.Johnson, 17.2.70.

2. Anon, interview, 21.1.70.

3. NHB, Dec. 1937, p.33.

4. H.B.Silver Ltd. obtained building approval for 168 houses on an estate in Harrow Weald in 1934 and for an estate of over 500 dwellings in Hillingdon. PBJ, Jan. 1934, p.294; NHB, May 1937, p.32.

at a price per foot frontage.¹

Up to this point the implication has been that land developers, whether as companies or individuals, were interested solely in selling their land at a price per foot frontage. In fact, it is probably accurate to suggest that this was the most common approach adopted by such developers, but it was by no means always the case, particularly where the area involved in the development was of any size. The case of the land development company H.R. & P. (London) Ltd. provides a good example of such an exception. This particular company was developing an area of approximately 280 acres in Kenton, Middlesex, during the early 1930s. By the end of 1932 in fact, the estate was well advanced, with over 800 dwellings having been built on it. By this date the company had produced an overall estate plan specifying the areas prepared for housebuilding, the areas already developed, areas allocated for open space and playing fields, and a site for a school; the main thoroughfare through the estate had been widened and laid as a road. Of the unbuilt area of the estate, the developers declared themselves to be ". . . always willing to negotiate for the sale of land to builders, either with road made, or at a price per acre."²

Here then was an example of a speculative land development company which in addition to the more regular activity of

1. For a further discussion of the builder as a land developer, see below pp. 456-61.

2. PB., Feb. 1933, p.42.

selling 'improved' land was attempting on other sections of the estate to reap speculative profits by acting purely as a land speculator by reselling those sections while still virgin and leaving the responsibility of the laying out of the land with the purchasers, whether as developers or housebuilders, in the way they considered to be most profitable. The speculative profit in such cases was derived from the higher price per acre that the individual virgin sections could command at the time of resale relative to the price paid by the development company in the original land purchase. This increase could have been the result of a number of factors: the increasing demand for and scarcity of building land within this area between the original purchase and the resale; the proximity of the housing development which had taken place on other parts of the estate during this period; the smaller areas of land which were involved during the resale; the making up of the more major roads in the area, such as Kenton Lane, this increasing the possibility of service from road transport near the land; and, in the case of this particular estate, the opening of the intermediate station at Belmont in 1932 on the London and North Western Railway branch line which ran between Stanmore and Harrow, improving dramatically the transport facilities in that area. All these factors could have been influential. It is unfortunate that there is no way in which the quantitative importance of such practice by land developers active in the Greater London OSA can be established. All that can be said is that land developers were more likely to adopt the dual

role of 'land developer' and 'land speculator' were the areas under their control were relatively large (perhaps over 150 acres), and that land development was just one of the profitable options which lay open to speculative land developers in the OSA between the wars when considering how best to distribute the land in their possession.

Before continuing to consider the activities of speculative land developers who were in some way also directly responsible for the construction of dwellings on all or part of the land under their development, the existence of other parties interested in land development as such will very briefly be noted.¹

Firstly there was that "discreet civilian figure",² the solicitor. As in the Victorian period, the solicitor was one of the most obscure characters involved in speculative land development and housebuilding between the wars; and this in a form of business activity which appears to have attracted a great number of diverse and obscure characters. Prof. Dyos has suggested the importance of the solicitor as a means by which capital was able to move into the housebuilding industry during the later nineteenth century. He also notes that examples of solicitors involved in land speculations of their own were to be found in west London during the 1860s.³

1. The brevity of the consideration of these parties should in no way deny their possible significance in this sphere of activity. It is rather the consequence of the problems involved in the location and the collection of specific examples of their activity which necessitates this.

2. A term used by Prof. Dyos in Dyos (1968), op. cit. p.643.

3. Dyos (1968), op. cit. pp. 688-9.

Between the wars only one suggestion of the direct involvement of a solicitor in speculative land development has been located, at Carshalton, Surrey, near to Carshalton Beeches Station.¹ It would appear that this particular solicitor was active during the 1920s and, by utilizing money left in his care by his clients, purchased an area of land lying virtually adjacent to the station, and laid out a modest-sized estate. As was customary, he divided the frontages into plots which he then sold either outright, or more commonly on a deposit and a signed agreement, to small building tradesmen who, often possessing little capital of their own, were also more than willing to take up his offer of loan facilities with which to finance the construction of the proposed dwellings. Examples such as this, however, are likely to have been rare. The law Society would no doubt have frowned upon the unprofessional nature of such a direct involvement by a solicitor in a speculative land development project, no matter how profitable; as no doubt would the legal community local to such a development. On the other hand, it is quite probable that a more direct involvement would have been much more common with money left in the care of solicitors being made available to individuals interested in speculative land development or housebuilding projects.

Secondly, there existed private individuals who had capital and the interest gain from that capital, to invest in estate development. Some such individuals were active

1. Anon, interview, 13.11.69.

with the direct aid or collaboration of an estate agent or surveyor; others formed themselves into some kind of syndicate with others of like mind. However, evidence has been found of at least one private individual who undertook the financial risk and responsibility for a number of developments, primarily on his own initiative, without a great degree of professional advice. A Mr Taylor, known to have been active in the Sutton and Carshalton districts of Surrey, was one such financier-developer who involved himself not only in the physical task of speculative land development (the road construction, where required, being contracted out to a firm of civil engineers), but also concerned himself in land speculation deals, without concerning himself in the land's eventual development.¹ His activities in this sphere did not entirely exclude the use of estate agents, but he did not confine himself solely to the use of any one agent. Over the period he used a number of agents: to keep in touch with the 'land market', and, initially at least, to find builders willing to buy from him either land which he had had developed, or virgin land which he wished to resell. It would appear that the size of the estates in which he was interested was not large, probably none was above 30 acres, and the majority would have been well below. Broadly speaking, it appears that he dealt with roughly the same housebuilding firms throughout the period, assuming, of course, that they

1. I am most grateful to Mr G. Edser, formerly of Edser & Brown Ltd. (Sutton), for the limited information I have on the activities of Mr Taylor.

were able to remain solvent. Like the solicitor at Carshalton Beeches, it would appear that Taylor was most anxious to lend money to the housebuilders buying his land, and like that same solicitor, it would appear that for a number of the builders concerned the cost of this private finance was a little too high. This was not, of course, always the case and it would appear that firms content not to over-extend their business activities relative to their financial means were able to make profitable use of such private sources. Edser & Brown Ltd. of Sutton dealt successfully with Taylor for over a decade right up to the outbreak of the war as a customer for both land and finance. ¹

Thirdly, and lastly, there is evidence that certain speculative builders themselves were not entirely uninterested in the potential profitability of land development and the resale of developed land to other builders, whether this was intended at the time of the initial land purchase or not. Already the activities of H.B.Silver have been considered. Being the leading technical partner in a syndicate, such as Headstone Manor Estates Ltd., was obviously one successful method by which a speculative builder might become involved. ² A similar path was trodden by the Lancashire housebuilder, William Lancaster, in Ealing, Sudbury and Isleworth in Middlesex, and as far south as Kingston in Surrey. ³

1. Edser, interview, 16.10.69.

2. See above p. 450. Unfortunately it was not possible to discover any information on the extent to which H.B.Silver was also financially involved.

3. See above pp. 402-4.

Lancaster, as one of the three founding partners in the firm Clifford & Clifford Ltd. and its associated company, Clifford Estates Ltd., involved himself in the purchase and development of land not only for use by his own speculative house-building firm, R. Lancaster & Sons Ltd., but also for resale in an improve state to other builders, many of which were also from Lancashire.¹ Clifford Estates Ltd. were given the sole agency for the sale of all dwellings constructed on these estates. However, while it is certain that Lancaster was a partner in Clifford & Clifford Ltd., the relationship between, and the individual importance of, the various characters involved in the development activities is not altogether clear, although from the limited amount of evidence which has been made available to the author it would appear that Lancaster was directly responsible for the negotiation and purchase of much of the large Perivale Park Estate in Ealing, as indeed he was for its development with roads and services during the early 1930s.² The picture is further clouded by the fact that towards the end of the 1930s Lancaster sold out his share in both Clifford & Clifford Ltd. and Clifford Estates Ltd.³ But in spite of the lack of clarity in the evidence it would appear that here was an example of a speculative housebuilder who intentionally and successfully combined the functions of the speculative housebuilder and speculative land developer. Moreover, by the mid 1930s, Lancaster's entrepreneurship had

1. See above p. 404.

2. My thanks must go to Mr G.D.Lancaster for allowing me to examine the few remaining papers concerning land transfers and development carried out by his father.

3. Lancaster, interview, 22.1.70.

gone a stage further when he contracted the whole of the actual house construction process of the southern side of his business to the firm Jacob Ward & Son Ltd., who had been in charge of all the carpentry and joinery work on the houses he had built in Sudbury during the late 1920s.¹

In the case of other firms for which evidence has been found, the land development aspect of the speculative house-builder's enterprise does not appear to have been so pre-conceived. Two important examples have been uncovered: the first concerning two of the larger and better known interwar speculative builders in south London; the second, a medium-sized speculative builder active in the western suburbs. Some time between 1933 and 1935 G.T.Crouch Ltd. purchased a large area of land in Morden, an area with the Battersea New Cemetary adjacent to the northwest and Morden Park adjacent to the north east. The estate was named after the latter, and G.T.Crouch Ltd. laid it out with the intention of building upon it themselves. However, for some reason Crouch considered the area too large to develop profitably on his own and so decided to resell a section of the estate, at that time partially developed, in order to reduce the area of his own housing enterprise to presumably what he considered to be nearer an optimum size. Thus in 1936 the sale of the estate furthest from Morden Underground Station was transacted with Wates Ltd. of Streatham, consisting of frontage sufficient for

1. For other information on this remarkably enterprising and energetic housebuilder see pp. 400-404, 623, 624, 301.

of Uxbridge, in Hayes. Purchased between 1927 and 1931, this estate was considerably larger than the one in Uxbridge. It had an area sufficient for well over 1,200 dwellings, of which the builder resold, in a developed form, areas sufficient in total for less than 100 dwellings. The bulk of the sale took place during the financial year 1937-8, that is six to seven years after the annexation and purchase of the last section of the estate, and was to two small builders, C.J.A.Mead and G.W.Brooks, who bought the land for £5.10.0. and £5 per foot frontage respectively.

Only a very small number of examples of the interest shown by some speculative housebuilders in land development have been presented. Although quantitatively the evidence on this is sparse, it has revealed examples which to some extent indicate different approaches to such enterprise, different scales of operation, and, which suggest that different housebuilders probably had different reasons and motives for choosing to sell the land in an improved state rather than carrying through with the more usual speculative housebuilding process. How general such practice was among speculative housebuilders, however, must for the moment remain a mystery. Certainly in any number of cases it is not, and will not be, possible to draw too fine a distinction between the builder and the developer, a point which will be amply illustrated below during the consideration firstly of the 'developer-builders', ¹ and then the 'field-ranging house-builders'. ²

1. I.e. an individual or firm involved in speculative land development, but also interested in the possibilities of building dwellings on at least one part of the estate.

2. See below p. 476.

(c) The speculative land developer-builder.

The step from the role of land developer to that of housebuilder was not great. Indeed, particularly during periods of good demand for housing, the incentive for speculative land developers to complete the residential development process by erecting dwellings on at least part of the land they had 'improved' must have been substantial. It is probable that many land developers during the 1920s and 1930s saw and exploited the potential profitability of taking such a step. This appears to have been especially true where the developers were estate agents and surveyors acting either for themselves or for clients, although only a very few appear to have gone as far as to build the whole of any of their developments. This point can be seen as a first broad distinction between various speculative 'developer-builders'.

One concern which eventually was responsible for the building of all the dwellings on its development was the Haling Down Estate Company, the Croydon estate development company studied by Dr R.C.W.Cox.¹ Although initially intending to sell off the estate in developed frontage lots, the company's failure to have sold any of their land by 1914 led them to a reconsideration of their policy and to a decision to erect dwellings themselves. This the company did between 1922 and 1940 by contracting out all the construction work both labour and material, at first, between 1922 and 1934, to a builder

1. R.C.W.Cox, Some Aspects of the Urban Development of Croydon 1870-1940 (unpublished M.A.thesis, University of Leicester, 1966), pp. 97-120. Subsequently referred to as Cox (1966).

named Lee, and later, between 1934 and 1940, to Reed & Co. (Estates) Ltd. (R.A.Reed Ltd. of Wallington). In this way the Haling Down Estate was covered with houses, bungalows, and maisonnettes at a completion rate of between 9 and 38 dwellings a year.

Examples such as this do not appear to have been common in Greater London between the wars, but on the other hand, the example of the Haling Down Estate Co. is by no means an isolated one. Evidence has been found of land developers and land development companies in Ruislip, in Hillingdon, and in Enfield, which were responsible for the construction of all the dwellings to be built on their development. For example, on part of what had been Old Oak Farm in Hillingdon, Standard Properties (Hillingdon) Ltd., a subsidiary company formed by Standard Properties Ltd. of Astor House, Aldwych, WC2 to organize and bear the speculative responsibility for this enterprise, organized the laying out of sufficient developed frontage for approximately 840 dwellings. The company did not construct these dwellings themselves however, but instead chose to let all the building work on them to a contract builder, A. Pascall & Son Ltd. of Down Place, Hammersmith.¹ Similarly in Ruislip during the early 1930s, another London development company, The Ruislip Development Company Ltd. of 33, Madox Street, W1 had laid out the Ruislip Garden Estate for over 800 dwellings,² agreeing a

1. Bldr, 28 July 1933.

2. The estate adjacent and to the west of Ruislip Gardens Station, including Stafford Road to the north and Clyfford Road to the south.

building contract for the first part of the scheme with J.H.Harris & Son of Morris Avenue, Ilford. ¹

The last of the examples to be noted here was to be found in western Enfield and took rather a different form from the other three. On Cotswold Way between 1938 and 1940 the Southgate estate agent and surveyor, Hugh Davies & Co., organized the development of a relatively small site. Unlike the other three examples cited however, Davies had a much more direct interest in the actual construction of the dwellings. Through his own building company, London & Suburban Homesteads Ltd., he organized the supply of both finance and building materials for the project, also paying directly the wages of the labour force involved. However, like Haling Downs Estate Co., Ruislip Development Co. Ltd., and Standard Properties (Hillingdon) Ltd., Hugh Davies did not personally have the experience or the technical knowledge required to organize and carry out the actual construction of the dwellings. To take control of this work he directly employed a local architect-builder, H.A.Nash, as the building manager. ² When outbreak of war interrupted this particular project London & Suburban Homesteads Ltd. had only completed 48 houses. ³

A second, and perhaps more important, broad distinction

1. J.H.Harris & Son won this contract on the basis of a competitive tender (Bldr, Jan. 1934). Between 1934 and 1939 Harris completed over 400 dwellings on the estate, over half of which had been completed during the first two years. Ruislip-Northwood Register.

2. Davies, interview, 26.1.70.

3. Enfield Register.

may also be seen between the various speculative interwar developer-builders active in the Greater London OSAs. Indeed it may already have been noticed by the reader, for it concerns the way in which the house construction aspect of developer-builders' activities was organized. Few if any of these land developers were housebuilders as such and it can be imagined that even the agents and surveyors active in this sphere had, at the very most, only limited knowledge of the organizational and the more technical and practical aspects of the house construction process. Thus it was necessary for almost all speculative land developers who felt that the potential speculative profit from housebuilding was worth the risks involved, to purchase in some way their knowledge of construction. Broadly, they were faced with two possibilities. Firstly, like Haling Down Estate Co., Ruislip Development Co. Ltd., and Standard Properties (Hillingdon) Ltd., a land developer could let the construction of a group of dwellings to a housebuilder, or perhaps a number of housebuilders, either on a labour only or a labour and materials contract. The alternative would be to employ directly a skilled craftsman, a housebuilder, or perhaps an architect, as a building manager or a general foreman and thus organize the actual housebuilding process internally. Each of these alternatives, from both the housebuilder's and the developer's point of view will be considered briefly in turn by reference to a number of specific examples.

On the evidence which has been obtained it would appear that, in general, those land-developers who wished also to

build on their land preferred to adopt the former of the alternatives mentioned. Of course from the contracted house-builder's point of view, the fact that the developer chose to agree a building contract with him meant that he was not directly involved in any of the speculative aspects of the project, nor did he require the financial basis necessary if he were speculating on his own. On the other hand, such contract housebuilders were not entirely divorced from the risks and uncertainties involved in speculative enterprise. Indeed, even apart from the direct and almost certainly adverse, impact which any insolvency of the developer would have on the stability and fortunes of the contracted firm, such firms would be required to build the dwellings concerned at a pace dictated by the developer, which in turn would be related to the level of the demand for those dwellings at any particular time. Furthermore the developer was in practice often able to off-load at least some part of the financial burdens and risks involved in any project on to the contracted builder, normally by delaying the timing of the payments agreed in the contract.¹ In such a situation the builder was normally powerless, especially if, as was often the case, his firm was relatively small and only meagrely capitalized,

1. Normally payment under such an agreement would have been made on the basis of the stages completed, either for labour or labour and materials. Naturally if a developer should fail to make a payment, or a number of payments, for the completion of some stages of the work for any reason, the contracted builder would somehow have had to find sufficient funds, normally involving him in extending his own credit, to cover his own solvency between the time he made the initial outlay and the time he eventually received his payment. This could of course, and in fact normally did, increase his own costs.

being tied to the developer by the debts incurred with both bank and merchants while constructing the unpaid-for section of the contract.

In all, therefore, such contract work was for the small builder by no means free from the element of risk. In addition, it would appear that, especially during the early years of the 1930s, in order to obtain work, builders and craftsmen, some of whom had migrated to London from the provinces in search of employment, were willing to offer developers exceptionally low quotations on such projects even though it would leave them with barely any profit margin, if any at all, for themselves. Three interviewees independently gave strikingly similar accounts of builders on one particular estate in the northwestern suburbs.¹ Naturally enough there was a reluctance to give more concrete information, but one specific example was given. In 1931 a young builder left the unemployment of South Wales to search for work in London, but instead of work he found that the employment situation in the industry in the London area at this time was not much better than in South Wales. Consequently, although he knew that the contract would be difficult to complete at the price agreed between himself and the developer, he agreed to take on the construction (labour only) of a group of 24 dwellings. After completing a number of the houses, the builder found himself unable to carry out his side of the contract at the agreed price, and he eventually disappeared. The remaining houses

1. Interviews with Swanne, 29.10.69; Watson, 14.10.69; Anon, 1.10.69.

were built and completed by another Welsh builder who was employed directly by the developer as a general foreman. ¹

It would appear that not all builders who undertook this form of contract were small, nor were they all willing to undertake the task under such conditions and on such fine profit margins. In 1933 John W. Laing (now Sir John) of John Laing & Son Ltd. gave an interview to the leading journal of the building and contracting industry in which he explained how his firm had entered the sphere of speculative housebuilding after carrying out a contract to build houses for a developer. ² Here then is an example of a building firm, already a sizeable contractor by the early 1920s, which undertook housebuilding contracts for private developers.

The activities of G.T.Crouch Ltd. provide a second example, even though at this time the firm was still below the size it was later to attain. It appears that during the earlier 1930s Crouch would provide a building and sales service on contract for estate developers or development companies. A number of times the firm worked under the control of an architect, but not infrequently, in order to avoid professional fees, developers would place responsibility for

1. Anon, interview, 1.10.69. The informant on this point was a speculative builder who had purchased 12 plots of developed land which lay opposite the area of land on which this builder was working under contract. He learnt of the builder's predicament from conversations with both the builder himself and the builder who later took on the job of general foreman. From the latter he also learnt of the hurried nature of the workmanship on the houses erected by the contracted builder, a probable manifestation of such contracts.

2. NB, Oct. 1933, p.82.

both design and supervision in Crouch's hands.¹ However, these are only two examples, and the general picture built up from the interviews and conversations undertaken does tend to suggest that it was unusual to find the larger building firms carrying out such work, especially where estate agents or surveyors were involved. More characteristic do appear to have been the individual craftsmen and the smaller building firms.

Before turning to look at the other form by which private developer-builders were able to, and did, approach the problem of hiring housebuilding knowledge, it is perhaps important to recognize that the way such developers chose to organize the building contracts on their estates tended to vary to some extent. It has already been seen above that in each of the cases cited (i.e. Ruislip Development Co. Ltd., Standard Properties (Hillingdon) Ltd., and Haling Downs Estate Co.) the developer appears to have preferred to use only one builder at a time and to agree contracts for large sections of the estate, if not all of it.² When the estate agents, Hickman & Bishop of Kingston began developing and building under the name of Hygienic Houses Ltd. in 1934 they also decided to adopt this practice, and on their first development at Chertsey they contracted a Hounslow builder, Davis, to build all dwellings (terraced bungalows) at a labour and materials price for each dwelling completed. Although this was Davis' only contract with the firm, the practice was continued throughout.

1. Jones, interview, 10.10.69.

2. See above pp. 462-4.

the 1930s; and thus up until the outbreak of war a local Kingston firm of carpenters and joiners, Woods & Williamson, organized under contract the whole construction process on all of the firm's developments, on a labour only basis. ¹

The estate agents and developers Hilbery Chaplin Ltd. also preferred to employ just one builder to organize the construction of dwellings on any one of their estates at any one time. It would seem that if the builder was known by the developers to be reliable he would have been given a contract for the construction of all the dwellings it was proposed to erect on a particular estate with the freedom to organize the construction in any way he pleased. However there was always a clause in his contract which gave the developers the right to terminate the contract if for some reason his work was unsatisfactory. ² Where such a housebuilder was not known to the developer, but had won the contract by virtue of the price at which he was prepared to undertake the work, it was normal procedure for this particular firm to agree an initial contract for perhaps no more than 30 dwellings. Even in such cases however he would be the sole contracted housebuilder working on that particular estate. ³

Other developers on the other hand appear to have considered that a preferable, and perhaps also a more profitable,

1. Daniel, interviews, 1.11.69 and 7.11.69. In 1935 the firm changed its name to Hygienic Homes Ltd.

2. In this period at least, a formal signed contract was not necessarily a general feature of such an agreement. It appears that in many cases building agreements between developers and builders were of an oral nature.

3. Chaplin, interview, 5.1.70.

approach was to agree contracts with a number of builders and to have them working concurrently on a particular estate. The contracts given to individual builders by such developers tended to be relatively small: a common figure appears to have been in the region of 15 to 20 dwellings. On the Harrow Garden Village estate adjacent to Rayners Lane Underground Station for example, although Metropolitan Railway Country Estates Ltd. appears primarily to have contracted the construction of the dwellings sold under its name to A.E.A. Prouting Ltd. on a labour and material basis, the company also appears to have used at least two other building firms. In general the contracts agreed were for approximately 20 dwellings at a time. ¹

Another private developer who preferred to work in this way was the estate agent who financed and controlled the development of a 90 acre estate in Wealdstone (south of Locket Road) between 1929 and 1939. Part of the frontage of this estate was sold to speculative builders, one section in fact to New Ideal Homesteads Ltd. ² Over the rest of the area the residential development was completed by the developer himself, initially by contracting the whole house construction process out to three individual builders who worked concurrently on

1. Leathers, interview, 23.9.69. The company built on only a relatively small part of this 213 acre estate. By 1932, at least 12 builders had bought frontages of improved land from the company and were building speculative dwellings. Harrow Observer and Gazette, 15 April 1932, p.7.

2. Companies House, File No. 243565; Beckett, interview, 18.11.69.

different sections of the estate. ¹

From the evidence collected it appears probable that few developers had more than three or four builders working concurrently for them in this way. A larger number was not unknown however, and it appears that the estate agent and surveyor, P.H.Edwards, ² favoured employing a rather larger number of builders on his estates, often on rather smaller contracts. This was his practice on both the estates he organized for clients and those he organized for himself. ³

Broadly speaking, the alternative method by which developer-builders undertook housebuilding operations was by organizing the process internally and employing directly an individual with the knowledge and the experience required as a building manager or general foreman. By approaching the task in this way the developer assumed more closely the roles and the functions which were more traditionally ascribed to the 'field-ranging' speculative housebuilder in the process of

1. This was the only major development in which this particular developer was involved (Beckett, interview, 18.11.69). Mr Beckett considered it discrete not to divulge the name of his former employer to the author. No direct evidence as to his identity has come to hand, but in a copy of The Builder in late 1932 the following was found: "J.Searcy, 21, College Road, Harrow (estate agent) has erected 46 houses in Talbot Road and 64 houses in Locket Road (Builder: F.G.Smith of Harrow Weald)." (16 Nov. 1932). The development in question included both Talbot Road and parts of Locket Road. The answer to whether J.Searcy was the developer in question, and F.G.Smith one of the builders under contract to him, must for the moment remain unknown and must await further evidence.

2. I.e. through his companies P.H.Edwards Ltd., P.H.Edwards (Mill Hill) Ltd., P.H.Edwards (Golders Green) Ltd., P.H.Edwards (Kenton) Ltd.

3. Interviews with Davies, 26.1.70; Saunders, 1.10.69.

residential development,¹ with the exception of course, that not always did the land developer build over the whole area of his estate development. The developer-builders who decided on this alternative approach were therefore not only responsible for, and in control of, the initiative behind all phases of the land development process (i.e. after the release of the land by the landowner) and house construction, but they were also in direct control, via the building manager or general foreman, of the employment and organization of labour, and of material purchase, delivery and allocation. In addition they undertook the total financial burden involved in speculative house production. Clearly in such cases the agency through whom building knowledge and organizational ability was obtained became a direct part of the developer-builder's internal hierarchy.²

On the other hand the fact that the more typical speculative housebuilder invariably had a personal knowledge of the technical and organizational aspects of the house construction process and hence was able to play a part in this process, meant that the distinction between the

1. See Section 4(d) below.

2. In this way, of course, the developer-builder avoided having to pay the margin of profit which any firm agreeing to undertake building work on contract inevitably must have included in their quotation, and hence in the eventual agreed contract price. Although it is true that the employment of a building manager or general foreman would be an added cost with the second alternative considered, it would be most extraordinary if it amounted to a very high proportion of the profit margin which would normally have been required by a contract builder.

identities and structural form of the two types of house-building concerns, although blurred, still remained obvious.

It has been possible to discover evidence for only three examples, excluding Hugh Davies in Enfield ¹ where the developer-builder decided to adopt such an approach, and only one of these cases provides an entirely clear-cut example. This was on an estate in Sidcup, Kent. The developer in this case bought an area of land in Sidcup and contracted the road-laying and public services installation out to a firm of civil engineers. The house construction work on the estate was then organized by two bricklayers employed on a fixed weekly wage by the developer, while the completed dwellings were sold by a firm of estate agents. In this case therefore it is clear that the developer's contribution to the estate development was the provision of the finance and financial organization required plus, of course, the initial stimulus for the development. ²

The other two examples have already been mentioned in another context for they were both cases where the "developer-builder" had initially adopted one method of organizing their house construction operations, only later to change to the alternative. One was the Golders Green estate agent and surveyor, P.H.Edwards. On one of the estates being developed

1. See above pp. 462-4.

2. Whyte, interview, 16.10.69. Whyte's firm worked as sub-contract plumbers on a number of dwellings on this particular estate. According to Whyte, previous to this employment the bricklayers had worked as a pair on sub-contract work on a number of speculative housing estates within the south-eastern suburbs.

in Harrow by P.H. Edwards (Kenton) Ltd. during the late 1920s, it appears that Edwards employed his own clerk of works to organize the construction of dwellings for himself and his clients on the section of the estate not sold as 'improved' land. By 1931-2 however his practice appears to have changed, for in that year, and presumably the following years also, he was contracting small builders to erect groups of houses for him under a labour only contract,¹ and employing builders directly only on the insolvency of one of these contractors.² The second example was the case of the Wealdstone 'developer-builder'. As has been noted earlier this developer's initial approach to the problem of house construction was to contract out the work on a labour and material basis to three small builders.³ As it was in fact well into the 1930s before he made the decision to employ a building manager to organize the construction work and to contract out all parts of the construction process to individual trade sub-contractors.⁴

On the evidence which has come to light, the evaluation of the two broad alternatives noted above⁵ to reveal which was the more efficient, or rather the more profitable, is exceptionally difficult. The evidence concerning the Kenton and Wealdstone developments provides no help. Furthermore the

1. See above p. 466. For an example of a nineteenth century developer who commanded strict control over a number of builders active on his estate, see Dyos (1968), *op. cit.* p. 649.

2. Interviews with Anon, 1.10.69; 26.1.70.

3. See above p. 470.

4. Beckett, interview, 18.11.69.

5. See above p. 464.

task is complicated by the fact that the approach to the actual construction work undertaken by the 'developer-builder' was unlikely to have been the only important variable in the cost considerations of a housebuilding project. However, from the evidence gathered some comment may be made.

It would appear that the choice made by developers depended very much on the attitude of the individual developer concerned. In particular, it depended on the extent to which the developer was willing to pay the higher cost which would normally have been involved when the house construction process was contracted out to an independent builder. In return for these higher costs a builder obtained the advantages of the greater convenience and the greatly reduced work-load which this course of action provided compared with the possible alternative. The fact that the majority of the 'developer-builders' on whom evidence has been discovered appears to indicate a preference for some form of contracting system would perhaps suggest that in general developers were prepared to forego higher profit margins for the convenience and other advantages it provided. These advantages for example may well have included the ability to offset at least part of the speculative and financial burden of the house construction stage of the process. On the other hand, it is difficult to make such suggestions with any certainty. It is, for example, difficult to state at this stage of knowledge the extent to which in practice serious differentials in costs did exist between the two alternative approaches. Unquestionably the latter approach noted would, as a rule, be

the less costly of the two, but on the other hand, the very favourable contracts which such developers were able to achieve with small builders during these years, may well have been such as to reduce significantly the cost disadvantages of contracting out the whole house construction section of the process.

(d) The speculative estate developers and housebuilders.

During the second half of the 1920s and throughout the 1930s, speculative housebuilding firms came increasingly to usurp the functions of the land developer by undertaking personally the initiative and responsibility for all parts of the residential development process: from the purchase of land to the completion of the dwellings on that land. As has been noted earlier the speculative land developer continued to operate in a number of forms during the late 1920s and also, although probably to a lesser extent, during the 1930s. However, the increasing prominence of fieldranging housebuilders must inevitably have reduced their importance in the suburban scene in general, and their significance in the process of residential suburban growth in particular.

The term 'fieldranger' was coined within the industry itself, and these speculative housebuilders were just that. The Economist in mid-1937, in a review of the growth and changes which had taken place in the London area since the Armistice, stated that the London outer suburbs had mostly been developed by speculative builders " . . . buying a few fields at a time [these fields having] generally been

laid out as the builders pleased . . . " ¹ While approximately three and a half years earlier a building trade journal had commented on the activities of the west London speculative housebuilder, George Wimpey & Co. Ltd.:

The Company . . . is in the position to develop virgin acreage . . . Undeveloped land is purchased, surveying and preparation of plans is carried out, roads and sewers are laid, houses are designed and constructed and sales and legal work are all attended to under the same head. 2

This latter statement in fact provides a succinct description of the residential development functions undertaken by field-ranging speculative housebuilders and indicates the extent to which such firms spanned the residential development process during these years. ³

Moreover, although The Economist talked of these builders "buying up a few fields at a time", a number of speculative housebuilding firms were in fact undertaking some very large field-ranging projects indeed. At least two were of exceptional proportions. On a large area of land lying either side of the LNER railway line between Dagenham and Hornchurch Stations in Essex, for example, Richard Costain Ltd. planned out their Elm Park Estate for approximately 7,500 dwellings, a railway station, eight schools, five shopping centres, two churches, a public house, a cinema seating approximately 3,000 persons,

1. Economist (London Supplement) 8 May 1937, p.48.

2. PE, Nov. 1933, pp. 251-2.

3. Although it should be made clear that while the sales and legal aspects of this process were normally undertaken by fieldrangers, this was by no means a necessary characteristic.

and a recreation ground.¹ Indeed at least 81 acres of the land originally purchased were in fact given by Costain to the local authority, Hornchurch UDC.² Between Costain's first building approval on this estate in late 1933 and the official opening of the new railway station and the first section of the estate by the Minister of Health, Sir E. Hilton Young on 18th May 1935, 500 houses had been completed. As this was only 7% of the total number projected on the estate, it is not surprising that Elm Park Estate was still incomplete at the outbreak of the war in 1939. The fact that Costain failed to complete the estate is not important however. What is important is that here is an example of a speculative housebuilding firm who during the early 1930s negotiated the purchase of an area of land of at least 700 acres on which it

1. NB, June 1935, p.461.

2. PB, Dec. 1933, p.268. It was not uncommon to find fieldrangers and other developers of large sites donating land to LAs for use as open space. Any number of cases could be cited and indeed much outer suburban open space owes its origins to such an arrangement. In return for such donations the LA normally allowed the builder to build at higher densities on other sections of the site as long as the average density for the site as a whole did not exceed that stipulated in the statutory, or more normally non-statutory, town planning scheme for that particular area. The advantages of such an arrangement to the LA are clear, but what was in it for the builder? On the one hand the areas donated were in general of poor development quality and/or awkwardly shaped. Thus, by means of the donation and the resultant density concessions, the builder was able to exchange poor land for the ability to make more intensive use of the more easily and cheaply developable sections of the site, possibly also achieving certain additional building economies from the ability to build at higher densities. While on the other hand the arrangement almost certainly also had sales advantages for the builder since open space represented an important amenity. In basic principle the arrangement is still in use in the 1970s, under the title 'planning gain', and since 1945 has been used in relation to among other things housing and roadspace as well as open space.

was planned to create what was virtually a complete residential suburb.¹

The other exceptionally large development for which it has been possible to find evidence was planned by another prominent interwar contracting and speculative housebuilding firm, John Laing & Son Ltd. It was in fact smaller in area than Costain's Elm Park project, and was conceived much later in the decade. Encouraged by the London Passenger Transport Board's plans to extend the Underground from Stanmore to Elstree and obviously undeterred by any prospect of the outbreak of war, late in 1938 Laing purchased 500 acres of land between the London, Midland and Scottish Railway line to St. Pancras and the Barnet by-pass at Elstree. Unlike Costain at Elm Park, Laing's plans for this land included speculative factory, as well as housing, development.² The war was, however, to interrupt and put an end to this private enterprise dream, for after the peace the local authority compulsorily purchased the area for its own housing purposes.

Between these exceptionally large developments and estates of approximately 1,000 to 13,000 dwellings, the existence of estates like the 2,600 dwelling Tattenham Corner Estate of the Surrey Downs Housing Co. Ltd. in the Surrey suburbs, and the even larger Ruislip Manor Estate of George Ball (Ruislip) Ltd. in South Ruislip should not be over-

1. By 1933, Costain had already developed, or was developing, large estates in Cricklewood, Sudbury Hill, Dagenham and South Croydon.

2. NHB, Jan. 1939, p.3.

looked.¹ It does appear however that individual sites of approximately 100-150 acres were about as large as many of the larger speculative housebuilders were willing to develop, build upon and risk in any particular area.² There is no shortage of examples of such developments, for example, the estates of Haymills Ltd. at Barn Hill in Wembley and at Hanger Hill in Ealing;³ that of Comben & Wakeling Ltd. in South Kenton;⁴ of F. & C. Costin Ltd. in Kenton;⁵ of T.F.Nash Ltd. at Rayners Lane; of Henry Boot (Garden Estates) Ltd. at Burnt Oak, Hayes (Kent), and Greenford;⁶ of G.T. Crouch Ltd. in Richmond, Morden, and Whitton;⁷ of Taylor Woodrow Estates Ltd. in Hayes (Middx.);⁸ of Wates Ltd. in Streatham Vale and Dagenham;⁹ of Newman Eyre & Peterson Ltd. in Enfield and Gidea Park (Essex);¹⁰ of George Wimpey & Co. Ltd. in Heston;¹¹ of A. Waddington & Sons Ltd. in Alperton;¹² of R.T.Warren Ltd. in Hayes (Middx.);¹³ of London Housing Society Ltd. at Stonebridge Park, Wembley;¹⁴ of Elliot Construction Co. Ltd. in Hinchley Wood (Surrey);¹⁵ of

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1. i. PB, Oct. 1933, p.232.
ii. See above Ch.5. passim; Jackson, interview, 17.10.69; Ruislip-Northwood Register.
 2. Although it was not unknown for such housebuilders to build further estates in areas which had proven popular to house purchasers, see below pp. 668-74.
 3. Cox, interview, 28.8.69.
 4. See above p. 437.
 5. The Times, 25 April 1930, p.5.
 6. Tipples, interview, 25.8.69.
 7. Jones, interview, 10.10.69.
 8. Hayes UD, Register of Building Notices. Held by the London Borough of Hillingdon at Northwood.
 9. Wates, History, p.6; Building Dept. Memo. to the Directors of Wates Ltd., 30 June 1936.
 10. Enfield Register; Enfield Weekly Herald, 11 March 1938, p.12.
 11. Anon, interview, 26.8.69.
 12. ~~See above p. 437.~~ E.g. Bldr, 8 Sept. 1933; also above p. 400.
 13. See above p. 369-70.
 14. Dixon, interview, 13.10.69.
 15. See above p. 318.

Cutlers Ltd. in North Harrow; ¹ of New Ideal Homesteads Ltd. in Erith, Bexley, Falconwood (Welling), Sidcup, Feltham, Twickenham and Ilford; ² Allied Building Co. Ltd. in Hayes (Middx.); ³ of Davis Estates Ltd. in Kingsbury, Orpington, Chislehurst, and Malden; ⁴ of John Laing & Son Ltd. at Canons Park, Stanmore, Enfield West, and South Croydon; ⁵ and of Richard Costain & Sons Ltd. at Cricklewood, Sudbury Hill, South Croydon and Dagenham. ⁶

The above list is of course inevitably limited. And although it includes the vast majority of the largest inter-war speculative housebuilders active within the Greater London area, it obviously excludes the many medium-sized firms who, perhaps within one locality only, developed and built an estate of such a size at one time or other during this period. A further point which should be stressed is that as has already been indicated in Chapter 5, single firm estate developments of such a size were by no means characteristic of the housebuilding activity of the industry as a whole, although this is not of course to deny that such developments were a significant characteristic in residential suburban development, nor is it to deny that they were in many cases of the utmost significance to the development of particular suburban areas.

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1. See ~~above~~ below Map 1.
 2. Hefford, interview, 31.10.69.
 3. Hayes UD, op. cit.
 4. Steadman, interview, 14.11.69.
 5. Information supplied by John Laing & Son Ltd.
 6. See above p. 412.

The estates developed by speculative builders do not often appear to have been entire land ownerships prior to their purchase for building purposes. Indeed it would appear that the purchase of the whole of an ownership, such as a landed estate or a farm, was a rarity. John Laing & Son Ltd. were able to do so at Enfield West where South Lodge House and its estate were purchased complete, as was Francis Jackson, also in the early 1930s, when he purchased a farm in South Ruislip for George Ball (Ruislip) Ltd.¹ However, more generally the fieldranging speculative housebuilder appears to have purchased just one part or section of farms, private estates, or other single ownerships for his development purposes.

Such purchases were in fact often made following the sub-division of larger land-ownerships into smaller sale lots by landowners. As has been noted earlier such sub-division was at times made necessary because the estate as a whole had failed to achieve the price considered reasonable by the landowner. At other times it was because the estate was considered to be too large by potential purchasers and/or the landowner himself. The latter was in fact the reason for the sub-division of the land owned by St. Bartholomew's Hospital in the Stanmore area of Middlesex. The whole area totalled approximately 880 acres, and was clearly too large to be sold as a single lot except in the most exceptional circumstances. Hence the area was divided into lots by the Hospital. During

1. Jackson, interview, 17.10.69.

the late 1920s two areas of approximately 30 acres, and an area of approximately 250 acres were sold for building purposes, while further areas, totalling just over 56 acres were sold for open space and playing fields.¹ The sale continued during the early 1930s and in 1931 an area of over 58 acres was sold to one builder, areas of approximately 98 acres and 56 acres were sold to two others, while John Laing & Son Ltd. purchased two areas of 113 acres and 83 acres respectively.² In 1933 another builder purchased the most westerly section of the estate, an area of nearly 56 acres. On this estate then, Laing probably built in the region of 1,800 dwellings but even so purchased less than a quarter of the whole area sold.

The situation was similar in respect of Hayes Place in Kent and the housing estate of Henry Boot (Garden Estates) Ltd. The whole estate of 300 acres was sold in December 1930, but the housing development built by Boot included only approximately 1,000 dwellings.³ This would indicate that Henry Boot (Garden Estates) Ltd. had only purchased approximately a third of the original estate for their project. Similarly, the 80 acres of virgin land sold in 1930 to F. & C. Costin Ltd. by Harrow School represented only one section of Lyon Farm, Harrow, from which it came.⁴ While a fourth example which may be cited was in Enfield where an orchard was sold by auction during the early 1930s to a number of builders.

1. The Times, 4 Oct. 1929, p.11.

2. Ibid. 28 March 1931, p.20.

3. Ibid. 17 Dec. 1930, p.23; Tipples, interview, 25.8.69.

4. Ibid. 25 April 1930, p.5.

One builder, Newman Eyre & Peterson Ltd., purchased a particularly large area of this estate, its size being indicated by the fact that of the approximately 2,600 dwellings which had been built on the estate by early 1939, almost half had been completed by Newman Eyre & Peterson.¹

Although it has only been possible to specify these four examples in any detail at all, it perhaps may tentatively be suggested that at least during the middle years of this period the size and the boundaries, even of the larger estate developments of the larger fieldranging speculative housebuilders, were in the main smaller than the pre-existing areas of virgin farmland and estate on which they were being created. Indeed it would seem that often such developments did not alone even cover the major part of these areas previously under single landownership. In view of this, even though the boundaries of any particular estate development may be known, without further information it would be difficult, if not impossible, to derive from such boundaries the boundaries and proportions of the pre-existing estate or area which had been under individual landownership, and hence the pre-existing land-ownership pattern within any area.

The examination in Chapter 5 of the structures of the housebuilding industries in Enfield UD and Ruislip-Northwood UD between 1930-1 and 1940 has not only indicated that the larger estate developments of 100-150 acres were not necessarily a characteristic of suburban housebuilding within

1. Enfield Register.

specific areas, but it has also shown that a number of the larger fieldranging housebuilding firms were also willing to develop estates on a considerably smaller scale.¹ In Ruislip, for example, Taylor Woodrow Estates Ltd. built two estates of approximately 222 and 70 dwellings respectively, Davis Estates Ltd. built two slightly larger estates (i.e. approximately 265 and 109 dwellings respectively), and George Wimpey & Co. Ltd. had nearly two-thirds completed an estate of under 400 dwellings when war broke out. In Enfield, Wimpey was active on two much smaller estates, of approximately 122 and 60 dwellings respectively, during the later 1930s, and New Ideal Homesteads Ltd. built one estate of 160 dwellings and another of barely 20. Wates Ltd. was also building an estate in the Enfield area at this time and by September 1939 had completed 154 dwellings on an estate which was probably over half completed. Indeed in various parts of south London during the later 1930s Wates had a number of estates with only land for between 40 and 50 dwellings on each.² It is clear therefore that such speculative housebuilders not only sought relatively large areas of land on which to carry out their development and construction activities, but also were interested in much smaller acreages if they were well located.

Location was naturally of great importance to such

1. See above pp. 316-7.

2. Johnson, op. cit. p.159, from a conversation with the late Norman E. Wates. It was found confirmed in Wates, History. It should be acknowledged however that the houses on these estates were among the most expensive built by Wates at this time, often costing over £1,000 each. Seaton, interview, 23.1.70; Wates News letter, 1937-9.

speculative housebuilders in their land purchase decisions and it is known that if the location of a potential site was considered to be particularly favourable from a sales point of view, even the largest fieldrangers at times relinquished their land development function, and purchased land already developed with roads and services. For example, New Ideal Homesteads Ltd., 'Britain's Biggest Builders', was willing to purchase developed land at a price per foot frontage in Wealdstone during the first half of the 1930s in order to make up a small estate located well within a quarter of a mile of the newly-built Belmont (London and North Western Railway) station; ¹ while in 1934-5 Davis Estates Ltd. purchased frontage in Hampden Way, Southgate, on Hugh Davies' Osidge Estate. ² Admittedly these represent only two examples, but it is possible, if not probable, that should an examination of the land purchase records of these and other large speculative housebuilding firms ever be possible, these examples would be found not to be isolated, even though they may not have been particularly common.

Up to this point in the sub-section consideration has been given only to the larger speculative housebuilding firms. It is important to acknowledge however that such fieldrangers were not the only speculative housebuilders to undertake the initial development of virgin land within their operational framework. The estate development activities, albeit on a

1. Companies House, File No. 243565.

2. Interviews with Steadman, 14.11.69 and Davies, 26.1.70.

smaller scale, of a whole range of medium-sized speculative housebuilding firms should not be forgotten. The sites involved varied in size from anywhere between five and fifty acres and were sometimes even larger.¹ These firms, like their larger contemporaries, had over the period come increasingly to take over the functions of the speculative land developer by undertaking the laying of roads and public utilities on their estates themselves, either by direct labour or by contracting the task to a specialist firm. In this way they were in a position where they were able to buy virgin land directly, and where they did not have to rely on the development initiative of others. Also it would appear that such activity was undertaken even by small and sometimes very amateur housebuilders. A number of examples of this were found to have taken place on the estate in Shirley (Croydon) discussed at the beginning of the chapter. On this estate housebuilders of little size and very little experience constructed, or had constructed, roads and services on the small areas of land purchased. Frequently these areas were of sufficient size only for a short cul-de-sac or a small crescent.²

(d) Some conclusions.

In summary, a number of points have emerged from the above consideration both of land enterprise and development in the interwar outer London suburbs, and of some of the parties

1. See above pp. 293-309.

2. Cox (1970), op. cit. p. 358. See also above pp. 423-4.

involved. It is clear for example, that increasingly during these years the initiative for the development of land was being taken away from commercial land developers. Quantitative expressions of any description as to the comparative importance in this sphere of the various interested parties is not possible on the basis of the evidence known to the author at this time, whether they should be given for the period as a whole or for more limited time periods. Any such attempt therefore could only be dishonest. On the other hand, the overwhelming impression gained by the author from the research undertaken has been one of the increasing importance of the speculative housebuilder in this sphere as the period wore on. The activities of the larger firms naturally provide the most striking manifestation of this trend, but the evidence also indicates that speculative housebuilding firms of all sizes from the later 1920s onwards were developing their own land from a virgin state.

As is normally the case the picture is far from being black and white and commercial land developers were by no means totally eclipsed. Commercial land development took place in a number of forms during both the 1920s and to a lesser extent the 1930s, and some speculative housebuilders, more especially smaller operators, purchased land from such developers both in a virgin and/or in a developed state. Furthermore, the picture is complicated by the fact that in some areas it appears that speculative housebuilders played a number of different roles: in effect, and often consciously, becoming commercial land developers or a part of such an

organization.

The evidence presently at hand is insufficient to allow any categorical statement to be made as to the extent and importance of the commercial land development activities ^(i.e. other than for their own purposes) of interwar speculative housebuilders in the outer suburbs. However, no evidence has been located which suggests that such activities were of widespread significance in this area during these years, although in particular areas, such as the North Harrow area, they may have been of greater significance by virtue of the size of the individual enterprise (in this case that of H.B.Silver). The converse of such activity by speculative housebuilders was the frequent appreciation by commercial land developers and development companies of the profitability of undertaking speculative house construction. Here then was another grey shading on a picture of great complexity.¹

As for the impact of the speculative housebuilder on the pattern of suburban development, the lack of evidence makes firm conclusions equally difficult. In general, very large estates by particular housebuilding firms were not common. However, where such estates were developed, or even partially developed, clearly the builder involved had a not inconsiderable influence on the form and the status of the evolving suburban locality. Richard Costain Ltd. at Elm Park, and George Ball (Ruislip) Ltd.

1. In particular the role of the surveyor and estate agent during this period should not be overlooked. Individual agents and surveyors often played a variety of roles: some were developers, some developed for others, and many also became speculative housebuilders. Indeed, the surveyor and estate agent alone presents a subject most worthy of further research.

at South Ruislip provide striking evidence of this. In respect of the more average-sized large estate, that is of approximately 1,000 dwellings, it is apparent that the speculative housebuilder was of some significance in this respect although he was by no means necessarily the dominant figure. In such cases such factors as landownership patterns, the timing, and the reasons for the timing, of the release of land, the size of area which the market in a particular area at a particular time would accept,¹ would among others have also been influential and possibly of greater importance. In general, it is probably fair to suggest that the smaller the size of the housing estates (being built by individual builders) characteristic within any area, the less important the speculative housebuilder as such was likely to have been in the development and the developing shape of the interwar suburbs.

In the following chapter the land situation within the outer suburbs between the wars will be discussed, with a consideration of the availability of land, its nature, its changing value. Also, some of the factors probably influential in bringing land on to the market for sale will be considered briefly, with the reactions of some of the speculative housebuilders to the changing situation and circumstances through the period. This will be followed in Chapters 9 and 10 with a consideration of the approach of

1. This would of course in some degree have been influenced by the speculative housebuilder.

interwar speculative housebuilders to the acquisition of land within the Greater London OSA, both in terms of their search activities and their purchase decisions and policies.

APPENDIX 7.1. Some thoughts on the importance of the landowners in the pattern and timing of suburban growth in Greater London between the wars.

The impact of the interwar landowner on the actual development of his land was probably limited,¹ but it is possible that the landowner (that is, the last freeholder of the land before it was developed for building purposes) had a greater impact on the pattern of suburban development in respect of his ability to release or withhold his land, and also the size of the lots in which he eventually decided to release it. This needs to be considered.

To take the latter point first, the smaller the lots of land sold, the greater the direct impact that the landowner himself would have had on the development. The smaller the lots the more likely it would be that a certain type and size of builder would be interested in purchasing the land. Also, because of this, the type of pattern of development which materialized on the land, probably haphazard and disjointed, would be inevitable. The larger the lots sold by the landowner the more likely it was that the purchaser would be a speculative land developer who would then dictate the eventual form of the land after development, depending on his own sub-division decisions.

The extent to which landowners were able to determine

1. See above pp. 434-41, also below pp. 521-5.

freely the size of the individual lots which they released on to the market is uncertain, and must have varied a great deal. To some extent the size of the lots released will have been determined by the size of lot which developers and/or builders were willing to buy. For at least two reasons most landowners preferred to sell their land in large lots, even if it meant obtaining a lower price per acre. Firstly, the smaller the lot sizes, the greater was the likelihood of inconvenience and cost from having to hold the small areas which might not sell; also the greater was the possible cost of the sale and any subsequent sale which might be necessary. And secondly there was the fear that the lots of land which might remain after any sale would be those less favourably placed from a building point of view, and it might therefore have been many years before purchasers could be found.

However, in spite of such considerations, it appears that rarely were landowners able to place on the market lots of as large a size as they might have wished to sell. Apparently on many occasions there were simply no purchasers and this eventually led to further sub-division of the estates into smaller lots. Estates were offered for sale as a single lot or as a number of large lots, only to be withdrawn (having failed to be sold privately pre-auction or to reach the reserve price at the auction) and later reoffered in much smaller-sized lots. ¹ Two cases noted in Dr Waugh's study

1. The historian faces severe problems in this sphere in terms of information. The only published evidence is auction particulars, and a large proportion of land was sold outside the 'open market'. Clearly, much more research is required in this sphere.

of north west Kent provide good illustrations of this.¹
The Goddington Park Estate in Orpington was first put up for sale late in 1929. Initially it was offered as a single lot but the sale was unsuccessful. It was in fact two years before the estate was again put on the market and in 1931 it was offered as a large number of small lots. Some lots were as small as six acres, although most appear to have been larger. The other case cited was of an estate in Welling, for which more detailed information is available. The Danson Estate was originally put up for sale in 1929, following the death of its owner, Alfred Bean. With an area of 582 acres it was a large estate to hope to sell in one piece, and at the auction it failed to reach the reserve price and was withdrawn - the highest bid being only £25,000 or £42.19.0. an acre. The estate was subsequently placed on the market in smaller lots, but even so, much of the land failed to raise more than its agricultural value and one large lot was sold to the local authority as a public park.²

Unfortunately the evidence is at present far too limited to draw any categorical conclusions. Without doubt, in many cases the impetus behind the division of estates and farms for sale purposes resulted from 'market forces' rather than any conscious strategy of the landowner concerned. Furthermore,

1. Waugh, *op. cit.* pp. 208-10.

2. It should be added that not all estates failed to be sold in a single lot. Two examples are of the purchase of a farm in Ruislip by George Ball (Ruislip) Ltd. and of the South Lodge Estate, Enfield West, by John Laing & Son. Ltd. during the early 1930s. From the author's research, however, such circumstances would appear to have been exceptional.

where these estates were broken up in this way, it is probable that in general landowners would be unwilling to divide their land into areas of sufficiently small size for the smaller and even the smaller medium-sized housebuilders to normally consider purchasing them. Clearly there must have been exceptions, and the sale of land in Stanmore by St. Bartholomew's Hospital indicates that at least one very large landowner was willing to, and did, sell relatively small areas of land to housebuilders. Between 1929 and 1934 the Hospital sold four lots of four acres and under, and four lots of eight acres and under. To what extent this action was unique to St. Bartholomew's will have to await further research, as will the question whether such action was more common in particular areas of the outer suburbs. It should be added however, that St. Bartholomew's did not sell all its land in such small lots, indeed these eight lots accounted for only approximately two-fifths of the total number of lots sold. And the largest lot sizes were 249, 112 and 96 acres respectively, with the rest ranging from 12 to 55 acres.

Individual landlords possibly had a greater impact on the pattern of suburban development of any particular area through their ability to withhold land from development. A striking example of such action, although not in the interwar period, was to be found in later nineteenth century Southgate, north London. It appears that one of the two largest land-owning families in this area, the Walkers, refused to sell any

of their frontages for building purposes.¹ The other of these two families, the Taylors, and particularly John Donnithorne Taylor, was even more extreme. It seems that Taylor wished to prevent the spread of London northwards, and to achieve this end purchased the major part of the building land which became available in Southgate during the middle and later decades of the century. He was naturally strongly opposed to the Great Northern Railway's coming to Palmers Green in 1870, selling land for the Station only when compelled to do so. Indeed his refusal right up to his death in 1885 to sell his land for building purposes totally negated the stimulus to development normally associated with the opening of a railway station.² It was in fact only after the death of Major R.K. Taylor, Taylor's son, and the great auction sale of land in 1902 that Palmers Green and Southgate really became 'suburbanised', the population more than doubling from less than 15,000 to almost 34,000 between 1901 and 1911.³

Samuel Sudgens of Oak Lodge was another, though smaller, Southgate landowner, who refused to sell any of his land for housebuilding, and indeed in the later 1920s the estate was saved from complete development, when in 1927 fifty acres were sold to Southgate UD expressly for purposes of public open space.⁴ The creation of open space by the sale of land to the local authority was clearly another, and perhaps a more

1. H.W. Newby, Old Southgate (Southgate, 1949), p.59.

2. Ibid., pp. 58-9; Mason, op. cit. p.7.

3. Mason, op. cit. pp. 9, 30-5.

4. Ibid., pp. 10, 56; Newby, op. cit. p.59.

enduring way in which a landowner could withhold his land from suburban housing development and influence the pattern of suburban growth. Another example of this practice has been found in Pinner, Middlesex, where in 1931 St. Thomas' Hospital sold Pinner Park Farm, an area of 256 acres, to Hendon RDC for public open space.¹

The few examples cited above suggest that on the whole the landowner was able to play, and played, a generally limited role in the suburban development process during these years. On the other hand, it would also seem that within certain areas, by the sale of all or part of their lands to the local authority for public open space, landowners were permanently able to prevent development taking place on their land and at the same time give particular areas a more spacious context. It would be surprising if no other examples of either positive or negative action by landowners exist, but to what extent such action was widespread between the wars will have to await further research; as will the discovery of an interwar equivalent of John Donnithorne Taylor.

1. The Times, 8 May 1931, p.11. This was an area of land surrounded by three railway stations: Hatch End to the north, Headstone Lane to the west, and Pinner to the south west. None were as much as half a mile away.

APPENDIX 7.2. An unrealised variation to the form of the residential development process characteristic of the Ham Farm Estate, Shirley, Croydon.¹

A gymnastics instructor, W.J.Conner who already lived in Shirley, purchased in the very early 1930s an area of seven acres in the northern section of the estate from the land company. His initial intention was to lay a number of small roads, to divide the land into frontages, and to sell off these developed frontages to housebuilders.² If this had been followed through, the chain of the residential development process would have been lengthened and complicated by an additional stage, or link. The land on this small area of the estate would have passed from farmland to a smallholding with access to main drainage and utilities via the activities of the city land company, Percy Harvey Estates Ltd; it would then have passed from this 'smallholding' state (i.e. virgin land) to a 'land-developed' state by a further intermediary (in this case a person not remotely connected with land or building); and only then would it have passed plot by plot, or block by block, from a frontage site to a fully-developed plot with dwellings constructed upon it, presumably as a result of the activities of small speculative builders.

In the event, however, this intermediate stage in the process did not take place, for Connor met, and formed a partnership with, Edward Timblich (previously employed by a

1. See above p.424.

2. Cox (1970), op. cit. pp.387-8.

small builder active on the same estate) at a time when the demand for housing in Shirley seemed to be increasing.¹ Hence, like most of the other smallholdings on this estate which were built upon prior to 1939, the land was transferred directly from its virgin state (in this particular case without having been bought and resold by a smallholder) into the ownership of the 'speculative housebuilder' who eventually built roads and dwellings on it.

1. Cox (1970), op. cit. p.388.

APPENDIX 7.3. A note on the Haling Down Estate Company
as a developer of land. ¹

In a recent unpublished work Dr F.C.W.Cox described and discussed an estate developed between 1912 and 1940 by the Haling Down Estate Company. ² This he cited as an instance of the landowner developing his own land and then having houses built upon it. Dr Cox claims that this was an example of a very uncommon method of estate development, ³ and he noted that he had been unable to discover any similar examples in Croydon. ⁴

Superficially the activities of the Haling Down Estate Company would appear to provide a very attractive example for here would appear to be an exceptionally rare form of development. Indeed the Estate Company were undeniably the freeholders of the land. But to the author it appears misguided to suggest that here in fact was an example of the landowner/freeholder types of development referred to by Prof. Dyos and described by Edward Ryde before the Select Committee of Town Holdings. Although it is not possible to be certain, and it is not directly stated by Dr Cox, it would seem likely that the Haling Down Estate Company was not the original owner of the land, but had purchased the freehold of the land some time during the very early years of the century with the intention of laying roads and services on the land and selling it off in lots. Indeed the land in this form was put onto the

1. See above p. 434.

2. Cox (1966), op. cit.

3. See also Dyos (1961), op. cit. p.87.

4. Cox (1966), op. cit. p.146.

market by the company in 1912, but as a result of the very poor climate in the housebuilding industry at this time no sales appear to have been made.¹

It would appear therefore that the development of this particular estate was not an example of a landowner developing his own land, but in fact one of a freehold land company, having failed to sell off the land in individual lots before the Great War, choosing after the Armistice to organize the construction of dwellings on its estate itself. Furthermore it would appear that this form of development was not uncommon, since similar examples of land developers contracting housebuilders to erect dwellings on their estates can be found in any number of areas during the years between the wars.² Indeed this type of development may be seen as being only one stage divorced from the increasingly characteristic form of residential estate development practised between the wars by the field-ranging and medium-sized speculative housebuilders. And it was in fact the way in which a number of firms moved into the sphere of speculative housebuilding, including one firm which is now reputed to be one of the largest building and construction firms in the world.³

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1. Cox (1966), op. cit. p.99.
 2. See above pp. 461-476.
 3. Anon, interview, 26.8.69.



APPENDIX 7.4. Some thoughts on the transition from leasehold to freehold as the predominant basis for speculative residential development.

During the nineteenth century the land around London on which speculative residential development took place was rarely owned by the builder or developer but was leased from the landowner for an agreed number of years. In consequence, almost invariably, it was necessary for the owner of a new house, whether as an investor or occasionally as an owner-occupier, to pay an annual ground rent. During the interwar years however this was very rarely the case. During this period the vast majority of suburban housebuilders and developers bought the freehold of any land on which they worked outright and as a result were able to sell to each individual house purchaser the freehold of the land on which his/her house stood. The purpose of this appendix is to consider some of the possible reasons for this change and to suggest, albeit tentatively, why it took place.

For centuries the dominating factor in the development of [real property] law was the resolution of the great landowners to employ the land as a source of family endowment . . . Such conceptions as the estate tail, the life estate, contingent remainders and executory interests, powers of appointment and estates upon condition derived from no business necessity, but from the patriarchal obsessions of the landed gentry. Historically, the demands of the family [both present and future] preceded the demands of commerce 1
 . . .

1. G.C.Cheshire, The Modern Law of Real Property (7th edn. 1954), p.V.

The reform of the law affecting land ownership and transfer spread over four centuries. The result of this slow process was the gradual conversion of land from "a relatively simple rent-yielding asset into a capital asset which is priced in the capital market", and in consequence the emergence of owner-occupation as a reality for many millions of the population.¹ However, although land law reform was spread over several centuries, the most important period was without doubt that between the late 1820s and 1925 during which the legislature became increasingly active in this sphere primarily with a view to the extension of the landowners' powers of enjoyment and the simplification of conveyancing.²

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries there existed three forms of freehold tenure: (1) the fee simple, (2) the fee tail, and (3) the life tenancy.³ The ownership of the fee simple of any land gave a freeholder complete legal rights over that land, including all rights of sale. In contrast a tenant in tail was considerably restricted in the powers of his enjoyment over his land which was only his in trust for future generations of his line, an entailed estate being inheritable only by the specified lineal issue of the original grantee.⁴ A life tenancy was a more recent but closely related form of restricted freehold, whereby the rights of a freehold tenant to the enjoyment of his land were limited to a life interest. Life tenancies were

1. Nevitt, op. cit. p.14.
2. Cheshire, op. cit. p.5.
3. Ibid. p.32.
4. Ibid. p.33.

a method adopted in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by freehold tenants in fee simple to make their land inalienable and thus 'keep it in the family' and preserve their family name.¹ To this end a settlement was made, which in effect limited the perpetual freehold of the land, under which the tenant fee simple created himself life tenant and settled successive estates for life on his issue, whether born or not, ad infinitum.² Settlement and resettlement in this way was commonly used not only by tenants in fee simple but also (when legal changes established in the 1820s and 1830s the rule against perpetuities and during the mid-nineteenth century the right of a tenant in tail to execute a deed to bar the entail of the freehold of his land) by life tenants and tenants in tail where they wished their land to be retained within the ownership of their family in future years.³

During the mid-nineteenth century therefore land ownership in England was dominated by the laws of settlement and it became normal practice for a fee simple landowner to create a life tenancy for himself and his heir. It is true of course that under the rule against perpetuities it was impossible to settle the property, and thus suspend the vesting of the fee simple, for a period of longer than 21 years after the death of living persons named in the settlement.⁴ However this

1. Cheshire, op. cit. pp.267, 269.

2. Ibid. p.269.

3. Ibid. pp. 72, 267, 274-5.

4. Ibid. pp. 272. Normally, since the settlement was made on a son when he was young, it expired during the lifetime of the second beneficiary i.e. the grantor's grandson. However right up to the end of the century at least landowners were still attempting to ignore the rule against perpetuities and to settle in perpetuity. ibid. p.270.

attempt to limit the power of landowners to create future inalienable interests was almost invariably circumscribed by the persuasion of the eldest son's eldest son, on reaching his majority to convert his estate tail into a fee simple and then to resettle the fee simple upon himself for a life estate with the remainder to his issue in tail.¹ Although on his majority the second beneficiary in law had the opportunity (given the full consent of the first beneficiary, if alive) to bar completely the entail on the freehold, the first beneficiary, who was usually also his father, in general far from desired to bar the entail but used claims of parental affection, tradition, family pride and duty, and probably most importantly the immediate gift of money to persuade his son to sign away his right on his father's death to the fee simple of the land.² That this procedure was normal practice in 1869 was noted and attacked by Cliffe Leslie in Frazer's Magazine in February of that year.³

In view of the predominance of various forms of restricted freeholds in the structure of landownership in England at least up to the last quarter of the century it is surprising to find that where land was developed it was under a building lease granted by the landowner. In terms of the enjoyment of his land, the rights of the life tenant widened from the 1830s onwards. Underhill notes the impotence of the

1. Cheshire, op. cit. p.72.

2. Ibid. pp. 72-3.

3. T.Scrutton, Land in Fetters (1886), p.135. See also Sir F. Pollock, Land Laws (3rd edn. 1896), p.9.

life tenant in 1830: unable to sell, exchange, partition; or grant long leases.¹ However from this date various statutes were passed allowing life tenants to carry out improvements to their land and grant increasingly larger building leases.² Probably of greatest importance were the Settled Estates Acts of 1856 and 1877 (19 & 20 Vict. c.120; 40 & 41 Vict. c.18) and the intervening legislation which resulted in life tenants being able to grant a lease of up to 21 years without recourse to the courts, and able to sell, exchange and partition land and to grant building leases of 99 years with the sanction of the Chancery Division of the High Court.³ Clearly this represented an advance, particularly with respect to the granting of long leases, since it substituted an order of the court for a private Act of Parliament, however at this time the complexity and general inadequacy of conveyancing law still placed considerable obstacles and uncertainties in the path of any attempted sale.⁴

During the 1860s and 1870s there was growing agitation for the simplification of title to land and land transfer, and for a complete release from the settlement straightjacket in which the life tenant found himself.⁵ The Settled Estates Act 1877 was one consequence, but more important in the early 1880s, with the period of agricultural depression in arable

1. A. Underhill, *A Century of Law Reform*, p.284-5, noted in *Cheshire*, *op. cit.* p.74.

2. *Ibid.* pp.74-5. E.g. 27 & 28 Vict. c.114; 40 & 41 Vict. c.31; 3 & 4 Will IV. c.74; 19 & 20 Vict. c.120; 40 & 41 Vict. c.18.

3. *Cheshire*, *op. cit.* p.75.

4. See e.g. W.S. Holdsworth, 'The Reform of the Land Law: an Historical Retrospect', *Law Quarterly Review*, XLII (1926), 172-4. Also A. Underhill, 'Property', *Law Quarterly Review*, LI (1935), 225.

5. *Ibid.* pp.174; *Cheshire*, *op. cit.* p.75.

areas showing no sign of abating, the outcry against settlements gained additional political force and the Settled Land Act 1882 (45 & 46 Vict. c.38) was passed through Parliament.¹ Under this Act, "the first great reform of the laws of property passed during the last quarter of the nineteenth century",² the entire management of settled land was put in the hands of the life tenant for the time being, and gave him, at his sole discretion and without asking the permission of the court or the trustees of the settlement, wide powers of selling, leasing, mortgaging, and otherwise dealing with the land. These powers were quite independent of the settlement itself but were subject to statutory provisions designed to protect the interests of all the persons entitled under the settlement and prevent the life tenant from acquiring more than a life interest in the income or profits.³

There can be no doubt as to the unqualified success of this Act in making almost all land freely saleable, and it was amended in small particulars by further Acts in 1884, 1887, 1889 and 1890.⁴ This would appear to suggest that by the mid 1880s there no longer existed legal restrictions which inhibited the freedom of landowners to offer the fee simple of their land for sale. On the other hand, although the 1882 Act was a major advance in this respect, it is notable that in the 1890s the perpetuation of the system of

1. Holdsworth, op. cit. p.175.

2. Underhill, op. cit. p.223.

3. Cheshire, op. cit. p.75-6; Holdsworth, op. cit. p.175; Underhill, op. cit. pp. 225-6.

4. Ibid, p.226; Cheshire, op. cit. p.76.

strict settlement was still to be found quite openly pursued by landowners.¹ Moreover the Act did little to simplify the law of real property, or the law relating to the title of land. The law of freeholds remained overburdened with technicalities and the transfer of land remained an uncertain and costly business. All these things served to inhibit freehold land transactions.² Even 38 years after the 1882 Act for example the expenses, delays and uncertainties involved in land transfer in England was found to have been far greater than those found in other countries.³ In addition to such problems, particularly where the fee simple of land became available on the death of its owner, the sale of land was also inhibited by the imposition of covenants and other restrictive clauses as to the character of its future use which were laid down in the deceased owner's will.⁴

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, land law reform was clearly removing many of the impediments to the fee simple sale of settled land. And, while it is important that the significance of the restrictions, both in practice and as a consequence of law, which remained and inhibited the freedom of landowners to deal with his land as he wished,⁵ it is obvious that there must have existed other factors, both social and economic, which contributed to the prevalence

1. Cheshire, op. cit. p.269.

2. Underhill, op. cit. pp. 226-7.

3. Holdsworth, op. cit. pp. 177-8.

4. E.g. see Underhill, op. cit. p.230.

5. The significance of these remaining restrictions will be further emphasised when attention is turned to the post-1919 situation.

of the leasehold development of land during the nineteenth century. The existence of cases in later Victorian Camberwell for example where the fee simple of unsettled land (albeit areas of only limited acreage) did change hands but where the sites transferred were only rarely developed freehold provides a suggestion of this.¹

Unquestionably more attention and evidence must be focused on a consideration of the relative significance of the possible forces which may have created such a situation. The demands of such an analysis of course far exceed the scope and capabilities of the present appendix, however a number of possible (albeit not fully substantiated) elements will be mentioned below and, on the basis of the evidence located by the author, some tentative conclusions will be suggested.

One factor which immediately springs to mind is the possible significance of social attitudes to land ownership. The importance which the late Victorian gentleman placed in land and property is well known, and for owners of land on the suburban fringe this may well have encouraged a decision to retain the fee simple of their land and to develop it by means of building leases. Another possibility is that during this period it was preferably purely on economic terms for an owner of a moderately sized or large estate to lease his land for residential development rather than to sell the freehold to a developer or a number of individual builders.²

1. Dyos (1961), op. cit. pp. 91-127. passim.

2. Dyos (1961), op. cit. p.88. Of course such 'social' and 'economic' considerations need not be considered as mutually exclusive. Such considerations may well have exerted an interacting influence in any decision by landowners, e.g. social considerations confirming a decision to withhold the freehold where economic advantages were considered only marginal, or even swaying a decision where the economic advantages were considered uncertain.

For example, Prof. Dyos points to the return given to a leasing landowner from both the annual income deriving from the lease and from the rack-rents from the improved property which could be secured by himself and his heirs on the reversion of the lease. And compares the ultimate gain extremely favourably in relation to the proceeds of any sale and reinvestment in other securities. In support of this conclusion however Prof. Dyos gives only two examples of size of estimated rack rental in relation to freehold ground rental from all the leasehold building estates in Camberwell.¹ For greater illumination on this particular point it is clear that an examination and analysis of the contents of the personal papers of suburban landowners who were faced with this decision is required. Moreover any such consideration should include an investigation of possible returns available on alternative investment opportunities during the later nineteenth century, and their comparison with that anticipated by landowners as lessors. Superficially such an 'economic' argument has substantial appeal, but equally to the author's knowledge it appears that as yet the point has by no means been completely established either one way or the other.

Another 'economic' factor possibly important in this context should be mentioned at this point. Moreover it relates to line of thought which so far appears to have been neglected by economic historians and focuses on the possible restrictions that an only partially developed domestic

1. Dyos (1961), op. cit. p.88.

capital market might have had on the structure of a land market, even in the unlikely event of there existing no other restriction. As Nevitt suggested in 1966, "it is only after financial institutions have been developed that the freehold unencumbered estate can be sold with as much ease as a forty-year lease".¹ Prof. Dyos has indicated for example that although capital from outside the industry for speculative housebuilding and estate development came from a relatively narrow range of sources in the nineteenth century, as a general rule the individual sums involved were by no means large.² Up to the early 1870s relatively small building and freehold land societies for example appear to have been active in providing finance on mortgage for such speculative activity;³ while to a much lesser extent and in a far more discriminating way some insurance companies lent sums to builders of superior houses.⁴ As sources of any note however these developing institutional forms had evaporated by the early 1870s and 1880s respectively, while it is interesting that at this time London banks appear to have had little or no desire to advance money on mortgage to speculative housebuilders and developers.⁵ In the final three decades of the century private individuals, trustees, and solicitors appear to have become important.⁶ In particular it is quite possible that by the 1880s the

1. Nevitt, op. cit. p.18.
 2. Dyos (1968), op. cit. pp.665-673.
 3. Ibid., pp.665-6; Dyos (1961), op. cit. pp. 116, 128, 133.
 4. Dyos (1968), op. cit. pp. 667-8.
 5. Ibid., p.665.
 6. Ibid., pp. 668-9, 670, 672-3; Dyos (1961), op. cit. pp. 128-30.

solicitor may well have become the real fulcrum for the bulk of the movement of capital into speculative estate development and housebuilding.¹

Hence in the later nineteenth century, with the possible exception of the largest and most prosperous builders and developers, like Edward Yates, who had an apparently highly organized network of financial sources,² the rather primitive state of the capital market and the relative absence of institutions or individuals able and willing to mobilize large enough sums to cover a substantial part of the investment burden, or the entire burden, of residential estate development frequently necessitated a chain of sub-leases and in this way each leasee contributed to the investment required for the completion of all stages in the development of a site.³ In a situation of an only partially developed capital market it is to be expected that such intermediaries as the family solicitor and the private landlord should have occupied a position of great importance. The solicitor was perfectly placed to link lenders and a borrower, while together the solicitor and landlord were frequently the means by which the owners of land and capital and the eventual occupiers of land were all brought together.⁴ It is not difficult to imagine the likely implications on the position and importance of the solicitor and landlord in this process of the emergence, during the early twentieth century, of larger financial institutions,

1. Dyos (1968), op. cit. p.668.

2. E.g. see ibid., pp. 670-3.

3. Nevitt, op. cit. pp. 21-2.

4. Ibid. p.21.

such as banks and building societies, willing to lend substantial sums for, and on, speculative residential development. Such financial developments made it much more possible for individuals or firms, by going directly to the appropriate large-scale lenders, to carry all the capital costs of whole developments. Moreover, by doing likewise, it was possible for the eventual occupiers to carry the whole cost of the purchase of the resultant dwellings.¹ Thus where previously the ability to mobilize sufficient capital to finance the purchase and development of a freehold site of any size had been considerably limited, the development of large financial institutions interested in investment in this sphere meant that such activity could become commonplace.

It is clear that a number of the changes which were contributory to the elimination of leasehold as the primary basis for new residential development in England had their origins during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It was not until the interwar years however that freehold completely usurped the position of leasehold

1. Nevitt, op. cit. pp. 21, 22. This naturally in turn tended to shorten the period for which the developer/builder had to carry the financial costs of the development of any particular site. Moreover it is not of course that solicitors in particular ceased to play a role in this sphere (see e.g. Ch. 10), but almost certainly the importance of their role, and its centrality in the process, did diminish.

in this respect.¹ In view of this, an examination of various aspects of the law, finance and the economic situation post-1919 as they affected land and residential development is required.

The years following the Armistice represent a period of great and fundamental reform in land and property law. Although the provisions of the series of Acts between 1922 and 1925 had to some extent been foreshadowed by the machinery of the earlier Settled Land Acts and Land Charges Act, they contained many new provisions and great changes were made in the direction of cheapening and facilitating the transfer of land and the enjoyment which freehold tenants of settled land had over their property.² Prior to this legislation the complexity, delays, uncertainty, and cost involved in conveyancing severely inhibited the free

1. Of course the leasehold development of estates by land-owners was not totally unknown between the wars; however it was mainly restricted to activity by corporate landowners e.g. University Colleges, such as Merton College, Oxford, with estates in Merton, Hendon, and Stanmore, and Kings College, Cambridge with their 1,300 acre estate at Ruislip Manor (Ashworth, op. cit. p. 192). While in the 1920s, on relatively small better quality developments particularly within the inner OSA it was known for some builders and developers who had purchased the freehold of a site to create improved ground rents, either for their own or other people's investment purposes, by selling the dwellings built leasehold (e.g. Harrow Observer & Gazette, 18 Sept. 1929, p.4; Interviews with Harston, 25.8.69; Cooper, 12.11.69). This practice does not appear to have been particularly common within the OSA however and does not appear to have continued into the 1930s. Although for other reasons towards the end of the decade a number of the larger house-builders (e.g. Wates Ltd., N.I.H. Ltd.) were advertising their houses for sale either freehold or leasehold. This represented an attempt to influence demand by enabling the reduction of the possible sale price. Normally however any purchaser was given between 6 months and a year in which he/she could buy the freehold (see e.g. Enfield Weekly Herald, 22 May 1938, p.11; Wates News Sheet, 31 Dec. 1938; ibid., 4 March 1939).

2. Holdsworth, op. cit. p.181. For details see e.g. Underhill, op. cit. pp. 229-230; Cheshire, op. cit.

operation of the market in freehold land,¹ while another inhibiting factor, the existence of restrictive covenants and stipulations in wills relating to the future use of land, was only nullified after the 1925 legislation which allowed the removal or modification of such restrictions where they had become unreasonable.² Among the consequences of this legislation therefore was not only the ability of many more freeholders legally to sell their land freehold and sell it more easily, with less expense, and without the liabilities of historically imposed restrictions, but also, in turn, the fact that for the first time it became legally possible for millions of individuals to own a small area of freehold land.³

The legislative changes which took place between 1922 and 1925 were the result of political, economic and social conditions.⁴ During the immediate aftermath of war public opinion was prepared for change and larger measures of reform,⁵ and in 1919 the Ministry of Reconstruction set up a sub-committee (Scott Committee) to examine land transfer and advise on possible reform.⁶ It would appear that there were a number of factors which made it impossible to leave land and property law in its pre-1914 condition. As has been mentioned previously, the expense of, and the uncertainties and delays involved in, land transfer in

1. Holdsworth, op. cit. pp. 178, 181.

2. Underhill, op. cit. p.230.

3. Nevitt, op. cit. pp. 22-3.

4. Holdsworth, op. cit. p.160.

5. Ibid. p.177.

6. Ibid. p.179; Underhill, op. cit. p.228.

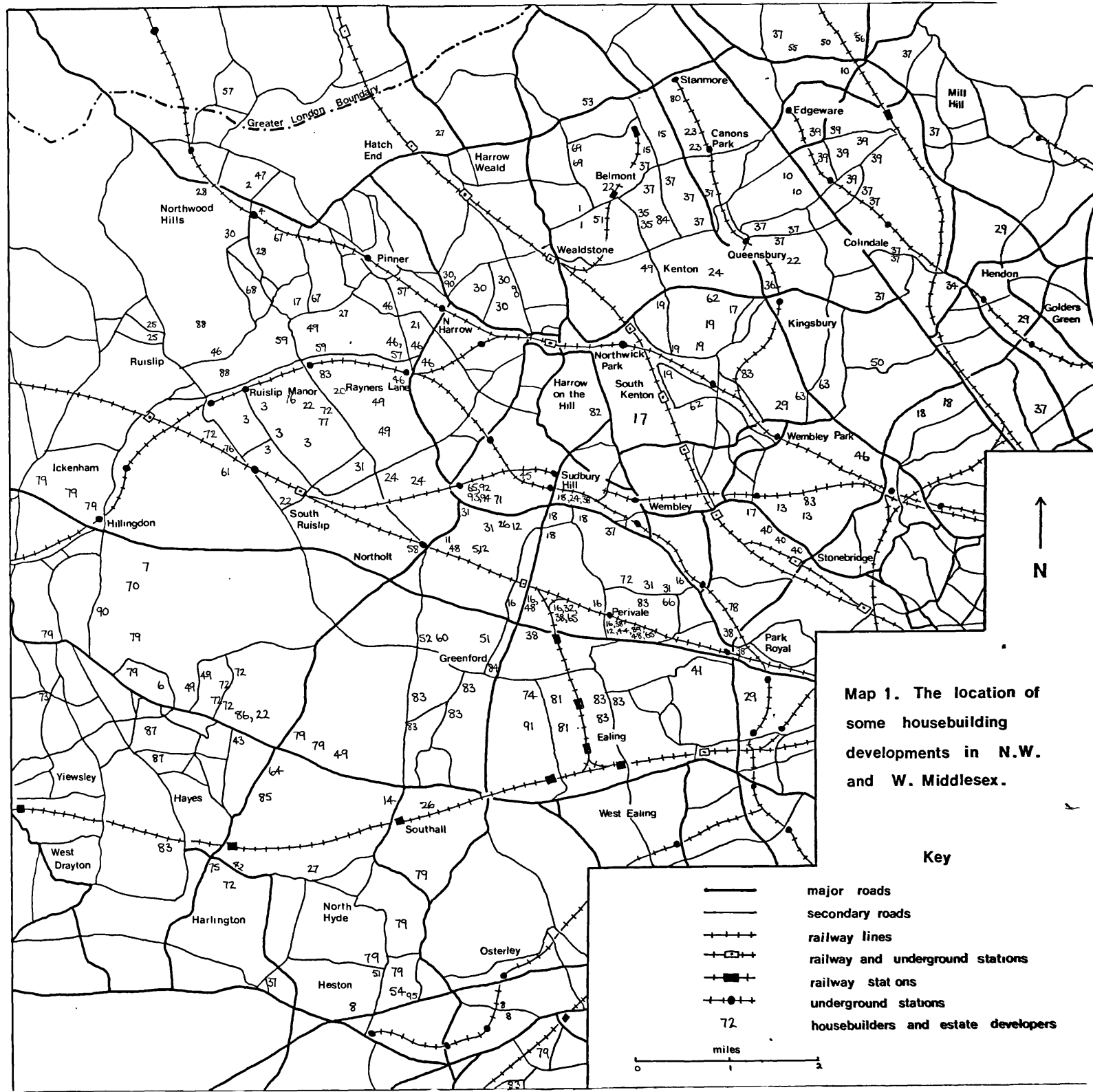
England were far greater than in other countries. This inadequacy was further emphasised by a second factor which concerned the changing social attitude to, and the economics of, land ownership. After the First World War no longer did land ownership confer such social prestige and advantages as it had done during the previous century, while its costs increased. High post-war taxation and death duties "were going to work on the redistribution of property", ¹ while the downward trend in agricultural prices, especially after 1922, and the general depression in agriculture during the 1920s reinforced such incentives to sell. ² Moreover in comparison with the returns available from investment in land, the relatively favourable rates of interest available in alternative investment fields during the 1920s, ^{must} have looked particularly inviting to financially stretched landowners. Moreover the fact that this situation occurred during a period when developing financial institutions, able to draw together small investment savings and willing to lend larger sums for speculative residential development and house purchase purposes, increasingly were enabling housebuilders and developers to borrow sums sufficient to finance the complete freehold development of substantial sites and house-purchasers to raise sufficiently large loans to cover virtually the entire freehold capital cost of the resultant houses, meant that the owners of land with residential

1. Mowat, *op. cit.* p.203; Holdsworth, *op. cit.* p.178.

2. B.R.Mitchell and P.Deane, Abstract of British Historical Statistics (Cambridge, 1962), p.489; M.Tracy, Agriculture in Western Europe (1964), p.152.

development potential had even less incentive, either legal or financial, to retain the freehold ownership of their land.

This appendix has attempted to give some thought to the reasons for the decline of leasehold as the predominant tenure basis of speculative residential development, and the reasons for its almost complete replacement by freehold during the interwar period. It should be appreciated however that, in view of the paucity of detailed empirical evidence known to the author in this area, the discussion and conclusions should at this stage be considered as only preliminary and, as a consequence, remain to be confirmed, modified or disputed in the light of future work in this sphere by social, economic, legal and/or financial historians.



Map 1. The location of some housebuilding developments in N.W. and W. Middlesex.

Key

- major roads
- secondary roads
- +—+— railway lines
- +—+—+— railway and underground stations
- +—+—+— railway stations
- +—+—+— underground stations
- 72 housebuilders and estate developers

0 1 2 miles

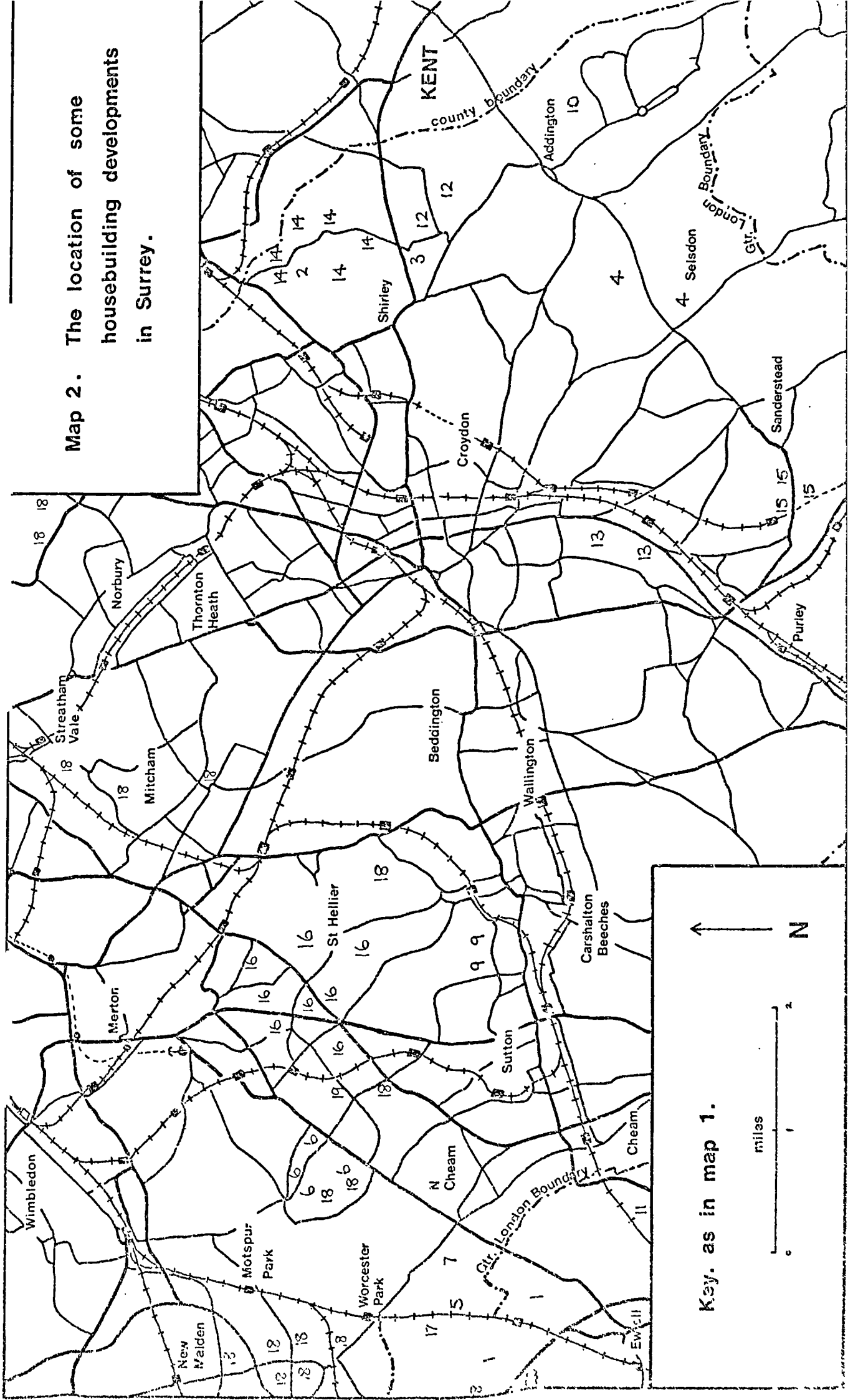
Map 1. The location of some housebuilding developments in
N.W. and W. Middlesex: list of housebuilders and
estate developers.

The one-inch Ordnance Survey provided the base for this map. Greater detail can therefore be obtained by reference to this series. A large-scale street atlas, such as Geographers' London Atlas, will also facilitate interpretation.

1. Anon. (J.Searcy?)
2. George Ball Estates Ltd.
3. George Ball (Ruislip) Ltd.
4. Belton Estates Ltd.
5. Bindon Building Co. Ltd.
6. W.E.Black Ltd.
7. T.Blade Ltd.
8. J.P.Blake.
10. Henry Boot (Garden Estates) Ltd./Henry Boot & Sons Ltd.
11. J. & J.H.Boothman (1930) Ltd.
12. E.B.Burge Ltd.
13. Callow & Wright Ltd.
14. Hilbery Chaplin Ltd.
15. H.J.Clare Ltd.
16. Clifford Estates Ltd./Clifford & Clifford Ltd.
17. Comben & Wakeling Ltd.
18. Richard Costain & Sons Ltd.
19. F. & C.Costin Ltd.
20. G.T.Crouch Ltd.
21. Cutlers Ltd.
22. A.F.Davis Ltd./Davis Estates Ltd.
23. D.C.Houses (Canons) Ltd.
24. P.H.Edwards Ltd. (various companies)
25. English Houses Ltd.
26. R.Fielding & Sons Ltd.
27. General Housing Co. Ltd.
28. Hamilton & Hillman Ltd.
29. Haymills Ltd.
30. Headstone Manor Estates Ltd.
31. Hillingdon Estate Co. Ltd.
32. Hillside Estates (Southport) Ltd.
33. Houelands Ltd.
34. F.Howkins Ltd.
35. Ideal Homesteads Ltd.
36. W.J.Jennings Ltd.
37. J.Laing & Son Ltd.
38. R.Lancaster & Sons Ltd.
39. London County Council's Watling 'out-county' estate.
40. London Housing Society Ltd.
41. London & Provincial Building Co. Ltd.

42. R.J.Mackenzie & Sons Ltd.
43. Manor House Estate Co. Ltd.
44. J.Marshall Ltd.
45. G.K.Ietcalfe Ltd.
46. Metropolitan Railway Country Estates Ltd.
47. Morgan & Edwards Ltd.
48. A.E.Murdock Ltd.
49. T.F.Nash Ltd./Nash Construction Ltd.
50. Neasden Property Co. Ltd.
51. New Ideal Homesteads Ltd.
52. North West London Estates Ltd.
53. Philips & Cooper Ltd.
54. Perry's (Ealing) Ltd.
55. Quality Contracts Ltd.
56. George Reed & Sons Ltd.
57. E.S.Reid & Son (Builders) Ltd.
58. Romford & District Estates Ltd.
59. Rotherham Estates Ltd.
60. Ruddock & Neighan Ltd.
61. Ruislip Development Co. Ltd.
62. Clifford Sabey Ltd.
63. Salmon Estates (Kingsbury) Ltd.
64. Scott & Speedie Ltd.
65. B.Smith & Son (Builders) Ltd.
66. W.Smirk & Sons Ltd.
67. Southern Park Estates Ltd.
68. W.Spencer Ltd.
69. Standard Estates Ltd.
70. Standard Properties (Hillingdon) Ltd.
71. F.Taylor Jnr. & Co. Ltd.
72. Taylor, Woodrow Ltd./Taylor Woodrow Estates Ltd.
73. W.S.Try Ltd.
74. Tucker & Warren Ltd.
75. Unit Construction Co. Ltd.
76. Vincent Estates Ltd.
77. W.G.Estates Ltd.
78. A.Waddington & Sons Ltd.
79. R.T.Warren Ltd.
80. Warren House Estate, Stanmore.
81. West London Garden Village (Ealing Co-Partnership Tenants Ltd.)
82. R.C.Watson Ltd.
83. George Wimpey & Co. Ltd.
84. Wonder Homes Ltd.
85. Great Western Railway Co. (Great Western (London) Garden Village Society).
86. T.G.Gough Ltd.
87. Allied Building Corporation Ltd.
88. Kings College Estate, Ruislip.
89. A.Watson Ltd.
90. H.B.Silver (Builder) Ltd./H.B.Silver Estates Ltd.
91. Great Western Land Co. Ltd.
92. C.Peppiatt Ltd.
93. W.Gradwell & Co. (Slough) Ltd.
94. Hayes Bridge Estate Co. Ltd.
95. Wates Ltd.

Map 2. The location of some housebuilding developments in Surrey.



Key. as in map 1.

↑ N

0 1 2 miles

Map 2. The location of some housebuilding developments
in Surrey: list of housebuilders and estate
developers.

1. Atkinson & Marler (estate agents).
2. E. & L. Berg Ltd.
3. M.Brown & Sons Ltd.
4. R.Costain & Sons Ltd.
5. J.Cronk & Sons Ltd.
6. G.T.Crouch Ltd.
7. Davies & Davies Ltd.
8. Davis Estates Ltd.
9. Edser & Brown Ltd.
10. First National Housing Trust Ltd.
11. Gleeson Development Co. Ltd.
12. Gower Builders (London) Ltd.
13. Haling Down Estate Co. Ltd.
14. Ham Farm Estate, Shirley.
15. J.Laing & Son Ltd.
16. London County Council's St. Hellier 'out-county' estate.
17. F.H.Robinson Ltd.
18. E. & A. Wates Ltd./Wates Streatham (1928) Ltd./Wates
Malden Ltd./Wates Ltd.
19. R.F.H.Watts Ltd.
20. George Wimpey & Co. Ltd.

CHAPTER 8. The availability of land for speculative building.

The position of land in the production activities of a housebuilder (or any individual or firm interested in the construction of new buildings) was, and still is, rather different from its position in any other production or assembly industry, for every unit, or block of units, produced or projected for production required its own piece of land as an input. Housebuilding was clearly a highly land consumptive production process, and particularly so between the wars when local authority town planning regulations so often required relatively low residential densities. In consequence throughout his business operations land was a central consideration to the housebuilder whether, for example, in terms of the physical and locational attributes of sites already owned with respect to site and house construction and sale, or in terms of the search for, evaluation of, and purchase of new pieces of land for projected developments. Clearly the discovery, selection and the purchase of land was a vital entrepreneurial function for the speculative housebuilder; a fact which placed the acquisition of land as an important, even crucial, element in the decision-making process of speculative residential construction activity. In view of this the decision has been made to focus the remaining three chapters of this work on this aspect of speculative housebuilding between the wars.

Up to the present time, consideration of this area in any detail has been noticeably absent from any historical work on the activities of the speculative housebuilder. This is a fact which makes the work in the following chapters all the more

important, and emphasises the pioneer and exploratory nature of the research.

In the present chapter an attempt is made, with varying degrees of success, at an appreciation (1) of the availability of land for speculative housebuilding between the wars, (2) of some of the forces instrumental in making land available for speculative residential development during these years, and (3) of the effect that the changing market situation in land during the period may, or may not, have had on the speculative housebuilder and his activities. This is then followed by a further two chapters in which the activities of the speculative housebuilder, in the context of various aspects of land acquisition for residential development, are examined in some detail. In Chapter 9 attention is focused on the first of the two broad processes involved in land acquisition, that is the search for land. This may be thought of as the process by which a speculative housebuilder approached the problems of obtaining intelligence of land which was available or becoming available, and then decided the suitability, or otherwise, of the sites for his purposes. The purchase of land may be seen as the second of the two processes involved and may be thought of as the process, both physical and financial, by which a housebuilder approached the actual purchase of any area of virgin land, or developed frontage, selected. This aspect of land acquisition is examined in Chapter 10, an examination which will also include a consideration of the land purchase policies pursued by a number of housebuilding firms, and of the incidence of land stockholdings by housebuilders and their

significance for the firms which held them.

1. Land.

In itself, land has no value, or at least, no value in the same way as a manufactured product would have an inherent value from its inputs. Lands of course will have some value in agricultural and soil terms, but for the most part any non-agricultural value associated with a specific piece of land will stem from its locational characteristics and the interaction of housing market forces. The non-agricultural value of land therefore depends upon its availability, the uses to which it can be put, and the number of people who consider that it could be put to such uses and are interested in doing so. Although this may appear obvious, it needs to be stated, especially when considering land in terms of its building value. In such terms the soil quality or topographical features are likely to be of distinctly secondary importance, when compared with locational considerations. And it is the demand for land for residential and industrial building purposes which normally results in the most rapid increments in its value.

Land surrounding a growing urban centre is normally thought to pass through three distinct stages of usage during the process by which it becomes developed for residential purposes. And at each stage the value placed on the land would rise. Broadly, these stages of usage may be referred to as: firstly, 'agricultural', which would include private estates and parkland as well as farmland; secondly, 'accommodation', for example land which was being used as orchards, playing fields, or for market gardening, nursery work, allotments or other

smallholdings of some description; and thirdly, 'building', that is land which has been adopted for building purposes. The fact that so much of the land around cities is to be found under such intensive agricultural uses as dairying, market gardening and orchards would appear to support the suggestion of the reality of such a transitional process.¹ On the other hand it should also be added that during a period of high residential activity such as the interwar years, it was not unusual to find farmland and private parkland being purchased and directly developed for residential and industrial purposes without passing through any intermediate stage of development. In such cases of course it is to be expected that the land would have appreciated in value fairly rapidly over a relatively short period.

2. Land availability.

An enormous area of land became available for house-building purposes in the OSA during the interwar years. Over this period the built-up area of Greater London approximately doubled in size.² However, in a sense, the area of land available for residential development between 1918 and 1939 was even greater than the area used, for even in 1939 there was in existence all the land which remained unused until 1940 or after. This was also true for any particular year during

1. Cmd. 6153. Report of the Royal Commission on the Distribution of the Industrial Population (1940), p.14 (Barlow Report); Howkins (1938), op. cit. p.11; See also Ordnance Survey Maps 1:25000 series, 1914 and 1935-8 edns. of areas within the Greater London outer suburbs.

2. See above p.13.

the period. When the availability of land is looked at in this way the function performed by individual landowners can be more clearly appreciated. The release of land onto, or the withholding of land from, the land market was, as indeed it still is, in the control of individual landowners who in turn may have been stimulated to sell, or constrained to hold, all or part of their land by various economic and/or non-economic forces which may have been influential at particular points in time. ¹

The 1920s were characterised by widespread activity in land transfer dealings with many acres of farmland and private estates being introduced on to the 'land market' for sale, and to a much lesser extent, particularly after 1925, for lease. ² As Prof. Mowat has pointed out, "high taxes and

1. The term 'land market' relates to the buying and selling of land. In strict theory the term should only be used where the dealings were on a large enough scale, and the communications between all buyers and sellers were sufficiently fluid, to constitute something like a 'market' in the sense in which the word is used by economists (see e.g. A.W.Stonier and J.C.Hague, A Textbook of Economic Theory (3rd edn. 1964), pp. 10-15). The extent that the commercial transference of land for housebuilding purposes in the interwar OJA may be described in such terms is debatable. It would appear that the market in land used for housebuilding in operation during these years operated primarily on an extremely private level with most of the land transactions taking place without the land coming on to the open market, being advertised on the open market, or being bought and sold in the more traditional market-place of the auction arena. Therefore, although the word 'market' will be used for the sake of convenience, it should be recognised that its meaning will not be strictly that used by economists, but rather refer to a more informal, looser phenomenon and one which was highly imperfect.

2. See above Appendix 7.4.

death duties were going to work on the redistribution of property".¹ Certainly high post-war taxation provided an important economic stimulus to landowners to release all or part of their land for sale when they found its financial burden becoming too excessive. Furthermore the downward trend in agricultural prices, especially after 1922, and the general depression in agriculture throughout the 1920s provided the owners of farmland with additional incentives.² In comparison with the economic returns on investment in land, the relatively favourable returns on alternative investments available during the 1920s must have looked particularly inviting to financially stretched landowners.³

1. Mowat, op. cit. p.203.

2. Mitchell and Deane, op. cit. p.489; Tracy, op. cit. p.152.

3. It is important to remember of course that, without the interest of a land developer or speculative housebuilder, the fact that land was available to be purchased, even if it were flat, well-drained, and well-positioned for housebuilding purposes, was by no means sufficient to cause residential development to take place. It simply made its development possible. Even when areas of very cheap land came on to the market they were not necessarily purchased for residential development during the first half of the 1920s. For example, Little Danson Farm, a 76 acre area of the Danson Estate, Welling, was well-located near the local railway station on the Bexleyheath line, and extremely suitable for housebuilding purposes. (see Course, op. cit. pp. 207-15). However when the estate was put up for auction in 1922 it was bought by neither a land-developer nor a housebuilder, but was sold as farmland for approx. £6 an acre (Bexleyheath Public Library, File No. 3897, op. cit.; Waugh, op. cit. p.209.) It was quite probable that a good deal of the land which surrounded London A.C. and which was offered for sale during the early 1920s was divided and resold for agricultural or semi-rural purposes: e.g. to small or tenant farmers as small farms (like Little Danson Farm), or to horticulturists or other types of smallholders. And then only later in the period was it resold at a higher price for some form of residential development.

The evidence for the second half of the nineteenth century which has so far come to light appears to suggest that the most important single factor determining the release of estates, on to the market, whether parkland, farmland, or houses with large gardens, was the death of the owner. However, it is impossible at the present time to state categorically how common a cause for the break-up of estates the death of the owner was, in comparison with other possible forces, such as the collapse of banks, the miscarriage of investments, overspending, the mismanagement of the estate, or foolish business ventures. And therefore the state of present knowledge allows the historian to make no stronger a statement than that for the most part the timing of the sale of land, and the broad form of its subsequent development was very largely haphazard. ¹

It seems probable that within the area surrounding the County of London during the interwar years this was still very largely the situation. Death, for example, seems in general to have held just as prominent a position in any number of specific examples. Furthermore it is certain that an examination of any particular area would undoubtedly result in the discovery that, in any number of cases, the timing of the sale of individual estates or farms, and their subsequent use, was the consequence of a whole variety of individual and peculiar forces which most often were intimately connected with the circumstance and the character of the individual

1. Kellett, op. cit. pp. 416-7.

landowners.¹ On the other hand it is also clear that, as noted earlier, during the 1920s the coincidence of the agricultural depression, high taxation, relatively favourable alternative investment opportunities, and the reform of real property law with regard to land transfer, settled lands, and restrictive covenants on inherited lands were of considerable significance for the availability of land for residential development purposes, as well as being positive, and perhaps crucial, elements in any number of specific cases.²

The combination of an increased supply of land on the market and the agricultural depression naturally had implications on the price of land. Indeed it has been stated that in the south-eastern suburbs, the value of open agricultural land during the first half of the 1920s dropped to approximately 50% of its level at the turn of the century.³ The prices paid for building land were of course higher than those paid for farmland but, with the exception of the already established but still expanding suburban areas where the demand for land was high and the supply appeared to be decreasing, such as Golders Green, Hendon and Finchley in north and north-west London, land values within the outer suburban ring appear in general to have been distinctly depressed. This was particularly true during the first decade. Moreover contemporary town planning legislation was not without its influence, and the

1. See e.g. Appendix 7.1.

2. See e.g. Appendix 7.4. Also above p. 439.

3. Waugh, op. cit., p.208.

maintenance of low densities for residential development by local authorities helped to keep land values low while hindering a very rapid rise in values taking place.¹ Thus the relatively low cost of building land around London between the wars may be seen as a distinguishing characteristic of the period, and possibly only by the end of the period do land values appear to have re-attained their 1907 levels.²

Of all commodities however, the value and price of land is among the most difficult to assess. The paucity of detailed information and the reticence of the people directly involved to discuss such matters remain fundamental obstacles. Further problems arise over the possible comparability of two separate but superficially similar pieces of land, even though they may have been located within the same locality, since as a result of any number of characteristics specific to one or other of them, their values as building land could have differed widely. It can be imagined therefore that where pieces of land were in two distinct areas, separated perhaps only by a mile or two, the problems of comparability are even greater. Factors like the proximity to a developed area, to good transport facilities, to the main

1. Normally the densities required of residential developments in the OSA varied between 3 and 12 dwellings an acre. The only exceptions to this appear on a number of L.C.C. out-county estates built during the 1920s and early 1930s. On these estates densities were up to approx. 15 dwellings an acre. L.C.C., London Statistics 1936-8 (1938), pp. 146-9.

2. Waugh, op. cit. p.211.

drainage network, among others, could be crucial. For example, in Stanmore in 1929 it appears that top bids of £500 an acre were made for various 3-4 acre areas of undeveloped land on the St. Bartholomew's Hospital estate,¹ while not a mile away in Harrow Weald similar-sized areas of virgin land were said to have been sold, and were selling, at a price at least four times that figure.²

During the middle and later 1920s the interest of developers and housebuilders in undeveloped land in outer suburban areas began to increase, and with it the price of land. Between the late 1920s and early 1930s a large acreage of virgin land changed hands for the purpose of residential development. Some areas were bought by developers, who after having laid them out with roads and sewers wished to resell it at a price per foot frontage; other areas, by speculative housebuilders;³ while others, simply by individuals who sensed a rising market and that money was to be made from the buying and selling of undeveloped land. The areas involved were both large and small. Indeed some of them had been involved as part of land sales earlier in the period.⁴ In Essex, individual areas the size of Costain's Elm Park development, and 300 acres in Ilford were sold during the early 1930s;⁵ also estates of 800 acres and of over 350 acres in

1. The Times, 10 Sept. 1929, p.11.

2. Ibid. 18 Sept. 1929, p.10.

3. See above Ch. 7.

4. E.g. see Waugh, op. cit. pp. 207-10 for examples in N.W.Kent.

5. See above pp.477-9; PB, Aug. 1933, p.183.

Surrey.¹ A little earlier, in 1927, St. Bartholomew's Hospital had begun to sell an area of over 880 acres in Stanmore (Middlesex) to various housebuilders and developers, while just to the east, Stag Lane Aerodrome, Edgware, was purchased from the De Havilland Aircraft Company for house-building purposes in 1933.² In the western suburbs during these years, farms were being sold and divided to provide land for large and small housing estates, or sold complete to allow developments like that of George Ball (Ruislip) Ltd. to be undertaken.³ Neither could the numerous private estates in West Middlesex escape, and in parts of Hillingdon, Hayes, Heston, Isleworth and Twickenham, as of course in many other areas around London, they were eagerly devoured by the speculative housebuilders.⁴ Similarly, in the Enfield and Southgate districts of north London during these years, the estates of South Lodge, Osidge, Arnos Grove, Eversley Park, and The Chase, were purchased for development, while a large orchard was divided and many acres of nursery land were sold.⁵

The early operations of New Ideal Homesteads Ltd. and the evidence contained in Waugh's doctoral thesis both

1. PB, Oct. 1933, p.232; April 1933, pp. 94-6.

2. Ibid, June 1933, p.137.

3. Jackson, interview, 17.10.69; See above pp.309-32 passim.

4. E.g. interviews with Kenny, 24.9.69; Seaton, 23.1.70; Tipples, 25.8.69; Pownsend, 18.2.70; anon, 26.8.69; Davies, 21.1.70; Harston, 25.8.69; Johnson & Harper, 17.11.69.

5. Interviews with Johnson & Harper, 17.11.69; Davies, 21.1.70; Todd, 4.2.70; Townsend, 18.2.70; Smith, 26.2.70; Harston, 25.8.69. Also Ordnance Survey Maps, 1:25000 series, 1914 and 1935-8 edns.

indicate that the Kentish experience during the 1920s and the early 1930s differed little from the experience of the rest of the OSA.¹ Clearly the list could be almost endless and examples of many small land sales have not been given. Farms, private estates, orchards, nurseries, playing fields, gardens were bought by estate developers and speculative builders, either as a whole or in sections. Particularly where the division of a private estate took place, small areas often of only one or two acres, were purchased by small and medium builders anxious not to miss the opportunity to exploit a demand situation for their products which during the later 1920s and especially from 1932-3 was becoming increasingly favourable.

By the middle of August in 1933, however, it appears that the general land situation in the London suburbs was no longer so favourable to the housebuilder as it had been. In that month in fact it was stated in one building trade journal that "available building sites near to London are very difficult to obtain today . . .",² while earlier in the same issue it had been noted that "agents handling land suitable for building . . . especially within a few miles of the Metropolis, report that demand at the moment greatly exceeds supply."³

On the other hand, as has been suggested earlier, land availability or supply could (and can) never be a static phenomenon, since in a sense there was (and is) always land

1. Companies House, File No. 243565; Waugh, op. cit. pp. 208-11.

2. PE, Aug. 1933, p.185.

3. Ibid, p.183.

available, even though market, or perhaps other more individual, forces had not brought it overtly onto the land market.¹ Hence, it was not surprising to discover the same journal reporting before the end of that same year that "the difficulty of obtaining land for development, which existed a few months ago, has eased . . .".² Neither was it surprising to find in this same journal over this particular period the announcement of the purchase by housebuilders and estate agents of a number of large estates.³

During the rest of the 1930s there appears to have been little slackening off in the demand for building sites and estates. Although land prices in the outer suburbs did rise, a phenomenon which in itself perhaps indicates that to some extent there did exist a relative scarcity of available land, the rise does not appear to have been very great. In 1938 for example, a prominent London agent, William Johnson & Co. of Hanover Square, stated that estates within an area between 10 acres and 100, or just over, within the OSA were selling at anything between £500 and £900 an acre according to their proportions, location and physical attributes.⁴ Furthermore, during the second half of the 1930s, and in fact as late as 1938, areas of land of over 100 acres were being sold for building sites in areas like Hayes (Middlesex), Ickenham, Ilford, Dagenham, and Hinchley Wood. In view of these two

1. See above p. 522.

2. PE, Nov. 1933, p.245.

3. See above pp. 477-81.

4. Bidr, 28 Jan. 1938, p.226; NHB, Feb. 1938, p.8.

points, the question could be asked, to what extent was there a scarcity of land suitable for building sites towards the end of the period? And to what extent did this present speculative housebuilders with a real problem at this time?

The interviews can provide a partial answer to these questions, although a number of points should be recognized which will necessarily qualify the extent of their validity on this particular question. First, the size of the building firm would be of importance within a specific area, for clearly, while there may have been plenty of land available of a size and character profitable for a small builder to develop or build upon, there may also have been a severe shortage of sites which were considered an economically viable proposition for a larger firm.¹ A second point is that any retrospective comment made by a builder during the late 1960s about the period before the Second World War will inevitably have been made, albeit perhaps unconsciously, with the post-1945 land situation in mind.

On the other hand, in spite of these points, there can be no doubt that the consensus view among the small builders interviewed, and indeed also among the larger field-ranging concerns, was that before 1939 there had never been any serious problems in finding building sites which suited their needs while two individuals who had been concerned in the development of large estates (one in northwest outer suburbs

1. Although of course a larger builder most probably would be willing and able to build over a far wider size-range of areas than a smaller concern.

and the other in various areas all around London) for example went rather further; one stating that "there was always more land available than one would dare to build upon", while the other was of the opinion that right up to the outbreak of the war there was "plenty of land, even for the big man".¹

On the other hand, the fact that builders interviewed expressed such opinions does not necessarily mean of course that land availability in the OSA between say 1937-9 was quantitatively or qualitatively as great as it had been earlier in the decade; after all an increasing tendency for building land to be sold by auction as opposed to private treaty was certainly noticed as the decade wore on.²

Probably what happened was that although a great deal of land was still available for building purposes towards the end of the decade, in general the sites being sold were less ideally located or easy to develop than they had been in earlier years. Hence it is quite probable that speculative house-builders and estate developers, in their very natural search for building sites which were potentially the most profitable,³ found increasingly towards the end of the decade that their earlier activities and the activities of others in the industry had used up many of the most desirable sites.⁴

1. Anon, interview, 14.11.69.

2. Interviews with Reed, 12.11.69 and 18.11.69; Davies, 21.1.70; Daniel, 7.11.69; See also R. Turvey, 'The Rationale of Rising Property Values', Lloyds Bank Review, LXIII (1962), 28.

3. I.e. sites which both (1) helped to encourage potential purchasers to visit the estate and to buy the houses, for example sites which were near to other development and were well served with public transport, and also (2) presented the builder with the lowest development costs, for example sites which were level, well-drained and were directly served by the main drainage network.

4. A common remark made by those builders interviewed who have been active in speculative housebuilding during the post-war years was that since the war they have largely been building on the more

It is difficult, if not impossible, to estimate the extent to which this situation may have had a direct influence on housebuilding levels within various areas, or within the OSA as a whole. What is perhaps more possible is to say something about the impact that it might have had on the pattern of the activities of individual builders. That is to say, to what extent any changes in such a pattern were a reaction to it, and to what extent they were clearly independent, perhaps the result of an entrepreneurial response to some other, more positive, force. The most obvious response which might be expected of a speculative housebuilder faced with a scarcity of available and suitable land in the area in which he was active would be to look away from that area. Broadly speaking at this point he would be faced with a choice of two alternatives, that is he could either move generally away from or around the built-up area, or else he could move inwards towards the centre. It is in fact possible to find examples of speculative housebuilders doing both of these things during the later 1930s, and since the former seems to have been more common this will be examined first.

As an urban area grows, so the area under development, that is development on previously undeveloped land, will be the land on the outer fringe of that built-up area. It is therefore not surprising to discover speculative housebuilders and developers active in the interwar outer suburbs of London

difficult sites of land which for the most part had been ignored by the interwar suburban operators because of the existence of superior and more easily developable alternatives.

moving their activities gradually outwards, as, one by one, the more inner of the suburban areas became increasingly developed.¹ This was a continuing process throughout the period and a number of cases may be taken as brief examples. In the north western suburbs, for instance, the developer and estate agent P.H.Edwards began his activities in Golders Green during the early 1920s, moving outwards to Hendon, Mill Hill, and Kenton during the later 1920s and the early 1930s.² A somewhat smaller housebuilder, E.L. Saunders followed a somewhat similar path, building first in Hendon, before moving out to the Kingsbury and Kenton areas.³ The path followed by a third Golders Green building firm, Haymills Ltd., on the other hand, although outward, does not appear to have been so radial in direction. Before the Great War and during the immediate post-war period this firm was building houses in the Golders Green and Hendon areas (e.g. the 22½ acre Shirehall Estate on land purchased from the Metropolitan Railway) . However, during the 1920s, its area of operation shifted westwards and south-westwards into Wembley and Ealing where it developed two relatively large estates.⁴ Moreover, to the south of the river, the early activities of Wates Ltd. in the form of subsidiary speculative housebuilding companies, showed a similar outward

1. This, of course, might also have involved a degree of movement around the perimeter of the built-up area if such areas for some reason had remained undeveloped.

2. Anon, interview, 29.10.69.

3. Saunders, interview, 1.10.69.

4. I.e. the Barn Hill and Hanger Hill Estates respectively. Cox, interview, 28.8.69.

pattern during the 1920s. From a sizeable development at Grove Road, Mitcham, the company moved outwards and around in two directions, first in 1927 to a site in Thornton Heath and soon afterwards to two sites in New Malden, building in both concurrently. ¹

However to what extent was such a movement apparent during the later 1930s? It would seem that such a movement was unquestionably apparent during these years, although it should be added that it was perhaps less evident among the smaller and some medium-sized speculative builders who, it appears, were normally able to find sufficient land to satisfy their needs in small sites within their own localities. ² For medium and larger builders on the other hand such sites had less appeal. Referring back for one moment to the builder who suggested the availability of "plenty of land, even for the big man", ³ it is interesting to note that when he required an estate for development around 1936-7, he found it necessary to move quite a way outwards along the Underground line next to which he had been developing in order to find a suitable area of undeveloped land large enough for his purposes. Furthermore, in north-west Middlesex a medium-sized builder who had been building on MRCE Ltd.'s Harrow Garden Village Estate at Rayner's Lane also followed an Underground Railway line outwards, in his case

1. Wates, History, p.8; Wates Streatham (1928) Ltd. Sales Ledger; Seaton, interview, 23.1.70.

2. Interviews with Bradley, 10.10.69; Edser, 16.10.69; Swane, 29.10.69; Watson, 14.10.69; Pilgrim, 15.1.70; Cooper, 12.11.69.

3. See above p.532.

to an estate in Northwood.¹ While in 1939 the Harrow builder T.F.Nash Ltd. was building estates in Sevenoaks and St. Albans, and the Enfield builder, A.Harston and Co. (Enfield) Ltd., was building in Hoddesdon, Herts. These are, of course, just individual examples, but a marked centrifugal movement was apparent in the activities of many speculative housebuilders during the later 1930s. On the other hand, with the exception perhaps of some of the distances involved, this centrifugal movement would not appear to have been any more a feature of this period than it had been during the earlier years.

But what of the very large, that is the more 'regional' housebuilding firms: firms like New Ideal Homesteads, Costain, Wimpey, Wates, Davies and Taylor Woodrow? It has already been mentioned how Wates, during the 1920s and early 1930s, showed a noticeable centrifugal tendency in the pattern of its estate development activities. It would appear that to some extent this was also true of the earlier interwar experience of Wimpey, even though later in the period the activities of these two firms and of the other regional firms did not appear to maintain such a strong or distinct pattern.² On the other hand, for most of these firms there was a perhaps rather more dramatic movement of their activities away from the centre of London. For example, in 1939, New Ideal Homesteads Ltd. had

1. Anon, interview, 29.9.69.

2. However, it must be admitted that many of the estate developments of these firms, even those started during the very early 1930s, were increasingly located in the more outer suburban areas.

built, or were building, estates in Southampton, Hastings, Sevenoaks, Birmingham, Castle Bromwich, Burton and Crewe;¹ Wates Ltd. in Oxford and Coventry;² G.T.Crouch Ltd. in Northampton;³ Wimpey in Yeovil; and Davis Estates Ltd. in Horsham, Luton, Fareham, Gosport, Bournemouth and Plymouth.⁴ Taylor Woodrow Estates Ltd. by the late 1930s had gone even further afield. In 1936, with estates in progress in N.W. and W. Middlesex, Wiltshire (Trowbridge, Chippenham, Calne, Melksham), Kent (Rochester), and Devon (Plymouth), Frank Taylor paid his first visit to the U.S.A. where he purchased a golf course on Long Island for one million dollars.⁵ Expansion overseas however did not hinder expansion at home and by 1939 Taylor had added sites in Birmingham (Alcocks Green and Perry Bar), Walsall, Scunthorpe and Oxford to his list.⁶

Superficially therefore, here would appear to be the manifestations of the possible forces that an increasing scarcity of land in a heavily built-up area like the outer

1. Companies House, File No. 243565; Hefford, interview, 31.10.69.

2. Interviews with Seaton, 23.1.70; Kelsoe, 10.2.70.

3. Daniel, interview, 7.11.69.

4. Southern Railways, op. cit. p.4; Steadman, interview, 14.11.69.

5. i. Jenkins, op. cit. pp.26,27; NHB, Dec. 1937, p.30; Jan. 1938, pp. 8,30.

ii. L.H.P.Meyer, founder and managing director of NIH Ltd., planned to visit the U.S.A. in 1938 to review the possibilities of an expansion into America. Unfortunately it has not been possible to discover the results of this visit, if any. NHB, Dec. 1937, p.30.

6. Jenkins, op. cit. p.30; All England Homefinder and Small Property Guide, Nov. 1939, p.32 (subsequently referred to as AEHSPG.)

suburbs could have exerted on the operations of larger builders. But was it for this reason that such builders decided to venture into new areas? To what extent was it the desire to maintain a level of activity which was in decline as a lack of available and suitable land, or to what extent was it the consequence of an entrepreneurial response to demand opportunities sensed in other areas, combined with a desire for expansion? This is of course a very difficult question to answer. Unfortunately it has not been possible to locate evidence which shines any direct light on this matter. However two, in some ways related, observations may be of some assistance.

The first is a question of dates, that is the dates on which London builders first began looking to the provinces for building opportunities. It is known for example that by 1936 Davis Estates Ltd. were building in at least three areas in the country districts surrounding Greater London and in five other areas in various parts of the country, especially towards the south west.¹ Now, if this company was in the process of building at least eight estates outside the London area in 1936, on the most conservative assumption the purchase of the sites would have had to have taken place during the previous year. And it is likely therefore that the company would, at the very latest, have had to have been considering the possibilities of such developments during 1934.² The second point is one which

1. Southern Railways, op. cit. p.4.

2. The fact that such moves were taken this early means that it is highly improbable that they were in any way stimulated by a falling demand in the Greater London area.

will be returned to in greater detail later. It concerns the building up of land stocks by individual firms.¹ This was especially relevant in the case of these larger firms, and by the middle of the 1930s it is probable that many of these firms had sufficient land in their possession to maintain their housebuilding levels for at least three, and perhaps for as many as six, years in the form of either untouched sites, or partially completed estates.

When these two points are considered together it would appear that at the time that for example Davis Estates Ltd. were first looking for possible sites outside the Greater London, area, it is likely that the firm already possessed a fairly large land stock within the London area. And although any decision to increase the number of provincial sites during the second half of the 1930s may well have stemmed from problems over land availability within the Greater London area, there would appear to be less reason to associate the initial moves away from London with such problems. When seen in this light therefore the initial moves would appear to be more associated with the sensing of the potential in various provincial areas combined with a desire to further expand the activities of the firm. Such a conclusion is to some extent strengthened by comments made during interviews, also by the fact that in 1939 the provincial estates of the majority of the larger speculative housebuilders represented numerically only a relatively small proportion of the total number of

1. See below Ch. 10. section 2 (d).

sites under development.¹ Expansion was even more clearly the case with the American venture of Taylor Woodrow Estates Ltd. If it had been merely a question of finding sufficient well-located land in order to maintain annual output levels, there were clearly suitable building sites rather nearer home.

Examples of housebuilders looking inwards towards the centre of London towards the end of the decade were rather rarer. Indeed only two examples of firms adopting this practice, are known, that is Wates Ltd. and Richard Costain & Sons Ltd. Dr J.H. Johnson, on the basis of a discussion with the late Norman Wates, former chairman of Wates Ltd., stated that "at least one large building company reacted to what seemed, in the context of the pre-war situation, to be a growing shortage of sites by buying up older properties in inner London with a view to redevelopment".²

While it is quite clear that this is a true statement of action taken by Wates during the later 1930s, when written in this way it rather tends to over-emphasize the importance of Wates' inner-London redevelopment enterprise in relation to their overall new estate policy during these years. It would

1. i. Interviews with Hefford, 31.10.69; Seaton, 23.1.70; Steadman, 14.11.69; Jones, 10.10.69.

ii. E.g. NIH Ltd. only 6 estates out of 32. SE, 12 Feb. 1939, p.26; Wimpey, 1 out of 15. SE, 26 March 1939, p.26; Wates Ltd., 2 out of 24. Wates News Letter, 19 Nov. 1938. On the other hand, in contrast, 14 out of the 29 estates developed by Davis Estates, and probably over 75% of those of Taylor Woodrow Estates Ltd., were located outside the OSA. SE, 12 Feb. 1939, p.26; AF13PG, Nov. 1939, p.8.

2. Johnson, op. cit. p.159.

appear that Wates saw their activities in the more inner areas during these years much more as complementary to their activities within the OSA rather than in any way as an alternative. A single entry in Wates' house magazine should be quite sufficient to illustrate this, although unfortunately no indication of the size of individual projects was given.

In the 29th October 1938 issue of the Wates News Sheet the company announced ten new estates where work was about to, or had just, started. Of these ten projects only one was located in inner London and this was for flats at St. George's Court, S.E.1. Of the rest, two were in Worcester Park, an area in which Wates had been building houses for at least 7-8 years, one was in Heston (Middlesex), and five were in Beckenham, Wallington, Surbiton, Ewell and Banstead respectively. The tenth estate was in Coventry. Thus although small estates were built on redeveloped land in such areas as Clapham, Camberwell, and even central London,¹ this was by no means a widespread practice, even by this particular firm.

Furthermore, the significance of these developments, in aggregate, was relatively small when compared with other, later 1930s' new development which Wates was undertaking on sites in the outer suburban areas like Worcester Park, Heston, Surbiton, and Ewell. It would appear therefore that in spite of "what seemed, in the context of the pre-war situation, to be a growing shortage of sites . . .",² Wates at least

1. Wates, History, p.11.

2. See above p. 540.

were able to locate the vast majority of their new sites in late 1938 in those areas where, or near to where, building had been taking place throughout the decade, within the suburban fringe.

On the other hand, it is probably true to say that, to the extent that Wates were stimulated into any modification of their estate siting policy, this was a consequence of the scarcity of 'ideal' virgin building sites elsewhere. This is possibly less true of Richard Costain Ltd. and the Dolphin Square development, although it is impossible at this point to support the suggestion with specific evidence. For Costain the interwar years was a period of change. In the early 1920s when the company moved from Liverpool to London for example it has been estimated that over 75% of its activity was connected with speculative housebuilding. By 1939 however this proportion had fallen to under a quarter.¹ This being the case, superficially at least, the Dolphin Square project would appear to fit into a pattern of structural change within the company which had begun to develop long before the later 1930s.

In general terms therefore, the available evidence would appear to suggest that a shift of activity inwards, towards inner London, as a reaction to an apparent land scarcity was a relatively uncommon course of action for a large speculative housebuilder to take during the second half of the 1930s.

1. Even though in actual terms it is probable that the speculative housebuilding side of the business had not declined. In 1939, for example, Costain still had the major part of their Elm Park Estate, Hornchurch, to complete, in addition to an estate at Borehamwood, Herts. Winstanley, interview, 6.9.69.

Further, where such action was adopted, it does not appear to have been a very important aspect of the builders' overall housebuilding business strategy at this particular time.

Possibly a more significant manifestation of any relative scarcity of suburban building sites as it affected the development activities of the speculative housebuilder and estate developer was in the size of the new sites being bought for residential development. For example, although there were occasional exceptions,¹ it is probably accurate to suggest that the vast majority of areas of over 100 acres that were to be sold to speculative housebuilders and estate developers before the outbreak of war had been sold by 1937.² In general therefore at the end of the decade the estates available for sale tended to be smaller than had previously been the case.

In theory, of course, this should have had, and possibly in fact did have, its greatest effect on the larger builders and developers. However, it remains to be seen whether this effect was as adverse as it might initially appear to have been. For instance, it should be remembered that even among

1. For example, two areas of just below approx. 100 acres were purchased in 1937. In Ickenham, Dunster Richardson & Co. purchased the land for their Milton Court Estate on which they planned to build over 1,000 dwellings; while in Hornchurch, Hilbery, Chaplin & Co. purchased a site sufficient for over 800 dwellings which they were later to name the Maryland Green Estate. NHB, Aug. 1937, p.36.

2. Although of course there were any number of estates of this size and larger, which had been bought and started earlier in the decade or even during the late 1920s, and were still being developed right up to, and even just after the outbreak of war in Sept. 1939.

the more regional speculative housebuilding firms only a few most commonly chose to develop estates of over 800-1,000 dwellings. Speculative housebuilding firms like New Ideal Homesteads and Costain, at least during the early 1930s, certainly did, but for firms like Wates, Wimpey, Taylor Woodrow, Hilbery Chaplin, and Davis, estates of these proportions were far less important in terms of their overall production of dwellings. For such firms, estates somewhere between 400 and 800 dwellings tended to be more common during the period of the greatest demand, while in some areas their estates were even smaller than this. Thus, the fact that fewer very large estates came on to the market after say 1936/7 may have been of significance to the larger firms but it was by no means crucial.

On the other hand from comments made by Dr J.H. Johnson it would appear that the desired areas that were available for sale in these years were becoming so small that "in the late 1930s large builders were forced to erect estates of only, say, 40-50 houses on these more desirable locations", ¹ while a little earlier Johnson had suggested that where housebuilders had wished to carried out ". . . large scale building operations . . . ", these operations had had to be preceded by the purchase and amalgamation of a number of pieces of land. ² Both of these points in fact require a little clarification, since on the basis of the evidence collected during the present work they appear to convey a rather

1. Johnson, op. cit. p.159.

2. Ibid. p.159.

exaggerated impression of the actual situation. Much of the reason for this is that they have been founded on the example of only two firms, one for each point.

In the former case, Dr Johnson has again generalised from the experience of Wates Ltd., and even then only from part of the experience of that firm. It is quite accurate to state that a number of the later Wates developments, particularly where they involved redevelopment and were located near to a railway station, were as small as 40-50 dwellings. On the other hand this was by no means a true reflection of the broad pattern of the estate development activity of this firm during the later 1930s. Even as late as 1939 this company was planning a 300-house estate in Worcester Park, not half a mile away from Tolworth Station,¹ while two years earlier they were starting work on an estate of over 290 houses close to Crane Park in Twickenham.²

Moreover when it is considered that an estate of fifty dwellings might have required only slightly over four acres of land, the distorted impression given by Dr Johnson's work is even clearer. Clearly although the size of areas coming on to the market may well have in general fallen towards the later 1930s, it is unlikely that the fall involved would have been by such a sizeable margin. And it is even more unlikely that the larger- and medium-sized speculative housebuilders in particular would, as a general rule, have been willing to develop estates as small as three to six acres. Wimpey, for example, appears

1. NHB, Sept. 1939, pp.28-9.

2. NHB, June 1937, p.32.

to have been developing new sites of between 150 to 400 dwellings during the last few years of the decade, and from the picture gained from the Enfield and Ruislip-Northwood areas of Middlesex, it would appear that the outer suburban experience of firms like Davis, Crouch, Taylor Woodrow and even New Ideal Homesteads during these years was similar.¹

What then of the second point: on the amalgamation or combination of various adjacent areas of land, in order to form a compact estate of a larger area than would otherwise have been possible? Although Dr Johnson cited an example of a firm undertaking such an amalgamation in north-west Middlesex, unfortunately no date is given.² Superficially, it would be reasonable to expect that, in a situation where the average size of the areas of building land available for sale were diminishing and where there were builders and estate-developers interested in land for residential development purposes who had previously been, and/or were, developing relatively large estates, amalgamation would become a noticeable phenomenon. However in fact even among the very large housebuilding firms it would appear that there was no tendency for the practice to increase as the decade wore on. Indeed, among those builders interviewed not one had found it necessary during the second half of the 1930s, nor had they any knowledge of other builders having acted in this way. This would seem to indicate either that on the whole in very

1. See above pp. 315-7.

2. The question of combination and annexation of land by housebuilders will be considered below. See Ch. 10. Section 2 (b).

few areas within the outer suburbs during the later 1930s were there any adjacently situated pieces of land under different ownership both well-located from the builder's point of view and which the owners were willing to sell, or that in general the areas of building-land for sale during these years were sufficient in number and size, and were sufficiently well-located to provide satisfactory sites for even the larger builders. Although it has not been possible to discover any specific evidence to support either of these theories, the latter case does seem to have been the more likely. Of course, if this was so, it would obviously further emphasize the relative nature of 'scarcity' in the land situation during the later 1930s. It indicates that although the sites available at the end of the period may not have been as 'ideal' from the point of view of the speculative housebuilder as they had been earlier, they were still able to present the builders with profitable building sites. Furthermore, if this is correct, it must mean that in general the individual sites available must almost certainly have been substantially larger than four acres in area.

Before progressing to an examination of the land search and land purchase activities of the speculative industry, there remains one other question, relating to the availability of land in the OSA during the later 1930s, which should be raised, even though in this present work it will have to remain largely unanswered.

It would appear that, particularly during the second half of the 'thirties, a number of larger firms increased the

number of the estates on which they were active within Greater London. Five examples are given in Fig. 8.1. immediately below.¹ The question arising therefore is why

Fig. 8.1. The number of housing estates being developed concurrently within Greater London by five large speculative housebuilding firms, 1931-9.²

Firm	Date								
	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937	1938	1939
i. Taylor Woodrow	*	*	*	*	7	9	*	*	12
ii. Wimpey	4	*	9	*	*	11	12	*	14
iii. N.I.H.	*	*	*	*	*	21	22	*	28
iv. Wates	*	12	*	*	12	16	20	22	*
v. Davis Estates.	*	*	*	*	*	11	13	*	15

- Sources:
- i. DM, 22 June 1935, p.18; SE, 5 Jan. 1936, p.22; NHB, Jan. 1938, p.30.
 - ii. HSPS, 6 Oct. 1931, p.5; PB, Nov. 1933, p.251; SE, 5 Jan. 1936, p.22; SE, 28 Feb. 1937, p.26; SE, 26 Mar. 1939, p.26.
 - iii. Palmers Green and Southgate Gazette, 11 Sept. 1936, p.16; SE, 14 Mar. 1937, p.26; AEHSPG, Nov. 1939, p.8.
 - iv. Wates, History, p.8; DM, 22 June 1935, p.22; Southern Railway, op. cit. p.8; SE, 28 Feb. 1937, p.26; Wates News Sheet, 19 Nov. 1938.
 - v. SE, 17 May 1936, p.26; SE, 29 Feb. 1937, p.26; SE, 12 Feb. 1939, p.26.
- * Not known.

1. Unfortunately, as Fig. 8.1. contains the sum of the documentary evidence it has been possible to discover on this matter, it is not possible to suggest the extent that this trend was also apparent in the activities of smaller firms. It is therefore necessary to base the following discussion on the evidence that is to hand, while at the same time recognising that the implications which may evolve from the discussion may well not be generally applicable.

2. It has not been possible to obtain much early information since during the early 1930s block advertisement, i.e. where all or a number of the current estates of a specific firm were advertised in a single advertisement, were rare.

did this trend occur, and to what extent can the explanation be found in the responses of the speculative housebuilders to changes in land availability?

The desire to expand the output of dwellings would have resulted in the speculative housebuilder following one or more of a number of strategies. One of these strategies is likely to have been the increase in the number of concurrent developments being undertaken; the strategy being founded on the principle that the greater the number of estates, the greater the number of selling points, or 'shop fronts', to the public the builder would have, and in consequence the greater the number of local markets that could be tapped by that builder. However, was the desire for expansion the sole reason a firm might increase the number of its concurrent developments? Almost certainly it was not. Earlier in this work it was suggested that increasingly, over the decade, the larger and more ideal building sites, had been purchased, leaving only the smaller and less ideal sites remaining for development during the later years. Also it was suggested that this, in part at least, explained why larger-and medium-sized speculative housebuilders in general were found developing smaller sites during the later 'thirties than they had been during the earlier years of the decade. Such evidence introduces a first element of complexity into the picture since clearly, if such a conclusion is justified and the available building sites were becoming smaller as the decade wore on, it suggests that during the later 'thirties at least an increase in the number of sites was a strategy virtually forced on speculative housebuilders if

they wished to maintain their output levels, let alone if they wished to increase them. On the other hand, although the increasing scarcity of larger, more easily-developable sites, combined with the desire of such firms to maintain or increase output, probably provides part of the explanation to the trend under consideration, there was at least one other force, unrelated to the land situation, which was also in all probability influential.

Within many outer suburban areas the general increase in the demand for houses experienced by the industry from around 1932-3 onwards had begun, by 1936-7 to slacken off.¹ Clearly speculative house-builders, particularly the ones with the greatest market awareness, would almost certainly have been influenced by a situation of declining demand, whether it was perceived, anticipated and/or actual. And would have modified their business strategy accordingly in order to maintain as high a production level as was possible in that particular market situation. One option open to them would have been to increase the number of sites they had under concurrent development and/or reduce the size of these sites. A housebuilder who modified his estate development strategy in both of these directions would not only have been reducing the size of his investment within particular areas with the consequent reduction of risk, but also at the same time have been widening the spatial boundaries of his markets by increasing the number of 'shop fronts' from which he could sell his products. The

1. Even though, in particular areas, actual completion levels did not start to fall until perhaps 1938.

advantages of such a strategy in a period of declining demand are obvious since not only would it increase the probability of the builder obtaining the highest possible number of house sales, but it would also reduce the obvious risks to the economic viability or profitability of the firm which would have arisen from the over-dependence of its operations on larger-sized estates within a particular local area, or even a small number of local areas.

Clearly, in this light, it could be suggested that the tendency evident during the second half of the 1930s whereby a number of the larger speculative housebuilders were undertaking the development of a growing number of concurrent developments of declining average size might be more accurately explained in terms of the actual, perceived or anticipated decline in the demand for small speculative houses rather than any decline in the size of available building sites. Of course there is no reason why such possible explanations should be seen as mutually exclusive. Clearly such a phenomenon is likely to have been the consequence of interacting influences, albeit perhaps influences of unequal importance.

Moreover it should be pointed out that the trend towards an increase in the number of estates being developed concurrently by such firms without a doubt had its origins prior to any downturn in demand and also any significant reduction in estate size. Wimpey, for example, more than doubled the number of its estates from 4 to 9 between 1931 and 1933, while Wates had twelve active estates by 1932 and NIH Ltd were developing 21 estates by 1936.¹ In view of this perhaps it is possible

1. See Fig. 8.1.

to suggest the hypothesis that this trend, although to all appearances relatively smooth, was the consequence of two consecutive demand situations which for different reasons both prompted the larger speculative housebuilders to activate, in one aspect at least, the same strategy. While the decision to adopt such a strategy was no doubt also reinforced and further encouraged by the changes in land availability during the middle and later years of the decade.

It is unfortunate that the evidence available to the author at the present time is insufficient to support any attempt to produce an any more categorical answer to the question posed in the last part of this chapter. For this reason it has been necessary to leave this aspect of the debate open in this rather unsatisfactory way. On the other hand, it has been possible to outline at least one explanatory hypothesis, and it is hoped that this will provide future historians a possible point from which they might advance further the present understanding of such aspects of this area of study.

Plate 6



F. Taylor Jnr. & Co. Ltd.
Wood End Gardens, Greenford. 1934-5



D Houses (Canons) Ltd
Howberry Road, Edgware. 1935-7

Plate 7



**George Wimpey & Co. Ltd.
Claremont Road, Ealing. 1930-2**



Grafton Road, Enfield. 1938

Plate 8



T.F.Nash Ltd:

Alicia Gardens, Kenton. 1935-6



Hillingdon Estate Co. Ltd.

Torrington Road, Greenford. 1932-4

Plate 9



**A. Waddington & Sons Ltd.
Bamford Avenue, Alperton. 1934-6**



Queensbury Road, Alperton. 1934-6

Plate 10



Laing & Son Ltd
St Andrews Drive, Edgware, 1932+5



T & Va e Southgate, N 14 1933 5

CHAPTER 9. Land acquisition: the search for and evaluation of land by builders and estate developers for speculative housebuilding purposes.

1. Land search: the process.

A piece of American research carried out during the mid-1960s into the processes of urban growth focused part of its attention on the activities and roles of the speculative residential developer involved in the urban development process in and around the city of Greensboro, North Carolina. As a result of this work two broad but distinct approaches used by residential developers in their search for land were distinguished.¹ It is necessary of course to guard against the indiscriminate transference of findings from American experience to Britain, particularly findings from the study of an American city during the 1960s to the situation within the OSA during the 1930s. Nevertheless these findings do provide a useful, albeit broad, point from which to view Greater London interwar experience in this respect.

The first approach distinguished by the study was where the search was positive and active by nature - known to Americans as 'bird-dogging'. This was where the builder attempted to identify a void in the housing supply for which he considered there was a demand, discover the character and price of dwelling which would best suit that demand, and then search for a piece of land which would be most appropriate for

1. S.F.Weiss, J.E.Smith, E.J.Kaiser, K.B.Kenney, Residential Developer Decisions: a focused view of the urban growth process (Chapel Hill, 1966), pp.32-3.

such a project. The second approach distinguished, on the other hand involved little or no active search at all. In this case, the builder would wait for a piece of land to be offered to him, by either an agent or a private individual, which he would then in some way evaluate. Then if he felt it could be profitably developed he would buy it.¹ The latter classification would also doubtless have encompassed those builders who themselves discovered a piece of land, but who had discovered it in some way by chance.

In what ways then, did the interwar speculative housebuilders and estate-developers active within the Greater London OSA approach the problems of land search? And to what extent could these approaches be considered as active or passive? The limited sample of speculative housebuilders interviewed included 49 building firms. Unfortunately 18 of these 49 firms either could not, or would not, provide any information on their land search practices.² In all therefore, positive answers on the approach to land search which had been most commonly used by speculative housebuilders during the 1930s were received from representatives of 31 firms. Of these 31 firms, 8 were regional estate developers or firms which had built often well over 500 dwellings annually in the majority of the years between 1930 and 1939; 7 were firms which ordinarily over this period built not more than 250 dwellings, but not less than 100 dwellings, a year; 6 were housebuilders who had a normal annual output of

1. Weiss, Smith, Kaiser, Kenney, op. cit. p.32.

2. For a discussion of the interview sample, see below Appendix B, pp. 780-4.

something between 20 and 99 dwellings over these years; while the remaining 10 firms normally never managed to erect more than 20 dwellings in any year.

Fig. 9.1. The approaches by which interwar speculative house-builders located building land within the Greater London OSA.

Approach by which builders discovered land.	Size of firm*			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
(a) primarily as a result of personal search	3	0	0	1
(b) primarily as a result of information presented to the builder by:				
(i) private individuals	0	1	2	4
(ii) land and estate agents or surveyors	5	6	4	5
(i) + (ii)	5	7	6	9
At some time adopted both approaches i.e. (a) and (b)	6	4	1	4

* Groupings of building firms by number of dwellings built annually in the majority of years between 1930 and 1939.

Group (1) : 250 and over.

Group (2) : 100 - 249.

Group (3) : 20 - 99

Group (4) : Under 20.

Source: Interviews.

The type of speculative housebuilding firm which most commonly appears to have undertaken a fairly active part in the search for suitable land during the 1930 would appear to have been the

larger operator. According to the representatives of interwar housebuilding firms interviewed, 3 out of the 8 firms in the sample classified in Group 1 had found the major part of the land on which they built during these years as a result of their own initiative,¹ while it would appear that the remaining 5 firms within this category had primarily relied upon land and estate agents to take the initiative and to offer land to them, which they would then either accept or reject. None of the 7 firms categorized within Group 2 chose to search actively for their building land; 6 of the firms relied primarily or entirely on agents. While one firm appeared largely to rely upon personal and individual contact, either with the landowners themselves or with persons who knew of pieces of land which were available, or likely to become available, but who were not in fact agents. These might have been solicitors or bank managers for example. The form of approach taken by the firms classified in Group 3 was broadly similar, although 2 of the 6 firms for which information was given, normally relied upon personal contacts rather than agents, while only 4 generally took the latter course. Among the smallest builders, half of the 10 firms for which information is available preferred to wait for agents to provide them with information on available land, although almost as many (4) discovered most of the land upon which they built through some form of personal contact. What is interesting however, and perhaps a little unexpected, is that the other

1. See above Fig. 9.1.

small housebuilder appears to have more frequently found his building sites as the direct result of a personal search within the area in which he had decided to concentrate his activities. The normal approach he adopted was to search for advertising boards erected on the sites themselves.

Of course, this far from provides a complete picture, even of the land search activities of the small number of firms for which information has been discovered. All that has been acknowledged above is the form of the approaches to land search primarily adopted by these individual building firms. Frequently individual firms could, or would, not limit themselves exclusively to one or other of these two broad forms of approach. For example, although from the early 1930s Davis Estates Ltd. consciously pursued an active land search policy and consequently employed men with a specific brief to learn about, and keep track of, all the land which became available within the areas in which the company was interested, sites were frequently offered to them by agents during this period, some of which were far too well-located and suitably-priced for the company to reject.¹ On the other hand, while a firm like New Ideal Homesteads Ltd. apparently primarily located suitable building sites by relying on land- and estate-agent introductions, a number of sites were discovered simply as a result of the personal initiative of individual members of the firm when driving around the suburbs.² Table 9.1. indicates that of the 31 firms covered by the sample, nearly half not

1. Steadman, interview, 14.11.69.

2. Hefford, interview, 31.10.69.

uncommonly found themselves adopting a dual approach in their search for potentially profitable building land. And this would appear to have been especially true of the speculative housebuilding firms who were normally constructing over 100 dwellings a year.

From the point of view of their internal organisation, how then did various speculative housebuilding firms approach the problems of land search? To what extent for instance was responsibility for land search, evaluation and purchase, delegated by the head of the firm in the same way that other parts of the house construction process were, for example the buying of building materials, or design? Or alternatively, to what extent did the housebuilder retain a tight command over these parts of the business himself?

There appears little doubt that in the case of the great majority of the small firms, and indeed many of the medium firms, the responsibility for land search, land evaluation, and the eventual purchase or rejection decision appears to have been primarily retained in the hands of the head of the firm himself, often with no delegation whatsoever. For example, R.T. Warren, the head of a speculative housebuilding firm which built extensively in many areas of the outer western suburbs, took complete charge of, and responsibility for, all aspects of land and land-dealing, since he considered the selection and choice of the site to be crucial to the potential success or failure of any particular estate development project. Indeed it appears that Warren often would finalize the negotiations on

a particular land purchase for a new estate several months before it became common knowledge among his office staff. ¹

On the other hand during the 1930s, a number of the firms active within the OSA were organising and expanding separate departments within their organisation specifically to deal with land; while others, for example Laing, although they did not go quite as far, gave perhaps one or two men, normally surveyors, the task of investigating and reporting on the pieces of land which in various ways came to the firm's notice, even though for these individuals this represented only part of their full-time job. ²

Possibly the firm with the most advanced land search department was Davis Estates Ltd., although Wates Ltd. also were apparently relatively well-developed in this respect. The role of the land search department of Davis Estates Ltd. was two-fold, incorporating actual search with a fairly close evaluation of the feasibility and the potential development profitability of the areas of land discovered.

By the mid-1930s at least two men were employed at the firm's head office in Kilburn with the job of directing the four land-scouts employed by the firm, maintaining records of available land known to the firm, and in general controlling land search operations. The four land-scouts were each allocated specific territories within the OSA, and one part of their role was to discover, within that specific area, the location of pieces of land already on the market, and pieces

1. During the 1930s Warren never employed more than six persons in the office. Kenny, interview, 24.9.69.

2. Johnson and Harper, interview, 17.11.69.

which, although perhaps not at that moment declared as available, appeared to be potentially suitable for the company's development purposes. Further than this their task was to discover the names of the landowners of the 'available' land and/or the agents with whom the land had been placed, to discover the sort of price that was being asked for the land, to make enquiries at the local authority offices to discover how the land had been zoned with respect to land-use and density, to make an appraisal of the type of development that would be likely to fit the land best and also sell best in that particular area, and then to report back the information that had been gathered to the head office for evaluation, and if necessary, filing. The areas of land discovered in this way and which appeared to have some potential were then followed up in more detail, either by the scout concerned, or more frequently by a person from the land search department at the head office. Such investigations included among other things an examination of (1) the facilities for drainage etc; (2) the gradients, allowing sewers to be installed; (3) the extent that streams had to be piped or culveted; (4) the rights of way across ground, if any; (5) the extent of any excavation work necessary; (6) the nature of the soil etc. On the basis of such investigations direct approaches were then made to either the agent or the landowner concerned. ¹

The land search department formed by Wates Ltd. was smaller than that of Davis Estates Ltd.; however, its establishment in 1932-3 by the appointment of one man, whose sole responsibilities

1. Steadman, interview, 14.11.69.

were to learn about and keep track of any land which was put up for sale within the areas of interest to the firm, indicates that by the early 1930s this particular south London firm had consciously separated the function of land search from the other processes involved in residential development. By 1939 this department had been expanded to a staff of three, and had compiled records of all the pieces of available land discovered, their characteristics and, if it was the case, why the firm had rejected them as unsuitable. Normally the department's task was to carry out a continuing search over what amounted to quite a wide area. On occasions however the brief was to search a specific area thoroughly. Often these were areas in which the company had previously developed, or were just developing, a successful estate. Unlike Davis Estates Ltd., however, Wates Ltd. did not require their land search department to make any detailed evaluation of the land searched. It would appear that this, and any consequent land purchase decisions, were carried out by a member or members of the board on the basis of the information collected.¹

The third of the three large builders noted in Table 9.1 to have adopted a primarily active approach to land search was Francis Jackson, the managing director of George Ball (Ruislip) Ltd., and later in the 1930s of Francis Jackson Developments Ltd.² Because of the size of the organizations involved and the spatial scope of their activities, Jackson's firms did not

1. Interviews with Seaton, 23.1.70; Kelso, 10.2.70; Bland, 13.1.70. Of course at times knowledge of land also came to firms via directors themselves and their personal contacts.

2. See above pp. 309-32 *passim*, 376-7.

include a specific or full-time land search team. However, his approach was no less active than that of Wates Ltd. or Davis Estates Ltd. Before 1939 Jackson was personally responsible for the location, the evaluation, and the purchase decision of all the estates on which he built. Admittedly between approximately 1931 and the outbreak of war he built on only two sites, in Ruislip and then in Ickenham. However both the estates were large and between 1933 and 1939 the annual production never amounted to less than 300 dwellings, while between 1934 and 1938 this figure stood at well over 500 dwellings. His approach to search was basically simple. Because he lived in Harrow, he consulted a number of maps of relatively close but more outer areas like Harrow Weald, Hatch End, Pinner, Ruislip and Hillingdon, following the tracks of various railway lines outwards. From this preliminary search position he noted a number of sites and areas of farmland which looked possibly suitable for his purposes, and then commenced further investigations. In this way, during the early 1930s Jackson came across Manor Farm in South Ruislip, an area of at least 300 acres lying directly between the Metropolitan and the Great Western Railway lines. Although at this time this particular area was not on the market as such, Jackson applied to the owners and eventually terms were agreed. The estate was eventually developed under the name of George Ball (Ruislip) Ltd. Jackson's approach during the search for his second large interwar estate, begun under his own name in 1938, was similar. ¹

1. Jackson, interview, 17.10.69.

Clearly therefore, for a number of interwar speculative housebuilders, personal search was of major significance in the discovery of available land ripe for development. However, of all the sources used by housebuilders in their search for land between the wars, it would appear that the land and estate agent was probably the most important. Moreover, the evidence categorized in Table 9.1. suggests that this was not particularly more true for one size of firm than for any other since, within each of the four categories, agents appear to have been the most important individual source adopted. Even among the largest firms, 5 out of the 8 firms for which oral evidence has been gathered appear to have been largely reliant on the initiative of agents or similar intermediaries for their supply of building sites.

Interwar land and estate agents with land which they wished to sell, or resell, to speculative housebuilders, approached the problem in various ways. For example, one approach adopted by some agents was simply to advertise in local and/or trade papers that land of a certain character, and perhaps of a certain price, was in their hands and that any persons interested should get in touch with them.¹ Although this approach was apparently used during the 1920s, it was not particularly favoured by estate

1. Only one of the building firms for which oral evidence was collected ever discovered a site, which they subsequently developed, within the OSA as a result of an estate agent's advertisement in a newspaper. Moreover the builder concerned had only used such a source on one occasion when he strayed from the area in which he was concentrating most of his activities. Berg, interview, 21.10.69.

agents with land in the Greater London area. And indeed after 1930 it has been possible to discover little or no evidence of advertisements of this type.¹

It would appear that in general during the 1930s agents adopted other more positive and direct approaches which clearly in the past had been proved more effective. Thus, during this decade, it became common for agents to circularize housebuilding firms with information on land they held. Alternatively, if they had a piece of land on their books which they considered to be suited to the requirements of a particular builder, or a number of firms, agents would often approach that firm, or those firms, directly, in order to put the proposition to them. These were the forms of approach most important to London builders. In this way, especially if they were generally well-known, or known to be interested in a particular locality, it was possible for speculative housebuilders to keep informed about the land situation as it affected them.

It would appear that this was the case with New Ideal Homesteads Ltd., which boasted itself 'Britain's Biggest Builders'. It has been estimated that the vast majority of the sites of the estates built by this company between 1930

1. The other occasion on which newspaper advertisement was used by agents for the sale of building sites (for which evidence has been obtained) was where a suburban London agent advertised in a provincial paper the sale of plots and lots of land on sites he had 'developed' in N.W. London. The advertisements preceded visits by the agents to various towns and cities, particularly in the North. As a consequence a number of northern firms began speculative housebuilding in the OSA. Davies, interview, 21.1.70; see also above pp. 401-2.

and 1939 had been offered to them by land and estate agents, and that this had been particularly true after the establishment of their reputation during the early 1930s.¹ Firms of agents from all parts of the OSA personally visited, or informed the company of available land. So much so in fact that the company formed a separate department to evaluate and report in detail on those of the many sites offered which appeared to be potentially suitable.² It has been suggested that the land search problem faced by New Ideal Homesteads Ltd. was not one of finding information on a sufficient number of sites to maintain their level of activity, but rather a problem of deciding which of the many sites offered to them were likely to be the most profitable if developed.³

Similarly, for John Laing & Son Ltd., agents appear to have been of prime importance during these years. It has been estimated by two former Laing employees that as much as 80% of all the land on which the company had built had been brought to the firm's attention by estate agents.⁴ Unfortunately there is no evidence of the way in which the agents actually introduced land to Laing, assuming of course that they were acting as something more than simply a purchasing agent for the company. The only documentary evidence that it has been possible to discover in fact relates to the 18 acre site between Colindale and Burnt Oak Underground Stations which

1. At times land was offered to them by the landowners directly, however this was a comparatively rare occurrence.

2. Hefford, interview, 31.10.69.

3. Ibid.

4. Johnson and Harper, interview, 17.11.69.

Laing acquired in 1933. And this evidence is simply a statement in The Builder that the site had been purchased for Laing by Stowell & Co. Ltd. of 38, Watford Way, Hendon Central, N.W.4. ¹

On the other hand the spatial pattern of the Laing estates around the outer suburban ring may perhaps give some indication of the way in which at least some of the sites came to the company's attention. Largely, these estates were concentrated within the north-western sector, although during the 1930s Laing also developed estates in Southgate and Enfield, and in Woodford, South Croydon and Heston. Thus a number of Laing estates were located some distance from the core of the company's speculative housebuilding activities. This suggests the possibility that the more distant estates at least had been introduced to Laing by people from outside the company and these would most probably have been estate agents. While, albeit only hearsay evidence, it has been suggested that within the north-western suburbs also Laing established a close working relationship with one particular firm of agents which not only served the company with information on sites, but also gave design advice on certain aspects of both the houses and estates. ²

Of course land and estate agents were not solely interested in circularizing the larger firms. Evidence has been found of firms which were relatively small during these years but which were regularly being circularized by agents in this way: from Bradley and Arthur Ltd. in the southern suburbs, to E.L.Saunders

1. Bldr, 22 Dec. 1933. This site includes Booth Road, Angus Gardens, Braemar Gardens.

2. Anon, interview, 29.10.69.

in Mill Hill and Kenton, to R.C.Watson & Co.Ltd. in Wembley and Harrow.¹ On the other hand, when a speculative house-building firm began to become established and develop a reputation within an area, or within a region, it could expect to receive a great number of unsolicited circulars from agents from many areas, while it appears that smaller firms were normally only circularized if they had either initially approached the agent personally at some point during a search for land, or perhaps had had some social or other business contact with them.

Some medium-sized firms also found that at times it was necessary for them to visit local firms of estate agents in order to be placed on their lists for circularisation, but in general this occurred primarily only when such builders became interested in expanding their activities into new and often specific areas. An example of this was found in the experience of The General Housing Co. Ltd. when it wished to develop an estate in the Southall area during the first half of the 1930s,² while E. & L. Berg Ltd. adopted a similar approach in their housebuilding activities in the southern suburbs.³

The circularization of details of land by agents was obviously important to Greater London speculative housebuilders during the 1930s. There can be no doubt that many builders responded to such circulars and, indeed, relied on them to a large degree in their search for building sites. On the other

1. Interviews with Bradley, 10.10.69; Saunders, 1.10.69; Watson, 14.10.69

2. Ellis, interview, 27.8.69.

3. Berg, interview, 21.10.69.

hand, a number of builders who were interviewed expressed a certain scepticism as to the value of such circulars. Among other things, some builders suggested that because the same circular had also been sent to other building firms, the price of land acquired in such a way was normally somewhat higher than would otherwise have been the case. Other builders suggested that any land included in such circulars was often not of high building quality, or alternatively relatively poorly located, since all the more superior pieces were normally sold more directly. ¹

Because of such beliefs, some builders where they were able, tended to ignore the land circulars of estate agents, and to show a preference for those pieces of land which had been offered directly to them. George Reed & Son Ltd., a firm which built in Tottenham, Edmonton, Enfield, Southgate, Finchley and Mill Hill between 1920 and 1939 present a fine example of this sort of attitude. As a firm, Reed relied almost entirely on estate agents for their information on available land, but although Reed were circularized by agents in a number of areas, the sites on which they built during the late 1920s and 1930s invariably had been offered personally. ² It would appear that Haymills Ltd. of Ealing also paid for more attention to the sites offered privately to the firm by agents. In fact on one occasion the firm was visited by an agent who had worked out a complete project for the site before offering the site for sale

1. Unfortunately it has not been possible to prove the veracity or otherwise of such beliefs.

2. Reed, interview, 12.11.69.

to the firm. In this particular case the agent was completely successful, and the builder followed the plan almost in its entirety.¹ Indeed there is evidence that this was not merely an isolated example, even though in other cases it would appear that the agents' plans for the site had not been worked out in such a detailed or complete form.²

With the exception of the larger firms, the majority of the housebuilding firms for which oral evidence has been obtained appear generally to have worked with a relatively limited number of agents. This was especially true of small- and medium-sized firms, which tended to concentrate their activities within particular localities or areas. For example, E. & L. Berg Ltd., a medium-sized firm which concentrated its activities largely in the Hinchley Wood and Surbiton areas of South London, apparently had no more than perhaps six different agents supplying it with information on available land over the whole period,³ while other firms such as Bradley and Arthur Ltd., E.L.Saunders and George Reed & Sons Ltd., were all described as having dealt primarily with a relatively small

1. Cox, interview, 28.8.69.

2. i. Interviews with Storr, 23.9.69; Bradley, 10.10.69; Watson, 14.10.69. Although these were all small firms, it is highly probable that any agent approaching a firm personally would have made the visit armed with certain proposals of the type of development (or alternatives) that they considered possible for that particular site.

ii. It is unfortunate that the evidence available has not allowed the establishment of any more precise or quantitative impression of the relative importance of circularization by agents or the more personal approach as a means by which speculative builders found building sites. This will have to await further research.

3. Berg, interview, 21.10.69.

core of estate agents in their 'search' for suitable building sites.¹ Indeed the oral evidence collected indicates that a number of small and medium-sized building firms placed almost all their entire land search effort in the hands of one particular land and/or estate agent. In 5 out of 6 examples that it has been possible to cite, the relationship between the housebuilder and agent began very early in the builder's housebuilding career, while in the sixth case the agent was a close family friend.

The relationship between Edser & Brown Ltd. and their particular agent began when the two partners and the agent all belonged to the same voluntary military training organization during the early 1920s. At this time the agent had become acquainted with a private individual who was looking for an opportunity to invest in residential development, and in consequence he approached his friends who at that time were working as small jobbing builders. In this way the partners were able to enter the sphere of speculative housebuilding and through the medium of the agent relied almost entirely on the private investor for both land and finance right until the outbreak of war.² In Enfield, Arthur Harston had a similar relationship with the local agent, James Neilson & Co., although in this case no private investor stood in the background. Their relationship began in about 1924-5 when Harston, at this time a contract builder with an interest in housebuilding, was approached by the Metropolitan Housing Company^{Ltd.} This company

1. Interviews with Bradley, 10.10.69; Saunders, 1.10.69; Reed, 12.11.69.

2. Edser, interview, 16.10.69.

offered Harston a contract for a small estate in Eastern Enfield which included the design, the construction, and the sale of approximately 50 dwellings.¹ At this time however Harston had had little experience in the processes of estate development other than the actual construction work, having worked under the supervision of an architect during the two previous housing contracts he had undertaken. For this reason he approached Neilson who apart from dealing in land and selling houses also employed an architect. Thus Harston, under contract for the completion of the whole development, sub-contracted out all the processes with the exception of the construction work to the estate agent. Harston maintained this practice when in approximately 1926-7 he decided to undertake speculative house-building on his own account. In addition he gave Neilson an open hand as far as land search was concerned. From this point on Neilson, who at all times would have had knowledge of Harston's future land requirements, was given authority by the builder to negotiate for any piece of land which the agent felt was suitable.² In this way this particular builder contracted out all responsibility for land search.³

It was in this same area, although later in the period, that Townsend & Collins Ltd. first had contact with Bowyer & Bowyer, a long-established firm of Enfield estate agents. This contact in fact was to form a landmark in the growth of this particular building firm. Prior to 1933 Townsend & Collins Ltd.,

1. Harston also had to obtain building approval for the development from the local authority.

2. Although, of course, Harston demanded full consultation before the final negotiations took place.

3. Harston, interview, 25.8.69.

still a very young firm, had been speculatively building single and occasional pairs of houses in the north Enfield area, but had not found a way of expanding the scale of their operations. The chance came in 1933 when Harold Townsend, one of the partners, came across a small estate being developed in north Enfield by the estate agent.¹ Apparently, at that time sales on the estate were slow and, backing his judgment that it was the type and the high price of the houses being built which was the reason for this, he set to work to devise and draw up plans for dwellings which would sell at approximately 80% of the price. These plans and ideas he took to the agent in the early part of the year and following discussions the agents agreed to allow him to take over, in the first instance, six plots. The initial cost to the builder involved the payment of a nominal deposit only, with an agreement that the balance of the land cost was to be paid after the sale of the houses.² He also secured an option on the other uncompleted plots on the estate. According to Townsend, by the time they had completed the first house on the estate in October 1933, purchasers had laid down deposits for all the 33 proposed dwellings on the development.³ Whatever the truth of this, it is clear that in his terms the estate was a success and the development allowed the firm to increase their capital reserves which obviously facilitated further expansion. Furthermore, the agents were obviously also pleased at the turn of events since it freed them from an

1. Bowyer and Bowyer were contracting a builder to carry out all the construction work.

2. See below pp. 612-23.

3. Enfield Register; Townsend, interview, 18.2.70.

enterprise which had become rather a liability. As a consequence, a fairly close relationship developed between the builder and agents and this continued right up to the outbreak of war.

Unlike Harston, however, Townsend & Collins did not rely entirely on one particular firm of agents for their land, even though it would appear that Bowyer and Bowyer were perhaps the major source of the land developed by the speculative side of this particular business. ¹

It was the result of a similar initiative taken by L.T. Swanne that introduced him to an agent in Frien Barnet in about 1934. Previous to the introduction Swanne had undertaken a somewhat less than successful housebuilding enterprise in Cuffley (Herts.) and had begun to search for another speculative building medium. Thus, in a period when he was marking time by undertaking various small building contracts, he came across a small strip of land in the already well-developed area of Frien Barnet, on which had been placed an agent's 'for sale' notice. Although this strip was unsuitable for a housing development, it appeared to Swanne ideally suited to a small block of flats, a form of enterprise he had already considered seriously. Before approaching the agent he worked out plans for a two-storey block of 24 small flats. The agent was impressed and persuaded the landowner to provide Swanne with working finance for the project. From this date until the war, Swanne primarily relied upon this agent for his building sites. ²

1. Op. cit.

2. Swanne, interview, 29.10.69.

The four firms which have just been considered were by no means large, at the most they could be described as small to medium in size. However, evidence has been found of two large-medium firms which also maintained such a builder/agent relationship. Newman Eyre & Peterson Ltd. for example had such a relationship with W. Goodchild & Co., a firm of estate agents originally established in Romford and which by the 1930s was found dealing in land and selling dwellings in Enfield. Between 1932 and 1938 Goodchild sold approximately 1,250 houses which had been constructed by Eyre & Peterson in Enfield, and by 1939 had found building sites for this particular housebuilder in Romford, eastern and western Enfield, and Gidea Park - the last two estates being of quite sizeable proportions.¹ The second such firm was Haymills Ltd. In addition to developing two estates of over 1,000 dwellings each in Wembley and Ealing, this firm also developed a number of somewhat smaller estates in Hendon, Mill Hill, and in Golders Green during these years. And although a number of agents were keeping this particular firm aware of the local land situation by circulars, it would appear that the source of information on available sites that the firm most heavily relied upon was the Golders Green agent, Walter Leslie Raymond, who was also a close family friend.²

Indeed, even some of the very large field-ranging firms appeared to maintain some form of relationship with certain agents. And although it appears in no way to have been such a

1. Todd, interview, 4.2.70.

2. Cox, interview, 28.8.69. Certain of Raymond's activities in the N.W. suburbs are briefly mentioned in Jackson, op. cit. pp. 74, 253, 263.

dominant relationship as among some of the smaller firms, it does seem that a number of the larger housebuilding firms during these years found themselves developing significant areas within certain districts as a result of the initiative of particular firms of estate agents.¹

The relationship between Davis Estates Ltd. and Hugh Davies of Southgate provides a good example. It also illustrates the fact that even though a firm may have employed land searchers and organized a land search department, this did not necessarily mean that the value of the role agents were able to play in the search for well-placed sites was ignored. Contact was first made between the builder and the agent when Davies visited the builder's offices in Kilburn during the mid-1930s to offer them an area on his Osidge estate in Southgate. By 1939 it appears that Davies had successfully negotiated the sale to Davis Estates of at least two other pieces of land within that same area.² The reason for the development of such minor relationships is probably the obvious one that on the one side the success of the housebuilder in developing the first site gave the firm confidence in the ability of that particular agent and encouraged a willingness to listen to any proposition which the agent might put forward, while on the other side the agent would be anxious to follow up a first success and keep that builder in particular, well-informed of any sites that were available for sale, or were likely to

1. Laing here is perhaps an exception, see above pp.565-6.

2. Interviews with Steadman, 14.11.69; Davies, 21.1.70.

become available, within his area and which would possibly suit the housebuilder's purposes. In fact it was suggested by employees and former employees of a number of the larger housebuilders that their firms were normally more than willing to pay commissions to land and estate agents who helped them to secure a building-site, even where most of the work involved in the search for a particular site had been carried out by the builder or his employees. From the builder's point of view the commission paid in such cases represented a good will payment, an incentive to that agent to keep the particular firm fully informed ahead of any other firm of any potentially suitable site which might come to their notice.

Clearly, land and estate agents, even before 1939, were important to the speculative housebuilder in the acquisition of land. However, the importance of personal contact for some builders in their search for land, likewise the element of chance, should not be overlooked, even though perhaps of lesser significance in general terms. First the importance of personal contact to certain housebuilding firms and the forms it took will be briefly considered. This will be followed by a consideration of some of the ways in which chance resulted in firms learning of available sites which they were later to develop.

The evidence tabulated in Table 9.1. appears to suggest that, as a primary source of information on available building land, there was a tendency for personal contact to be more important among the smaller speculative housebuilding firms. However, what the table does not indicate is the extent to which

housebuilding firms that normally used other sources occasionally found building sites in this way. Unfortunately from the oral evidence all that may be gleaned is a number of examples. Of the firms it is possible to cite as examples of cases where personal contact appears to have been the normal approach to land search, two in 1939 had their head offices in Uxbridge, while two others were primarily active in Harrow and Ilford respectively.

R.T.Warren Ltd. of Uxbridge would appear to have been quite exceptional among firms of his size in his land search experience since here was a medium-sized firm building houses in a number of different areas within the western suburbs, and which apparently discovered most of its sites through personal contacts of the builder himself. It appears that while agents circularized and also personally visited the firm with specific pieces of land, Warren's position as a local businessman, particularly within the Uxbridge and Hillingdon areas, encouraged both landowners and farmers to take the initiative when they had land to sell, and offer to negotiate the sale directly with him. A number were his personal friends, but also Warren apparently worked fairly closely with his solicitor, Woodbridge & Sons, of Uxbridge, and it seems likely that to some extent at least Woodbridge would have been a medium by which information on land, in Uxbridge and surrounding areas, would have come to Warren's notice. ¹

Personal friendship, it would seem, was even more important in the land dealings of another Uxbridge builder, W.S.Try Ltd. of Cowley. Again the firm was circularized by local agents, but

1. Kenny, interview, 24.9.69.

almost every piece of land on which this firm built between 1919 and 1939 had been purchased from personal friends of W.S.Try. For example, one piece of land in Hillingdon had been sold to Try by a friend who owned a nursery. The nurseryman reduced the acreage of his nursery by selling off the frontage of his land, but retained a right of way to the road and a section of the backland. In Cowley, the firm developed a site which had previously been owned by a farmer-friend of the builder, while the site of the firm's Uxbridge estate had been found by a solicitor friend. In fact, Try built only one estate of significance between the wars which had not been found in this way, and this had been brought to his notice by a local estate agent. ¹

Another housebuilding firm which may be cited in this respect developed three estates in Harrow and Northwood between the later 1920s and 1939. ² For two of the three in fact, building land had been found as a result of some form of personal contact between the builder and the vendor. It has already been seen above that it was a social acquaintanceship between the builder, then a local authority surveyor, and the managing director-cum-secretary of a London-based land development company which resulted in his first speculative estate in North Harrow. Following the completion of this estate the housebuilder concentrated his activities for a number of years

1. Leddington, interview, 30.10.69. It is perhaps not so very surprising that personal friendship should have figured so largely in Try's land search, considering the relatively restricted nature of his speculative housebuilding activities, both quantitatively and spatially.

2. This builder wishes his name to be held in confidence; see also above p. 390.

on the nearby Harrow Garden Village, from where, during the second half of the decade, he moved his operations outward to Northwood. This last move was a result of a proposition put to him by his solicitor, who, with a business associate, had previously bought an area of land and laid it out with roads and services in an attempt to sell it off in plots. The failure of this enterprise had led the solicitor to contract the builder to erect eight houses on the estate as an experiment. These houses sold well and the consequence was that the builder purchased the remainder of the developed land.¹

In the last of these four examples, taken from the activities of the Ilford firm of A.W.Jaggers & Sons Ltd., another dignitary of the local business scene is seen to have been of some significance in this respect. For it would appear that it was the bank manager who was often A.W.Jagger's source of information on available land in the Ilford and Woodford localities.²

For a number of firms, particularly the smaller concerns, it would appear that during this period, like the solicitor and the bank manager, builders' merchants and/or their travelling representatives could be a very real source of information. For example, on both the occasions on which a Sudbury firm of painters and decorators built speculative houses during these years, they had learnt of the availability of the land from one

1. Anon, interview, 29.9.69.

2. Jaggers, interview, 20.10.69.

of their building-materials suppliers.¹ Indeed the activities of one particular traveller was the means by which one builder from Tottenham, working in the Enfield area during the mid-1920s, was able to extend his activities westwards across to the Mill Hill district of Hendon. In this particular case, the builder, T.S.Bysouth, when in conversation with the traveller, mentioned that he would like to build at Mill Hill, which at that time was proving a very profitable area for speculative housebuilders. Thus when this representative made his calls on builders in the Mill Hill area, he made enquiries on his own initiative about the land situation in that district. One firm, E.L.Saunders, which at this time was developing an estate of between 400 and 500 dwellings, showed a great interest in these enquiries, and the traveller's news led to a telephone call to Bysouth who immediately drove over to the estate where the sale of 24 plots was negotiated.²

Furthermore, two pieces of evidence have been found where personal contact with members of the material supply industry appears to have led to housebuilders developing significantly larger areas than those developed by either Osbourne or Bysouth, and by coincidence both of the sites in question were located within the eastern suburbs. For example, it has been suggested that the source of information which led to a West Middlesex-based housebuilder developing an estate in Chingford (his only estate located within the eastern half of the OSA), was his acquaintanceship with the head of a large London building-

1. Osbourne, interview, 12.10.69.

2. Saunders, interview, 1.10.69.

material production and distribution firm; ¹ while another large London firm of building merchants was directly responsible for the information which led to the south London firm of Wates Ltd. purchasing approximately 70 acres of Dagenham farmland during the mid-1930s. ²

Hence, apart from any direct friendship or acquaintanceship link between the builders and actual landowners, it can be suggested that for quite a number of outer suburban speculative housebuilders, and particularly for the smaller firms, individuals whose position gave them a close knowledge of their locality, such as bank managers and solicitors, and, also at times, individuals involved in the building materials distribution sector were especially prominent as sources of information on land availability.

Unlike personal contact, in no way did chance play a major role in the land search activities of any housebuilding firm for which evidence has become available. On the other hand, it was the means by which a number of builders discovered the availability of sites which were to be of great significance to the development of their firms during these years.

Apparently the discovery of such sites most commonly resulted from a builder or employee chancing upon what was from the point of view of residential development, a particularly promising-looking piece of land or district while driving around

1. Lancaster, interview, 22.1.70.

2. See below pp. 657-8. Again it would appear that friendship between a member of the Wates family and a member of the family firm of building merchants provided the all-important links.

the OSA or in the countryside outside the conurbation.¹ Arthur F. Davis, the managing director of Davis Estates Ltd., for example, first considered extending his company's activities south to Horsham in Sussex when apparently quite by chance he was driving through the town and was struck by its building potential. It would appear that this was also the beginning of the expansion of Davis Estates Ltd.'s activities into the provinces.² Furthermore, it would appear that Davis' experience was by no means isolated in this respect since similar chance encounters which led to the development of successful estates were recounted in a number of interviews of large, medium and small-sized firms.³ Indeed it appears that the chairman of the west London firm, The General Housing Company Ltd., elevated chance into a conscious and direct form of land search policy for it seems that frequently throughout the 1930s he drove in a haphazard way around the western suburban area in the hope of spotting a piece of land suitable for his company's purposes. Of the three medium-sized estates developed by this firm two were discovered in this way.⁴

Of course it should not give any cause for surprise that house-building firms at times found land in this way since naturally, even at leisure, a housebuilder would tend to be alert to the potentialities for speculative residential

1. The piece of land in such cases may or may not have been immediately available for sale. If it was for sale, it was normally clearly marked as such by the presence of an estate agent's or surveyor's board.

2. Steadman, interview, 14.11.69.

3. E.g. interviews with Hefford, 31.10.69; Seaton, 23.1.70; Ellis, 27.8.69; Watson, 14.10.69; Lancaster, 22.1.70; Townsend, 1st.2.70.

4. Ellis, interview, 27.8.69.

development of the areas through which he was travelling. Chance, however, as an element in land search also took another form. Two examples should provide sufficient illustration and both emphasize the potential significance of social gathering places as a component of the 'land market'. The first example took place south of the Thames during the late 1920s. At this time G.T.Crouch Ltd. had been active in speculative house-building for only a few years and up to this time their activity had been relatively small-scale.¹ However, it appears that during one particular lunchtime in a public house, Crouch overheard two estate agents discussing the fact that a local landowner, the Earl of Dysart, was willing to sell an area of his land in North Kingston for residential purposes. Following up this news, Crouch personally approached the Chief Steward of the Dysart estates, and, after appraising the area involved, negotiated the purchase of the land. In this way Crouch not only purchased the site of his first estate of over 1,000 dwellings (the Tudor Estate in Kingston), but also avoided the expense of an estate agent's commission.² A similar piece of good fortune brought the sale of the Osidge Estate in Southgate in the early 1930s to the attention of the surveyor and estate agent, Hugh Davies. Davies at this time had only recently moved to the district from the northwestern suburbs, and in consequence was spending much of his leisure time in the local Conservative Club in order to become acquainted with the local business community. It was, in fact, over the Conservative Club bar that Davies learnt of the death of Sir Thomas Lipton and the

1. E.g. bungalows at Walton-on-Thames, houses at Strawberry Hill.

2. Interviews with Jones, 10.10.69; Daniel, 7.11.69.

sale of his house and its grounds. Osidge being an estate of approximately 48 acres and located only just over a quarter of a mile from the site of the newly-opened Piccadilly Line Underground Station at Southgate Circus, clearly a highly desirable building site. In the event, Davies successfully acquired the estate and then contracted George Wimpey & Co. Ltd. to lay out the estate roads and services to his own design. Once laid out Davies proceeded during the middle years of the 1930s to resell it in frontage plots to some six to eight different builders, while employing another builder under contract to build houses on one section for his own speculation. More than anything else, it was the development of this estate that initially established Davies' position as a prominent surveyor and estate agent within the Southgate area. ¹

The land market in the OSA between the wars was, as indeed it still is, comprised of a large number of small local markets each with its own individual characteristics. In consequence local knowledge was of great importance to speculative housebuilders in their work. Small- and relatively localised medium-sized housebuilders normally developed a network of contacts with individuals within the area in which they operated who had either local knowledge of the land situation or some influence over the sale of land. In some cases these contacts would have been personal, either social or business, and in others they would have been through the medium of a third person, for example an estate agent or solicitor. Those speculative housebuilders who tended to concentrate their activities within a particular area or even a small number of

1. Interviews with Davies, 21.1.70 and 26.1.70.

areas, whether or not they developed contacts with agents, were more likely therefore to develop a thorough local knowledge not only of the availability of land but also its suitability with respect to the type of development and housing that would sell well in that particular area at that particular time. As particular firms grew and began to look over a wider area for development sites, they increasingly found that they lacked the necessary local knowledge of the land situation within the areas into which they considered moving. And in consequence they had to consider the different ways of acquiring such knowledge open to them.

As has been revealed above, the reaction of a number of the larger 'regional' firms was to establish land or land search departments within their own organisations to undertake the active exploration of the localities in which they were interested. In this way in a positive and direct manner they attempted, sometimes with great success, to purchase the necessary local knowledge of actual and potential land availability, and local demand and supply conditions to facilitate their expansion. However as has been seen, even among the larger more regionally-oriented firms, such a practice was the exception rather than the rule during this period.¹ Moreover within the firms which adopted such an approach it remained one of a number of means by which land and such local knowledge was acquired. More commonly speculative housebuilders appear to have relied on service by

1. Although, as a method by which such firms obtained knowledge of previously unworked areas, it was to become more important during the later 1950s and early 1960s, see Craven, op. cit. pp.246-7.

sources outside their firm for such information, in particular from among the ranks of the increasing body of land and estate agents to be found active within the OSA during these years. This source, with social and business contacts and, on occasions, chance, apparently provided most builders with all the knowledge of local land markets that they felt they required.¹

It would appear clear that the land and estate agent was emerging as an increasingly significant actor in the suburban residential process during the interwar years, particularly with respect to land search and acquisition.² For instance, even on the occasions when a speculative housebuilder chose not to use such firms during his search for suitable building sites, almost invariably it was necessary to negotiate the eventual purchase of any site found through a firm of surveyors or estate agents. Apparently only very rarely did landowners negotiate the sale of their lands directly with the builder, although it would appear that this was not solely the result of a disinclination among selling landowners to deal directly with the potential purchasers of their land. A, and perhaps

1. As is suggested later, the level of detail demanded by speculative housebuilders during these years is likely to have varied, with many firms not concerning themselves with rigorous project assessments. Also later, albeit briefly, a number of suggestions are made to explain possibly why this was so. See below pp. 604-6.

2. An actor whose power and influence was to increase substantially during the 1960s to a point in the late 1960s where he was able to become very much the 'gate keeper' controlling the access to and the allocation of ripe housing land and hence occupy perhaps the most prominent position of all active in the entire land market, see Craven, op. cit. pp. 250-2.

the, major reason has probably already been touched upon ¹ and concerns the apparent contentment of many speculative housebuilders during these years to rely, and indeed show a positive preference for relying, on such firms to search out for them the quantity and quality of land which they required for their business operations.

When looking for an explanation of this tendency it would appear that fundamentally it was largely a question of cost and convenience. From interviews with interwar housebuilders it became clear that both small- and medium-sized operators were extremely conscious of the level of their fixed costs. Employees, apart from those involved in the actual construction work, were normally kept to an absolute minimum. The employment of additional salaried persons as land searchers, either on a full- or a part-time basis for example, was deemed extremely uneconomic by many builders, particularly in view of the stated opinion of many that it was possible to gather information over a far wider area, and cover a limited area far more efficiently, by means of contact with surveyors and agents local to the areas in which they were interested. Although it was suggested by some that the land which had passed through the hands of agents tended to be higher priced than that found directly by the housebuilder, the margin involved, if indeed this was the case, was clearly not in any sense prohibitive in the eyes of the vast majority of housebuilders. Indeed, as has been acknowledged above, some housebuilding firms were willing to pay agents a full commission, even though it may not have been fully earned, in order to ensure the continuing goodwill of the

1. See above pp. 563-76.

agents and to encourage them to remember their firm, should any potentially suitable pieces of land come to their knowledge at some future date.¹ The use of agents for land search was also considered to be more convenient by most speculative housebuilders, largely because it allowed them to devote a greater proportion of their energies to the organization of other, especially the constructional, aspects of the speculative housebuilding process. While one further reason why interwar speculative housebuilders of all sizes were quite willing and satisfied to deal with firms of surveyors and agents in their land search activities was possibly because up to 1939 at least, such firms were only rarely able to insist on the sole agency rights for the sale of the dwellings erected on the land sold if the builder was unwilling.²

2. Land search: the land study.

Following the search for land and the decision to consider a specific site which, superficially at least, appeared to fulfil certain basic requirements, the speculative housebuilder had to decide whether or not to purchase it. This of course was a crucial decision for a speculative housebuilder, since it involved him in a definite speculative

1. See above pp. 575-6.

2. The exceptions to this occurred where the firm of agents and/or surveyors were also the developers of the land and were willing to sell off developed frontage, see above p. More recently, surveyors and agents dealing in land have been in a position of much greater power due to the restricted land situation and increased landowner awareness of the value of their ownerships. During the 1960s for example, it was extremely rare to find speculative housing developments where the sale of the dwellings were not in the hands of the agents through whom the builder purchased the land. See Craven, op. cit. p.252.

commitment to the particular location and characteristics of that piece of land. Since 1945 this decision has involved speculative housebuilding firms in careful and increasingly detailed studies of sites which have come to their notice and which they have considered as possibilities for development. In more recent years this has become especially true among the medium- and larger-sized firms in the industry, particularly where they move into areas of which they have little or no experience or knowledge of local conditions.¹ Prior to 1939 the speculative housebuilder would of course have had to take similar decisions, but as yet nowhere in the literature has any attempt been made to determine the extent to which interwar housebuilders attempted to evaluate the suitability of any site under consideration for development. Neither has any attempt been made to identify the form that such studies took.

To judge the commercial profitability of a development and hence reduce the element of speculative risk involved in buying a site, a housebuilder should ideally have considered a number of sets of factors. Recent work on the speculative residential development process indicates that fundamentally any site evaluation process is likely to have involved two interrelated elements: (1) an internal costs and revenue calculation of the proposed development, which would also have included an assessment of location, the local market conditions and any non-market constraints on development, and (2) a non-economic element, important from the point of view of the actual decisions made on

1. Craven, op. cit. p.275.

the basis of the more 'objective' first element, and stemming from more socio-psychological factors and their influence on the attitude of the entrepreneur with respect to such things as risk, ambition, and the delegation of power and responsibility.¹

For obvious reasons connected with the oral nature of much of the evidence assembled, an investigation of the second element noted has not been possible in this present work. In view of this, this clearly important, and frequently probably crucial, element in the land evaluation and purchase decision-making process will have to await further research. Hopefully the location of accounts, letters, and other records at some time in the future will allow a consideration, analysis and illumination of this and other aspects of the decision-making process (including the factors influential in this process) adopted by particular firms and entrepreneurs in a detail impossible from the oral approach it has been necessary to use in the present work.

However more can perhaps be said concerning the first of the two elements noted. For example, ideally such a study should have incorporated an evaluation of the quantitative and qualitative nature of the housing demand within the local housing market, both at that particular time and at some time in the future;² a consideration of any local authority land use and building bye-law regulations pertinent to the location;

1. Weiss, Smith, Kaiser, Kenney, op. cit. pp. 17-19; Craven, op. cit. p.272.

2. A particularly crucial point if there were no immediate development proposals for the site, or the development was projected over a certain period of time.

and, obviously, a study of both the physical and the cost characteristics of the site under consideration. This last point could have included considerations such as the number of dwellings it was possible to build on the site, a comparison of averaged cost between the construction of the dwellings on the site and that on previous projects, a cost consideration of the topography of the site and provision of main drainage, the main sewer and public utilities to the site,¹ and an evaluation of the surrounding amenities such as open space, shopping and facilities for leisure. On the basis of the answers to such exercises, a housebuilder should have been able to estimate the most worthwhile type of development to attempt and whether or not it was the type of development in which he was interested, and the sort of turnover and return he would be likely to obtain from alternative types of development. From this point the housebuilder was then able to consider, in the light of the price of the land, whether or not the development of the site was likely to be a profitable proposition, to involve too great an element of risk, or to involve an unacceptable change in the size and/or organisational structure of his firm as a result of the change in the number of staff he might have required either to administer and control increased production levels and/or to organise and supervise the develop-

1. Such costings would not only include the cost of the land, and the potential costs of land development and site preparation, but would also include factors which would or might offset such costs. For example, when Wates (Streatham) Ltd. eventually purchased the Worcester Park Polo Ground in December 1933 at a cost of £800 an acre, the company was able to recover some £1,306.1.0. from the sale in July and August 1934 of the turf cut. Minutes of Worcester Park Estate Ltd., a polo syndicate. These minutes are now in the possession of Wates Ltd.

ment of a greater number of more dispersed sites.

The interwar speculative housebuilding firms which undertook land studies as thoroughly and in as great a detail as the more 'ideal' example described above were indeed the exception. On the other hand, most speculative housebuilders probably made some attempt to evaluate the economic viability of a particular site before acquiring it for development. Amongst such studies there almost certainly existed a wide variation in both the degree of comprehensiveness and the degree of sophistication. Between the wars such studies ranged from a fairly detailed, well-defined, and systematically approached research project undertaken by a separate land department, right down to an extremely subjective evaluation of various points, combined with a few 'back-of-the-envelope' type calculations and some mental estimations. Almost certainly some builders will have entered into a contract to purchase a piece of land without previously undertaking any investigation at all, or alternatively having neglected to consider such factors as the suitability of the district for the type of development contemplated, the proximity of public service and utility link-ups, or the density zoned for the area by the local authority. However such builders were relatively small in the scale of their operations.¹

Overwhelmingly, the interviews have revealed the general lack of precision of the land studies undertaken by interwar speculative housebuilders. This was particularly true of

1. PB, Dec. 1932, p.280 - an interview with Mr Frank E. Watson of Warner, Watson (Surrey) Ltd. on 'Buying Land'.

studies undertaken by medium- and small-sized firms, but was even the case among some of the larger operators. Of the six large firms for which oral evidence has been obtained, only one (New Ideal Homesteads Ltd.) had established a department with the specific function of the study and evaluation of the potential building land brought to their attention; while one other (Davis Estates Ltd.) had established a systematic process for land evaluation introducing different departments into different stages of the study.

It is unfortunate that so little is known of the structure of New Ideal Homesteads' land research department, although it would certainly appear that the department, having determined which of the sites brought to their attention were potentially profitable enough to be short-listed, would work out in detail various alternative projects and costings. These would then be presented to Mr Leo Meyer, the managing director, for the final decision¹ which although based on the detailed workings may well have depended to a varying extent on Meyer's own instinct or intuitive feelings about various aspects of the sites in question.

A little more is known of the steps involved in the appraisal of potential building sites by Davis Estates Ltd. At different stages, three sections within the firm were involved in the study of available land before the research results were presented to members of the Board for the final calculations and decision. First, the land was brought to the

1. Hefford, interview, 31.10.69.

notice of the firm either by its own land search team, or on occasions by agents and various individuals. The next stage was a sales appraisal of the district in which the land lay. This was carried out by the sales department and was to determine, from a sales point of view, the type of development most likely to be successful on that particular site. If the site was then considered to have sales potential, a detailed evaluation of the topographical characteristics of the site was then undertaken which included a costing of the requirements needed to develop it to a stage from which the construction of the dwellings could commence. This was carried out by surveyors and other members of the building department, and it was on the basis of calculations of costs, prices and profits made from this information that both the decision of whether or not to bid for the site and the offer the firm was willing to make for the land was determined.¹

Here then were two firms which apparently both approached land research in a very thorough and highly organized way; they were also possibly the two largest London-based speculative house-builders of the mid- and later 1930s. Wates Ltd., a firm which erected approximately 2,000 dwellings a year between 1933 and 1938, also appears to have been conscious of the importance of precision when considering land. This firm, from approximately 1933, maintained detailed records of the characteristics of any areas of available land which came to their attention. Unlike the other two firms however, this function was carried out by a land search department as opposed

1. Steadman, interview, 14.11.69.

to a research section. Clearly this information would have been used by the directors of the firm to help them make the land purchase decisions necessary to maintain and ensure the firm's level of activity in the future. However, it would appear that the main reason why this information was collected was for use by the land search section to enable back-checks to be made should an area of land previously rejected by the firm reappear. Thus, for any piece of land which had previously come to the firm's notice, details were immediately to hand and a decision whether to pursue the matter further or reject the land once again could be made according to the circumstances at that particular time. However, without doubt, either at this stage or at a later stage, some more detailed calculations on costs would have had to be made if the land was thought to warrant closer consideration. ¹

The three other large speculative housebuilding firms for which oral evidence has been obtained on this topic appear not to have approached land study in such systematic fashion, even though both John Laing of John Laing & Son Ltd. and George Chaplin of Hilbery Chaplin Ltd. appear to have emphasized the importance of thorough costings before work was allowed to commence on any particular site. ² How the information was gathered by Hilbery Chaplin Ltd. is not known, although given the firm's surveying background, it was probably evaluated with some care. In the case of John Laing & Son Ltd. however, more

1. Interviews with Kelso, 10.2.70; Seaton, 23.1.70.

2. Harrison, op. cit; Interviews with Johnson and Harper, 17.11.69 and Chaplin, 5.1.70.

is known. It appears that within this firm the responsibility rested on one particular employee, a surveyor, who as part of various duties would follow up, investigate, and report on the characteristics of various sites which had come to the notice of the firm.¹ The scope and detail of such investigations and reports is unfortunately not known with any degree of certainty.

In contrast to these examples, the approach of another major suburban housebuilding concern appears to have been rather less specific and rather more crude. If the evidence of the director who at this time was in full-time control of the housebuilding projects of this firm is accurate, it would appear that the land study centred on and relied almost entirely on the subjective feelings of this particular person who undertook sole charge of all land purchase or rejection decisions.² During the interview he acknowledged that his approach to the evaluation of any site was difficult to describe, was primarily subjective and only rarely took any quantitative form. For example, he felt that invariably before 1939 the price of land was relatively unimportant compared with the locational and environmental features of any estate.

In this way this builder considered that a subjective assessment of local employment potential, of the proximity of transport facilities, and of the character of the area involved constituted the basis and the most significant

1. Johnson and Harper, interview, 17.11.69.

2. Anon, interview, 29.9.69.

features of any such study. As for research, the approach adopted was far from sophisticated. For example, he noted that when he was interested in discovering the 'quality' of an area, that is the 'type' of family that was living in the area and the 'type' of family who would be interested in buying new houses in that area, he would ask a foreman to drive him around the district and in the process acquire the foreman's opinion. This the builder considered provided valuable insights and invariably the most accurate guide. To what extent this particular builder relied upon such methods as the major form of 'research' during the late 1920s and throughout the 1930s is obviously uncertain. But the fact that it was mentioned during the interview does suggest that at the very least it was adopted on more than one occasion during this period, and that it had probably proved very successful.

On the oral evidence obtained, it would appear that the research into the profitability and feasibility of land for residential purposes undertaken by many medium and small speculative housebuilding firms was very much on the level of that claimed by the last firm considered. None of the firms on which oral evidence was gathered appear to have worked out a study in any real detail, or one that involved any relatively precise costing. Rather, individual builders tended to rely very heavily on their own talent and ability for making subjective evaluations of the prospects and potentialities of the physical and locational characteristics of particular pieces of land. For example, Bradley & Arthur Ltd., a small builder in the southern suburbs, relied almost

entirely on very rough estimates when assessing sites available for development based largely on the experience of the partners (both bricklayers) and their knowledge of the area (Ewell) in which they were active.¹ A similar tale was told of the medium-sized West London housebuilding firm, The General Housing Co. Ltd. Any studies made by this firm were in no way quantitative. They normally took the form of a subjective evaluation of the situation by the founder and chairman of the firm, who it appears gave most of his attention to the problems and possible costs of drainage. This in fact proved to be extremely hit and miss in its reliability and in fact at least one of the three largest estates developed by this firm between the wars, although started in 1929, remained unfinished at the outbreak of war.²

The example of the General Housing Co. Ltd. in fact hints at the probable importance of experience and knowledge of local conditions where housebuilders relied on more subjective and intuitive approach to site evaluation. Earlier it has been noted how the founder of this Ealing-based company consciously elevated chance into a direct procedure for land search,³ and one result of this was that the major sites developed by this firm were relatively dispersed: in Southall, Pinner, and Heston. In such a situation it is clear that the lack of a reasonably thorough study or the adoption of other methods to obtain an understanding of local conditions was more likely to

1. Bradley, interview, 10.10.69.

2. Ellis, interview, 27.8.69.

3. See above p. 582.

result in unfortunate land purchase and development decisions, such as The General Housing Company's estate in Pinner.

More successful in his judgment was another West London housebuilder, R.T.Warren. Although specific land studies were non-existent within this firm, the subjective evaluations made by Warren, based on his experience in housebuilding, common-sense, and personal knowledge of the areas in which he was building estates, appear to have been in almost all cases fully justified. On only one occasion does it appear that this judgment was at fault. This was on a small site in Harlington, Middlesex, where it would appear that the location of the estate was unattractive, being poorly served by public transport.¹ The attitude of a third, but smaller, West London housebuilder may also be given as an example in this respect. This builder quite forthrightly acknowledged that rather than his research being a study in any rigorous sense, it tended to be a rather vague appraisal of a number of features, for example the proximity of the site to public transport, the quality of the surrounding area, and the proximity of the nearest public service and drainage link-ups to the site.²

Clearly where land studies were undertaken between the wars they generally lacked both sophistication and rigour, while some investigations were so minimal and vague that to describe them as 'a study' would be misleading. Not all firms chose to undertake such studies however. Some, invariably

1. Kenny, interview, 24.9.69.

2. Anon, interview, 29.9.69.

small, firms possibly did not give it a thought, while others left the evaluation partly or wholly in the hands of an agent, or surveyor. In general this latter group of housebuilders were working either closely or entirely with a particular firm of estate agents or surveyors which not unusually had also undertaken the initial land search, and indeed in some cases may well also have been left to undertake the eventual land purchase decision.

It is probable that the extent to which speculative housebuilders were willing to leave the decisions concerning the land evaluation and purchase, and perhaps even the form of the proposed development, in the hands of the agents with whom they worked, in all probability depended on a number of almost certainly interrelated factors, such as the scale of their operations, their previous experience in the industry, their personal characters and future ambitions, and the closeness of their relationship with the firm of agents or surveyors involved. Very probably, for example, an ambitious and outgoing developer like Newman Eyre of Newman Eyre & Peterson Ltd. would have played a far greater role in the decisions concerning the purchase of the sites for his 1,000 dwelling estates in Enfield and Gidea Park found for him by the agents W. Goodchild & Co., than for example George Edser of Edser & Brown Ltd. and Arthur Harston of A. Harston & Co. (Enfield) Ltd. would have played in this aspect of their activities in Sutton and Enfield respectively, both of whom worked very closely with specific agents in their respective areas but

who rarely completed more than 50 dwellings in any single year.¹

It is clear that for most firms the land studies carried out on available sites of land as an aid to any land purchase decision were far from being calculations in any rigorous or precise sense. For most it would appear that a subjective evaluation of the locational position of any particular site constituted the most important single element of any such studies. Only the larger firms appear to have approached the evaluation of the potential profitability and economic feasibility of available sites in any calculated or systematic way. However even among this section of the industry it has been possible to discover at least one firm which erected over 1,000 dwellings a year during most years of the 1930s and which appears to have relied primarily on fairly vague feelings based on experience and knowledge of particular areas, even though it is probable that some calculations and costing as to the physical suitability of a site were also undertaken.

Before progressing to a brief consideration of the possible

1. i. Interviews with Todd, 4.2.70; Edser, 16.10.69; Harston, 25.8.69.

ii. In addition to surveyors and estate agents there existed during these years firm which entitled themselves 'property sales consultants'. One such firm was charging a commission of 5% on the £100 and 2½% on the balance of the sales value of each dwelling sold on an estate which had been purchased under their guidance. However, it is very doubtful whether such firms were of any real significance to the Greater London speculative housebuilding industry during the 1930s. Indeed, not one of the individuals interviewed admitted to having used such firms. The only context in which a firm of property sales consultants came to the author's attention was an article written on 'choosing the site' by G.F.C. Wyatt, a partner in the firm Curtis, Wyatt and Partners, Property Sales Consultants. PB., Oct. 1932, pp.229-230.

importance of land study to the interwar housebuilders and the reasons why, prior to 1939, there was perhaps less need in such studies for the precision and detail which has become more common since 1945, ¹ it is important to recognize the possible significance the medium of data collection adopted may have had on the evidence assembled. The necessary reliance on oral evidence obtained from the recollections of individuals may well have meant that to some extent the degree of care and rigour with which some firms examined the building sites, ^{which} were brought to their attention has been under-estimated. At the present time however this is inevitable since, until it becomes possible to study in detail the records of individual speculative housebuilding firms, ² this remains the only source of information available on this particular subject.

How important then could a land study be between the wars in terms of the success or failure of a builder, or the maximisation of the potential profitability of a particular site? Clearly it could have been crucial, and as one Surrey builder noted, on a number of occasions to his knowledge speculative housebuilders active within the Greater London OSA found that, as a result of neglecting to consider for example the suitability of a district for the housing programme contemplated, the provision of amenities within the area, and/or the land-use and density zoning of the site stipulated under the local town planning scheme, they had been forced to sacrifice the deposit which had been laid on the land

1. Craven, *op. cit.* pp. 271-286.

2. Where and if such records still exist, see below Appendix A, pp. 769-771.

initially to secure it for their use.¹ In these cases the loss involved in the sacrifice of the deposit at this early stage of the development would probably have been somewhat lower than the probable losses incurred had the project been carried out, but it of course still involved a loss of capital and energy which might otherwise have been avoided. Furthermore, the lack of an adequate study could result in housebuilders paying an excessively high price for land, in relation to the value of dwelling that would sell successfully on the site and the costs involved in the preparation of the land for construction. For example, the degree of slope on a site would not only influence the number of dwellings it was possible to build on the land and thus influence the possible level of receipts, but also influence the costs of, for example, the surveying, road and drain laying, individual house-site preparation, foundation-laying, and general movement around the site. While additional costs would be likely to result from low-lying land which generally required extra expenditure on drainage; a heavy soil which would probably have resulted in higher labour costs; a need to extend a drain and/or sewer to link-up a specific estate to main drainage which was normally the responsibility of the builder; and a need to extend any part of the public utility system, the burden of which also had to be borne by the builder until a certain percentage of the cost had been off-set by the resulting revenue. All these and other possible variables, if not

1. PB, Dec. 1932, p.281, an interview with Mr. Frank E. Watson.

anticipated and related to the price of the land, the probable cost of house construction, and the anticipated revenue from the development, could eat into the level of profit margin desired and anticipated by the builder. As indeed could any misjudgment of the type of housing demand which existed within a particular area, since the slower the sales, the longer a greater level of capital would be tied up, the greater were the finance costs and the higher was the average cost of the project.

There can be no doubt that any number of speculative housebuilding firms active within the Greater London OSA during these years experienced a lower level of profit than they had anticipated and indeed at times significant losses, as a direct consequence of imprecision and a lack of rigour and/or misvaluation in their assessments of specific sites. On the other hand, even though a poor or insufficiently precise appraisal must inevitably have resulted in bankruptcies, or at the very least situations where builders were willing to cut their losses on certain projects in order to remain solvent, it seems probable that for perhaps several reasons, speculative housebuilders active during the 1930s were in general unlikely to suffer very drastically as a consequence of poor and imprecise land studies on available building sites prior to their land purchase decision.

Firstly, throughout the interwar years, the price of land within the OSA as a whole stood at a fairly low, albeit rising, level.¹ Secondly, in general there remained a

1. See above pp. 525-6.

relative abundance of land available for housing development in this area right up to 1939, and, probably more importantly, the speculative industry tended during this period to buy only the more easily developable sites which became available, tending to ignore those sites which looked to be the more difficult.¹ Thirdly, over the OSA as a whole during the majority of the years between 1930 and 1939, there existed a general buoyancy in the effective demand for housing, especially among the middle-classes. While fourthly for many firms in the industry, particularly among the small and small-medium sized concerns, the relative abundance of land meant that it was less necessary to look outside a relatively restricted locality for suitable and easily developable sites than it was to become after 1950. This is of course not to deny the existence and growing importance of the larger, and often more regionally oriented, firms which were looking for and developing sites over a relatively wide area within the OSA, but it is to suggest that for a large proportion of the industry the problem of obtaining local knowledge was by no means great. Such firms were likely to have had little need for systematic and detailed gathering of information to make their calculations or evaluations since it is likely that experience in local building and the local land and housing markets would already have provided this. Such builders would

1. These were left for the post-1950 industry. For an example of a relatively well-located site which because not straightforward to develop was passed over by a large number of builders before eventually being purchased, see Jenkins, op. cit. p.20.

thus have tended to rely on personal experience to make decisions which would therefore have been likely to have been largely intuitive. They would also have been likely to have had closer ties with local agents.

Together these four factors probably did much to shelter the speculative housebuilding industry from any potentially adverse manifestations resulting from land purchase and development decisions made on the basis of a less than systematic and rigorous study of some or all of the characteristics of a site, and/or assessment of the most suitable type of development. They also possibly helped produce a situation in which speculative housebuilders, and particularly those who were familiar with the area in which the particular site under consideration lay, were often able to evaluate the approximate costs and potential profitability of many of the sites brought to his attention just as successfully, and at times possibly almost as accurately, as those housebuilding firms which were expending resources by the employment of staff and/or agents to carry out relatively detailed and systematic research studies of such sites.

Plate 11



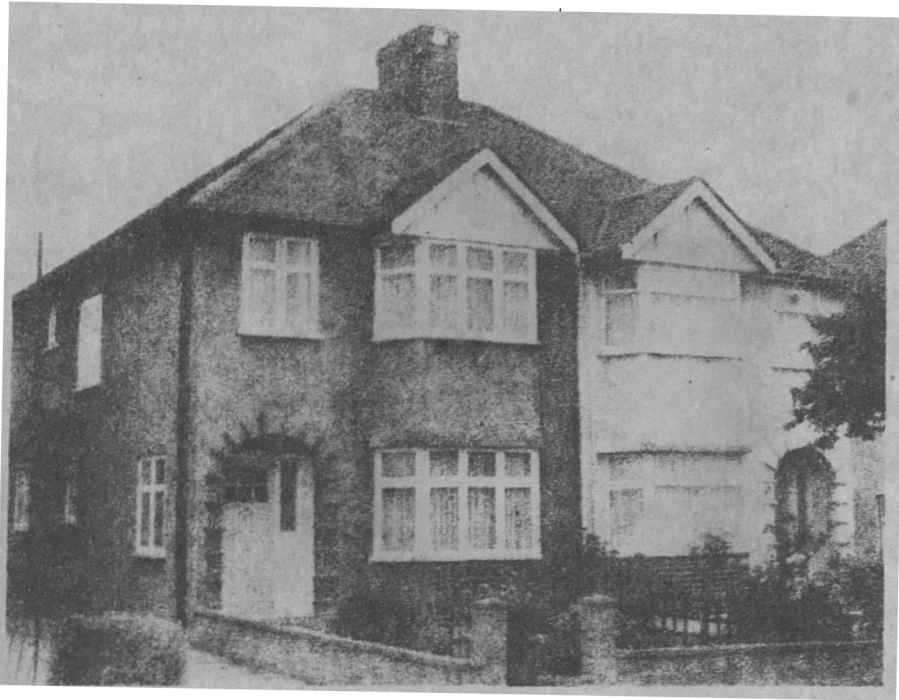
N F H Ltd

Grasmere Gardens, Belmont 1936-9



W G & S abey Ltd

Greenway, Kenton 1929-30



**Henry Boot (Garden Estates) Ltd.
The Chase, Burnt Oak. 1930-4**



**London & Provincial Building Co Ltd
Brunswick Road, Ealing. 1931-3**

Plate 13



Storr Bros.

Chase Road , Southgate , N.14. 1929 -30



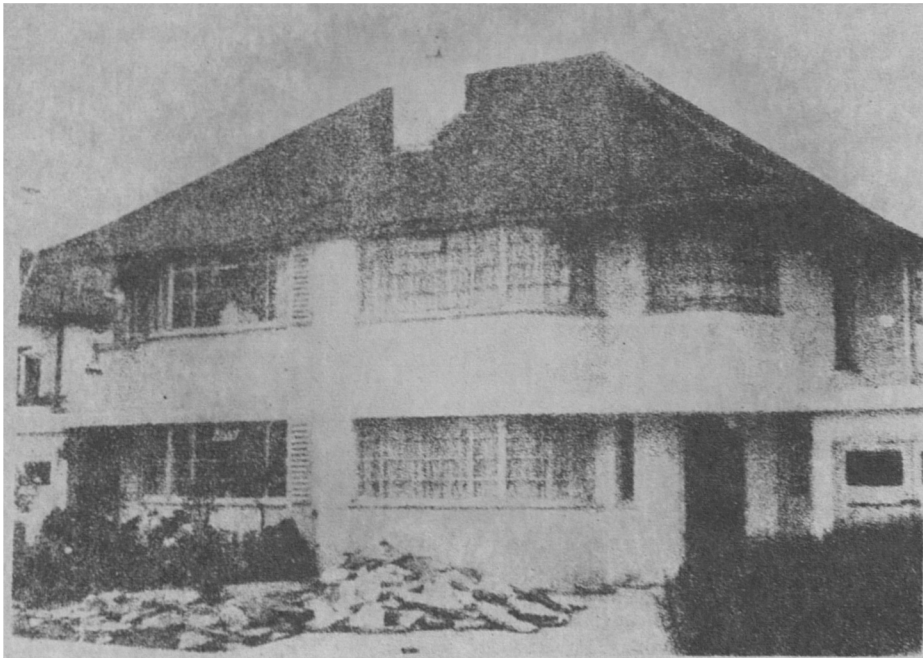
George Reed & Sons Ltd

As Above, 1934-6

Plate 14



**Comben & Wakeling Ltd.,
Lindsay Drive, Kenton. 1935-7**



A Above

Plate 15



Anon. (J Searcy?)
Belmont Road, Wealdstone. 1932-4



As Above

CHAPTER 10. Land acquisition: the purchase of land by builders and estate developers for house-building purposes.

1. Land purchase.

(a) Introduction.

Once the all-important land purchase decision had been taken by the housebuilder, and thus the speculative commitment made to a specific location and a particular piece of land, his next task was to negotiate the purchase of the land from the pre-existing landowner. Land within the OSA between the wars was normally bought and sold on the basis of either a price per foot frontage where it fronted a developed road (which may or may not have been made up), or alternatively a price per acre where it was still virgin.¹ These two bases for land sales were of course by no means mutually exclusive. Where a landowner owned a piece of land which lay adjacent to a road already laid with a main drain and sewer, he commonly sold his land in two price denominations: one part being sold at a price per acre, with the other part (i.e. a certain depth of the land which fronted the road), being sold at a price per foot frontage. For example during the mid-1930s Wates Ltd. bought a site from Hall & Co., the builders' merchants, in Dagenham (Essex), purchasing 68.59 acres of virgin land at a price per acre plus 1,182 feet of frontage along the unmade-up Frizlands Lane at a price per foot frontage.² Land was also on occasions sold in plots,

1. See above p. 419.

2. Building Dept. Memo. to the Directors of Wates Ltd., 30 June 1936.

particularly during the earlier part of the interwar period. As a rule however the price of the individual plots sold was established on the basis of a certain price for each footage of frontage, varying according to the plot depth. ¹

The consensus of opinion among the individuals interviewed who had personal knowledge of the details of land purchase, was that once the purchase decision had been made by the builder and the purchase negotiations completed, it was normal for the legal aspects of the transference of ownership to take anything between one and four months to complete. ² The first step following the completion of the purchase negotiations and when agreement had been reached on the purchase price was for a deposit of approximately 10% of the agreed purchase price to be laid on the land by the purchaser. This would appear to have been invariably the case, whatever the size of the purchasing housebuilding firm, and whether the land being purchased was in a developed or a virgin state. Apart from acting as a securing payment for the purchaser, the deposit had a dual function for the vendor. For not only did it serve as a guarantee of the purchaser's intent, but it also

1. i. E.g. see Harrow Observer, 29 Oct. 1919, p.10; 27 Feb. 1920, p.8; 26 Nov. 1920, p.19; Lewisham Public Library, Local History Collection A61/4/10, auction particulars of the West Chislehurst Park Estate, Mottingham, Kent (1926).

ii. Within the central London area, and indeed many other parts of England, it would appear that it was more normal for land to be sold on the basis of a price per square foot, or perhaps per square yard. Howkins (1938), op. cit. p.215.

2. Although of course it should be recognised that at times it could have taken much longer if any abnormalities occurred.

provided the vendor with at least part of the purchase money at an early stage of the transaction.¹

Within the OSA different housebuilders and landowners adopted a variety of approaches to the sale and purchase of land. And, while much appears to have depended upon whether the individual builder (or landowner) was anxious or willing to buy (or sell) the land in question outright, basically these approaches took two major forms. On the one hand, where it was agreed that the land should be bought outright, the housebuilder would normally take possession of the land directly after the purchase and sale contracts had been exchanged and a deposit payment had been made; while he would complete the purchase at an agreed time in the future when he paid the balance of the purchase money which was due. There can be little doubt that this was the approach normally adopted by the larger and medium-sized firms particularly where the land purchased was undeveloped.

The second approach was more normally adopted by the firms of smaller size especially where they were purchasing an area of developed land or frontage from a land developer or developments' company. It had two common variants: the former probably being heard of more during the first decade of the period, and the latter more during the 1930s. The latter imposed less of an immediate financial burden on the individual builder. In both cases an initial deposit payment was required of the purchaser by the vendor. However,

1. BSG, May 1932, p.326.

the first variant required the balance of the price agreed for each house plot to be paid in periodic instalments over a stated period of time, while the other variant did not require payment of the balance until after the housebuilder had built, sold, and had received payment (from the eventual purchaser) for the dwelling erected on it.

There were of course probably other methods by which the actual payment of the negotiated purchase price of land was made to landowners by members of the speculative housebuilding industry, but it seems unlikely that they were of any marked significance in general terms. There was perhaps one exception to this, but even this could be seen as an extension of the first of the two basic approaches mentioned. This 'third' approach was where the builder was allowed by the vendor to phase the purchase of the land, and hence the purchase payments, over an agreed period of time. Such an arrangement was described and praised by a South London speculative housebuilder in a trade journal published in late 1932, and although it is noticeable that the discussion referred implicitly to the purchase of undeveloped land, given the approval of the vendor, there appears to be no reason why it should not also have applied to the sale of developed land.¹ In this particular article, the builder noted the advantages of agreeing a contract with the vendor on the basis of a deposit, to purchase the land in a number of sections on specifically stated dates. The advantages were stressed especially in terms of the burden

1. PB , Dec. 1932, p.282.

that land purchase could place on a housebuilder's capital resources. The example given was the purchase of an area of land for £12,000 in three sections over a period of three years (i.e. at twelve-monthly intervals.). This meant that, while building dwellings on the first section during the first year, the builder did not have a large unproductive asset on his hands, while at the same time the landowner was assured of the whole sale under the agreed contract.

How widespread this scheme of phased land purchase was, is unfortunately not known. Its mention in a trade journal in the early 1930s by a speculative housebuilder active at that time suggests that it had been used on at least one occasion by at least one builder during the interwar period. On the other hand only one of the housebuilders interviewed knew of its application within the OSA without the inclusion of a cancellation clause favouring the builder.¹ The inclusion of such a clause would mean that rather than being a significant variation of, or an extension to, the first of the two basic approaches to land purchase payment noted above, it took the

1. During the later 1920s a firm of estate agents purchased a large house and grounds just off the Great North Road in Hendon, laid it out with roads and visited Haymills Ltd. with the offer of land and plans for its residential development. On the estate there was sufficient land for Haymills to build between 60 and 70 dwellings priced at between £1500 and £2500. The building company agreed to buy the developed land and a contract was drawn up and signed under which Haymills purchased the land in 4 sections over a period of 2 years. The estate (the Downage Estate) took Haymills approx. three years to complete and sell. Cox, interview, 28.8.69.

form of an option agreement.¹

The two basic approaches mentioned above will now be considered in more detail, with an examination of some of the ways in which speculative housebuilding firms financed their land purchase activities.

(b) Land purchase by deferred or credit payment.

First, the two variants which together constituted the latter approach will be considered in turn. It is clear that the vast majority of small housebuilding firms found the ability to extend the purchase of the land on which they were building over a period of time a considerable convenience. Of all factors, it was probably the lack of capital resources which could most hinder a small builder in his speculative housebuilding activities. In fact, had any number of smaller builders who were able to take advantage of such land purchase facilities and move into speculative housebuilding, found it necessary to pay the full price for any building site or plot at an early stage in the housebuilding process, it is probable that the capital burden involved would have been too great, and in consequence would have restricted them to the jobbing sector of the industry. By the same token, such facilities allowed many of the smaller housebuilding firms, if they so desired, to operate on a significantly higher level of activity than would otherwise have been the case, for it enabled them to take possession, and to start construction, on

1. See below pp. 640-8.

a greater number of sites at any given time while still working on a given financial base. From this point of view it is clear that of the two variants mentioned the latter was unquestionably of greater advantage to the small speculative housebuilder.

During the years following the Armistice, however, it appears to have been the former variant which was more commonly adopted in transactions concerning the sale of developed building sites. At Northolt Junction very early in the period for example "Freehold plots, large or small . . ." were being advertised for sale on an estate, on terms which required an immediate deposit of 10% but allowed the balance of the land price to be paid in equal monthly or quarterly payments over a six year period.¹ In the south-eastern suburbs seven years later similar arrangements were being advertised for purchasers at the auction of the West Chislehurst Park Estate at Mottingham: "To assist purchasers, the owners are prepared to accept a payment of 10 per cent of the purchase money at the sale and to receive payment of the remainder either by quarterly or half-yearly instalments . . ."² Although fundamentally these two arrangements were the same, clearly they differed in a number of respects. For example, it can be seen that the instalment periods laid down in the latter case were longer than the former. While, further, the purchasers of land on the West Chislehurst Park Estate in 1926 were allowed only a third of the period of six years, over which the land purchasers on the Northolt Junction Estate, seven years earlier,

1. Harrow Observer, 29 Oct. 1919, p.10.

2. Lewisham Public Library, Local History Collection. A61/4/10, p.2.

had been required to pay the balance of the purchase money and thus complete their purchase commitments. Up to 1926 at least it would appear that this form of sale and purchase agreement was quite widespread within the Greater London area. In that year in fact a book published on the development of private building estates made explicit reference to the purchase of land by instalments as a means of helping, and thus encouraging, smaller builders to take on the speculative commitment involved in buying land.¹ It is interesting that no mention was made of the latter of the two variants. This perhaps suggests the possibility that it was only at a point after this date that the latter land purchase arrangement became more popular.

This is a suggestion which in fact appears to be very much supported by the oral evidence collected. Almost all individuals interviewed who had had experience in the purchase of frontage on estates developed by land developers during the late 1920s and the early 1930s, noted that they were able, on almost every occasion, to take possession of the developed land on the basis of a deposit while not having to pay the balance of the purchase money for each plot until after they had sold the dwelling erected upon it.² An exception to this was on an estate in Kenton (Middlesex) during the early 1930s, where the

1. F. Howkins, An Introduction to the Development of Private Building Estates and Town Planning (1926), pp.206-8. Subsequently referred to as Howkins (1926).

2. E.g. interviews with Swanne, 29.10.69; Edser, 16.10.69; Townsend, 18.2.70; Leddington, 30.10.69; anon, 29.9.69; Leathers, 23.9.69; Chaplin, 5.1.70; Gostling, 28.10.69; Priest, 13.11.69; Whyte, 16.10.69; Beckett, 18.11.69; Davies, 21.1.70.

surveyor in control of the development insisted not only on the sole agency rights to the sales of the dwellings to be erected, but also on the prospective housebuilders buying any land on the estate outright.¹ On the other hand this does indeed appear to have been an exception in a very real sense of the word.

It appears probable that the latter variant was a development from the former mentioned. As has been noted previously, it must almost certainly have been the more favoured of the two variants by the small lowly-capitalized speculative housebuilder, in view of the smaller capital burden imposed on the firm during the construction process. Thus it seems likely that as the period progressed land developers became more inclined to adopt such a form of sales agreement in order to dispose of the frontage on their estates more quickly, and hence more rapidly obtain security for, and probably the return on, their investment.

During the late 1920s and the 1930s, this approach appears to have been adopted by many, if not all, forms of land developers. In the Harrow area for example both Headstone Manor Estates Ltd. at Wealdstone and MRCE Ltd. on their Harrow Garden Village at Rayners Lane, appear to have negotiated the sale of frontage and plots in this way during this period.² Furthermore surveyors and estate agents who

1. Saunders, interview, 1.10.69.

2. Interviews with Beckett, 18.11.69; Leathers, 23.9.69; Reed, 12.11.69.

were involved in land development for themselves and/or for their clients, like Hilbery Chaplin within outer suburban areas from Southall in the west across to Romford in the east, and like P.H.Edwards Ltd. in various areas in the north western suburbs during the later 1920s, adopted similar land sales practices; as did the surveyor, Hugh Davies, on a number of estates in the Southgate area of the northern suburbs from 1933 onwards.¹ Within the northern suburbs an Enfield firm of estate agents and auctioneers, Bowyer and Bowyer, after an unsuccessful attempt at housebuilding on a small estate in north Enfield between 1931 and 1933, agreed to sell the remaining land (three-fifths) to Townsend & Collins Ltd. First sufficient frontage for six dwellings was sold, and this was soon followed by the sale of the remaining frontage (i.e. sufficient for another 30 dwellings) at the immediate cost to the housebuilders of only approximately 10% of the total amount due. The sale of a slightly larger estate of developed land followed the success of this first transaction. And, as at Hillside Crescent, the agents required the balance of the total land cost only after the successful sale of each dwelling.²

Examples of housebuilders buying land in this way from private individuals, from investors, and from (and through)

1. Interviews with Chaplin, 5.1.70; Swanne 29.10.69; Saunders, 1.10.69; Davies, 21.1.70.

2. Enfield Register; Townsend, interview, 18.2.70. The latter estate had sufficient frontage for 42 dwellings to be built.

solicitors have been found. For instance in Hillingdon during the late 1920s, W.S.Try¹ purchased a length of frontage from a personal friend in this way, while in Sutton and the surrounding areas all the land purchased by Edser & Brown Ltd. from one particular private investor² was never paid for in full before the completion of the sale of the individual dwelling built.³ It is to be admitted that the direct interest of solicitors in this sphere appears to have been rare; however, on one known occasion, a solicitor not only provided the speculative housebuilders who purchased house plots with building finance, but also appears to have actively preferred the builders to delay their payment of the difference between the deposit and the full land cost.⁴ It is probable that a more common role played by solicitors was rather less direct than this and rather more like that played by one Northwood solicitor. This solicitor, together with a client, provided the funds required to purchase and develop a site in that area; he also found a builder, who in fact was also one of his clients, and willing to purchase the frontage produced. Here again, the builder was only called upon to pay the full cost of each of the plots of land on which he was building after he had sold, and been paid for, each dwelling erected.

1. "building contractor, funeral director, garden rockeries and crazy paving in all varieties". Kelly's Trade Directory, Middlesex (1933), p.510.

2. Representing at least 80% of the total area of land they built upon prior to 1939.

3. Interviews with Leddington, 30.10.69; Edser, 16.10.69.

4. Priest, interview, 13.11.69.

The ability to pay for land either in instalments over a number of years, or after having received payment for the dwelling that had been built upon it, certainly appears to have been highly satisfactory in economic terms to a large number of speculative housebuilders. However, for the developer, both of these forms of land purchase, and especially the latter, would appear superficially at least, to have involved both additional cost as well as greater risk. To some extent this statement accurately conveys the fact since if land developers had been able to sell-off the developed frontage on their estates quickly and outright for cash, both the risks and the costs involved in their enterprise would have been kept to a minimum. However, it is clear that in almost every case, in the minds of land developers the prospects of a more rapid sale of the developed frontage more than offset any cost disadvantage or the increased risk which may have been involved. For example, there was the obvious advantage that, on the security of having sold (that is, having collected the deposits on), the frontage of a developed estate to speculative housebuilders, the developer was able to borrow money, often from a bank, with which he was able to finance his operations.¹ Hence the sooner a developer was able to 'sell-off' his estate, the shorter was the period that he would have had to finance its development from his own, or his clients, internal resources.

1. Davies, interview, 21.1.70. It should be remembered that the developer in such circumstances still retained the rights of ownership over the land in case of default.

Furthermore, it is probable that the extra cost to the developer in making it financially easier for the speculative builders to buy land was probably not so great as it superficially might appear. Howkins noted in the mid-1920s that some developers were charging interest, to the builders buying the land by instalment payments, at an agreed rate on the balance outstanding.¹ In 1926 it was laid down in the conditions of sale of the West Chislehurst Park Estate that the difference between the deposit on the land and the total cost of the land purchased by any individual could be paid in instalments over a period of two years from the date of the sale "with interest at the rate of £5.10.0 per cent per annum on the amount for the time being remaining unpaid."² The developers selling their land in this way were thus able to keep any additional sales cost down to a minimum by passing on the burden to the purchaser.

The action of the developers who chose to adopt the latter variant of this form of land sale appear to have been very similar. On the surface, this latter variant would appear to have involved the developer in even greater sales costs than the former, since after all it was quite possible for six months to a year or more to elapse before the purchaser of the land, having built a dwelling, was able to sell it. However, although during the later 1920s and the 1930s the practice of allowing builders the time up to the completion of the dwelling built on the land before requiring the payment of the

1. Howkins (1926), *op. cit.*, p.206.

2. Lewisham Public Library, Local History Collection, A61/4/10, p.4.

land cost outstanding appears to have been common on developed estates within the OSA, it was acknowledged that, within this particular area at least, it was the general practice for a security clause to have been included in the sale and purchase contracts.¹ This clause was for the security of the developer, and it stipulated that in the event of the dwelling remaining incomplete and/or unsold,² within a stated period of time, interest at a specific rate was to be charged on the outstanding payment for the period between the date stated and the date on which the sale of the dwelling allowed the builder to complete the land purchase.³ The interest-free period of time which was allowed appears to have varied from developer to developer, but it was unlikely to be more, and was probably normally less, than three months. It has been suggested that after the early 1930s a normal interest charged was somewhere between 5% and 6%.⁴

Thus it can be seen that although the land developer might have accepted some degree of increased cost in his activities for the sake of benefits stemming from a more rapid sale of the land he had developed, the major part of any increased costs incurred by allowing purchasers to buy

1. E.g. interviews with Chaplin, 5.1.70; Whyte, 16.10.69; Davies, 21.1.70; Leddington, 30.10.69; Townsend, 18.2.70; Swanne, 29.10.69; anon, 29.9.69; Gostling, 28.10.69; Beckett, 18.11.69; Edser, 16.10.69; Priest, 13.11.69; Leathers, 23.9.69.

2. And consequently the builder not having received the payment from the sale of the dwelling.

3. Some contracts stipulated some final date by which the balance had to be paid even if by that time the dwelling had not been sold.

4. Davies, interview, 21.1.70.

land on some form of credit basis was initially at least borne, and seemingly borne quite willingly, by the purchasers, that is mainly small- and medium-sized speculative house-builders themselves.

But what about the increased risks involved for the developers? For clearly, where an individual was able to gain possession of a developed building plot for 10% of its actual cost, the opportunity offered was likely to encourage builders to undertake activities of a type and a size which they were unable to carry through successfully, and which they would otherwise not have attempted. Of course, during the first part of the period, and where the land was being paid for in instalments, the size of the risk was being reduced each time a payment was made. However, it would appear that in almost every case where a credit land sale agreement, of either form, was drawn up, the security of the vendor was protected by the inclusion of a 'default' clause. A paragraph from the conditions of sale of the West Chislehurst Park Estate in 1926 may be taken as a fairly typical example.

If any purchaser shall make a default in payment of the balance of his purchase money or any instalment thereof . . . his deposit and all instalments (if any) paid up by him shall be absolutely forfeited and the vendors shall be at liberty . . . to resell the lot or lots sold to him either by public auction or private contract and the deficiency (if any) arising on such a resale and all expenses attending the same or any attempted resale shall be made good and paid by the Purchaser at the present sale as liquidated damages and any increase in price on such sale shall belong to the vendors.

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It can be appreciated that only a small change needs to be made to such a sale condition to make it applicable to the alternative form of credit sale of developed land which has been considered.

Such a clause would clearly provide a developer with a more than adequate security for it should be remembered that under British law all permanent structures on a piece of land were and/or are considered as part of that land. Thus, where a purchaser had defaulted on his payments for a piece of land, not only would that area of land revert to the ownership of the vendor, in this case the land developer, but in addition the vendor would come into the ownership of any building work which had been carried out on that particular piece of land up to that point in time. Indeed, not only would such a clause give security to the speculative land developer, but also it could, and in some cases almost certainly did, lead to unfair practice by some developers. It placed them in a position to exploit the vulnerability of some small under-capitalized house-builders who were enticed into the sphere of speculative building by the thought of the potentially high profitability of the activity and the low initial cost requirement of gaining possession of developed land. Not a few of the small and medium-sized builders interviewed, and indeed even some of the individuals involved in surveying and estate agency work, referred to the existence of land developers and development companies who, especially for small builders, were "making it easy to start, but difficult to finish." Indeed a number of interviewees were able to name examples of specific estates

where such abuse took place. At least two such estates were cited quite independently by more than one interviewee.¹ It is unfortunately not possible to attempt any estimation of the actual incidence of land developers adopting such unscrupulous, though legal, practices. All that can be said on the basis of the evidence in the author's possession is that clearly they did exist.

(c) Land purchase by outright payment.

The approach to land purchase adopted by speculative housebuilders first mentioned, that is by outright purchase, will now be considered.² It has already been noted that almost invariably this particular approach to land purchase was used where the area involved was undeveloped.³ However naturally there were exceptions to this. For example, P.H. Edwards (Mill Hill) Ltd. began to sell the frontage of their Glebe Estate in Kenton outright, in the early 1930s;⁴ while in South London one piece of developed land offered to R. Lancaster & Sons Ltd., sufficient for nearly 150 dwellings, required the purchaser to pay a deposit of approximately 2½% on the signing of the contract, while a further deposit payment, to bring the total deposit up to 10% of the total land

1. My responsibility to my sources unfortunately prevents me from specifically citing the names of the firms and estates mentioned. It also prevents me from naming the sources.

2. See above p. 609.

3. Ibid.

4. See above p. 614-5.

cost, was to have been paid after the first 250 feet of roadway had been laid. The completion of the payment was to have been made twelve months after the payment of the second portion of the deposit.¹ These are just two examples. However, there were almost certainly other occasions when owners of developed land within the OSA sold it in this fashion.

The mode of sale required by an owner of a developed area when disposing of his land to a housebuilder or a number of housebuilders probably depended to a very large extent upon the personal inclination and/or the financial position of the individual landowner involved. Other factors which may perhaps have been influential included the related consideration of the speed with which the land-owner wished to dispose of the land, and also possibly the form of the landowner's personal and/or business relationship, or contact, with the speculative housebuilder(s) interested in purchasing the land.

Where any type of land was bought outright by builders, landowners would probably have had to bear any financial burden associated with the land sale over a considerably shorter period than was the case where some form of credit purchase was allowed. This period would have been the time between the payment of the deposit by the purchaser (i.e. normally when contracts were exchanged), and the completion of the sale by the payment of the balance due, at some agreed date. Naturally this period varied from one land sale to another, and it would be dangerous to generalize too strongly

1. Lancaster, interview, 22.1.70. After consideration, Lancaster decided not to take up this particular offer of land.

on the basis of the limited information that has been gathered. It has already been noted above that in one contract the vendor proposed that the balance required to complete the sale should be paid a year after the full deposit payment had been made. However, in the light of the evidence obtained from the land purchase account of a West London speculative housebuilder, twelve months would appear to have been a rather longer period than was perhaps normal. ¹

These Warren records provide the dates when the deposits and purchase completions were respectively laid and made on six pieces of undeveloped land purchased between 1927 and 1931. They show that this period varied between approximately $1\frac{1}{2}$ months on a piece of land off Fern Lane at North Hyde (Middlesex) in 1927, and approximately $7\frac{1}{2}$ months on land adjacent to Cranford Lane, Heston (Middlesex) in 1928/9. Chronologically they were $1\frac{1}{2}$, $2\frac{2}{3}$, $7\frac{1}{2}$, $6\frac{1}{2}$, $2\frac{1}{2}$ and 3 months in length. Immediately, as would be expected, there can be seen some relationship between the overall cost of a piece of land, and the length of the period between the payment of the deposit and the completion of the land purchase. For example, on the occasions when it took Warren only $1\frac{1}{2}$ and $2\frac{1}{2}$ months respectively to complete the purchase, the amounts involved were relatively small, while on the occasions when the periods involved were $6\frac{1}{2}$ and $7\frac{1}{2}$ months respectively, the amounts involved were, for Warren, relatively high. On the other

1. R.T. Warren, Personal Accounts: land purchase account. Held at the offices of Malcolm Sanderson (Southern) Ltd., Uxbridge. I would like to thank Mr R.E. Kenny for access to these records.

hand, this relationship was far from straightforward or consistent. For example, although the land purchase agreements which took $1\frac{1}{2}$ and $2\frac{1}{2}$ months involved the lowest overall prices (of the six pieces noted) that Warren paid for land, the overall price of the former area was double that of the latter. Moreover, although in 1930 it took approximately $6\frac{1}{2}$ months to complete a purchase agreement worth £10,000, in the following year it took Warren under half that time to complete an agreement worth only £800 less than this. Also, some $2\frac{1}{2}$ years earlier it had taken him only 81 days to complete the payment on an area of land priced at £7,500.¹ Clearly there were other variables involved, which these figures alone cannot elucidate: such factors as the financial position of the housebuilder at any particular time, and the personal demands of the landowner. Unfortunately it is not possible to develop this any further on the basis of the evidence in the hands of the author.

The consideration earlier of the other basic approach to land purchase revealed that commonly the vendor in any land sale, after an agreed date, charged the purchaser interest on that part of the purchase price outstanding. This was also true where the land was purchased outright with the vendors charging interest on the balance due, between the payment of the deposit and the possession of the land and the completion of the purchase. For example, late in 1933 a contract

1. It is necessary to respect Mr Kenny's wishes that the prices paid for particular building sites should not be associated with their specific location.

proposed to one speculative builder included a clause which would impose an interest charge of 6% per annum on the balance over such a period. ¹ R.T.Warren was required to pay interest on at least one of his land purchases. This was in 1938, when he appears to have paid an interest charge of 4% per annum for the six months between the payment of his deposit and the balance which made up the total price of a building site near Harlington, Middlesex. ²

But this was clearly not always the case. Although interest might still be charged to a purchaser on any outstanding balance, it was by no means always charged from the time when the deposit was made. In about 1933/4 a suburban estate agent made some notes for distribution to his employees, entitled Information and Instructions to Representatives. ³ In these notes he discussed, among other things, many aspects of land search as it would apply to his representatives, including the sort of characteristics which made a site most valuable for building purposes. He also discussed questions relating to the sale and purchase of land. On the outright purchase of land the agent wrote:

A point worth bearing in mind on the question of sale and purchase of land, is that very often the vendor is prepared to allow the builder to take possession of the land he has purchased when contracts have been exchanged between them, and a 10% deposit paid (or sometimes less by arrangement). The builder will then complete his purchase within

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1. The source of this information must remain confidential.
 2. R.T.Warren, Personal Accounts: Interest Account I 5/21.
 3. Only one copy of these notes remains. This is held by Mr H.Davies of Hugh Davies, Estate Agent and Auctioneer, of Southgate.

the normal time, but again, on a great many occasions the vendor will agree to allow him a much larger period than usual before he does so, stipulating however, that interest on the outstanding purchase money must be paid, generally at the rate of 5% or 6%. 1

Clearly the implication of this was that, in the experience of this particular agent, a vendor normally allowed the purchaser of his land an interest-free period of time in which to complete the purchase after having laid down a deposit and taken possession of the land. The interest would be charged only after this 'normal time' had elapsed.

Furthermore, Davies noted later on in his notes that although a completion date for the loan was normally written into the contracts of sale and purchase, it was also sometimes the practice for there to be included "a proviso that the purchaser may delay completion upon payment of interest, at an agreed rate, on the outstanding purchase money". 2

Where such a proviso was included in a contract, it was possible for the builder to use the vendor as a first stage in the financing of land purchase, although how far he was able to take such an arrangement very much depended upon the landowner concerned. As was noted by the estate agent, some vendors of undeveloped land were willing to provide house-builders with credit for a longer period of time than that laid down in the contract as the completion period. Some, like the vendors of developed plots, were doubtless willing to wait perhaps even until the residential development had

1. Hugh Davies, Information and Instructions to Representatives (unpublished typescript, c. 1933-4), p.10.

2. Ibid., p.11.

been completed and the builder had received payment for his enterprise before requiring the full payment for the land. However, from the oral evidence collected it would appear that where the land being sold was undeveloped, the latter practice was a relative rarity. Further, the only evidence that has been found of such practice taking place related to relatively small areas of land, and was found in cases where the vendor was also providing the builder with some, or all, of his working finance for the project.¹ This evidence at least would appear to suggest that the former practice noted was probably more common.

Hence practice varied again in this respect. As has been seen, this was also true of the rate of interest charged. Whether or not there was a normal rate, as the estate agent writing in the early 1930s suggested, is difficult to say. Early in the decade both of the examples cited acknowledge the figure of 6% p.a., while Warren in 1938 was paying 4% p.a. Clearly, the figure would at all times have been above the prevailing Bank Rate, and almost certainly would not have been below the overdraft interest rate of the commercial banks.² Indeed where private finance of this nature was concerned, especially in such cases where it would have been exceptionally difficult to obtain any form of bank loan, it is highly probable that in some instances interest rates well above even the 6% level noted may well have been charged. However, without more

1. Interviews with Edser, 16.10.69; Swanⁿe. 29.10.69.

2. Between 30th June 1932 and 24th Aug. 1939 Bank Rate stood at 2%. Mitchell & Deane, op. cit. p.459.

specific evidence it is not possible to be more precise on this point.¹ It is on the other hand possible to conclude that not a few of the landowners who sold their land outright to housebuilders were passing the cost of financing land purchase for the period up to the completion of the sale on to the purchaser. Further, it is probable that those landowners who chose to specify some interest-free period within which the sale could have been completed specified only a relatively short period of a matter of months.

(d) The finance of outright land purchase.

Between the Wars, the purchase of an area of land outright by a speculative housebuilder almost invariably meant that at a very early stage in a particular development, the full financial burden of land purchase was placed upon him and his resources. An important consequence of this was that, at this early stage, it was necessary for the housebuilder to bring together sufficient funds with which to finance this purchase. Of course it becomes difficult and perhaps unreal to separate finance raised for land purchase from that raised for constructional and other development purposes. On the other hand the evidence collected indicates that there existed a number of possible sources of land purchase finance available, and that the members of the industry adopted a

1. With respect to questions like: did the interest rate imposed, change over the decade? Did the interest rate charged vary in any way according to the length of the period over which the builder was paying the balance of the land purchase money?; the present state of knowledge is inadequate to allow answers.

variety of methods to obtain such finance. Although this evidence lacks detail it does allow the presentation in broad outline of a number of these methods.

No builder interviewed was very explicit when it came to the discussion of such delicate matters, but enough was said to suggest that, for those builders who were not getting credit from the vendor, the possession of a sufficient reserve of capital was important. To some extent it must be admitted that it was basically a question of at what stage the builder received the finance or loan. Even during the period of cheap money it was not easy to raise funds without a security to pledge, and land was universally accepted and favoured as a security. Hence it was more difficult to raise a loan to buy land than it was to raise it on the basis of land. And this being the case, the latter appears to have been the more general way in which speculative housebuilders approached the problem before the Second World War.

Before considering some of the ways in which such builders were able to raise mortgages on land in their possession, and some of the various sources involved, it would perhaps be interesting at this point to note one exception to this norm which has come to the author's attention. This particular case took place during the mid-1920s and concerns a firm, Haymills Ltd., which in the 1920s and 1930s built two large estates in the Ealing and Wembley areas respectively. ¹ When the site on which they were to

1. Cox, interview, 28.8.69.

build their Hanger Hill Estate came up for sale around 1925-6, Haymills Ltd. found that the total cost of the land was rather greater than the company's capital reserves could bear at that particular time. These reserves, on the other hand, easily covered the 10% of the cost required as a deposit. Without the ownership of the land the company found that they were not able to obtain at that time a mortgage from a bank or other institutional source. Hence the directors turned to another source, private trustees,¹ which required a lower margin of security, but which demanded a rather higher price for its services. The purchase completed, the deeds of the land were placed in the hands of the private trustees as security for their loan. Thus in this case the land was purchased after the loan had been made, on the basis of a security obtained only after the purchase had been completed. Unfortunately, the importance of private sources of this nature will almost certainly never be known with any reasonable degree of accuracy.²

Where the finance was raised after the actual purchase of the land, albeit on the security of the land, it is not so easy to consider the loan as being 'land purchase finance' as such, since clearly in such cases any loan was not specifically raised for the actual action of land purchase. It might well be argued that such finance should more accurately be categorized as 'housebuilding or construction finance', since

1. Cox's description.

2. There are also difficulties involved in the estimation of the importance of private sources in the finance of house purchase, e.g. see Nevitt, op. cit., p.39.

the loan was quite probably used for this purpose. Where money was raised by means of mortgage on all or part of a piece of building land, it is probably inaccurate to label it in any clear-cut fashion. It should always be remembered that, although a housebuilder may not have used any of the money raised in this way for the actual purchase of a specific building-site, it is highly probable that, ceteris paribus, it would have been financially unsound for that builder to have bought the site in the first place, had he not known he was able to raise money, on the security of the land, with which in turn he was able to further its future residential development. When seen in this light, the money raised from a mortgage on a piece of land after it had been purchased was in reality as important in a speculative housebuilder's land purchase considerations ¹ as it was in the probable use that the builder actually made of the money obtained in financing site development and house construction on the land.

R.T.Warren, the West London housebuilder, in fact coined an expression for the process involved. He described it as a 'reverse purchase' operation. It would appear that almost invariably he raised the price of any piece of land he bought, both deposit and balance, from the internal capital resources of R.T.Warren Ltd. or its subsidiary companies, or at times possibly with the help of his solicitor Woodbridge & Sons. ²

1. E.g. relating to the cost and to the economic feasibility of a piece of land of a certain size and character.

2. On this latter point Mr Kenny was uncertain, although he considered that it was more than likely. Interview, 24.9.69.

Then, as described above, on the completion of the purchase he would compensate for at least part of the drain on his firm's capital resources by securing a mortgage on the land just purchased. His bank, it seems, was normally more than willing to accommodate him in this respect.¹

In the north London suburbs, also, banks appear to have been very willing to grant loans to speculative housebuilders, even where they were inexperienced in this sphere of activity. However, it did not always involve the loan of a fixed sum of money on the basis of a mortgage on the land purchased for the project. The practice of different banks and bank managers varied. The bank used by A. Harston & Co. (Enfield) Ltd. for example were led by caution to limit the risk that any loan to the builder might have involved. Thus the builder, having purchased the land for his first estate with the capital reserves he had built up from his previous contracting and jobbing activities, was forced to put the deeds to the land in

1. i. Ibid. On those occasions when part of the land purchase finance had been borrowed from his solicitor and the land purchased had not been taken as security, an attempt to secure a post-purchase mortgage would still have been made doubtless in order to repay the almost certainly more costly loan from the solicitor as quickly as possible. In these terms therefore the original loan would have been used by the builder as a bridging loan. For another example of bank lending to finance land purchase, see Jenkins, op. cit. p.20.

ii. The only figure known of lending by an individual bank for land purchase purposes was for the year 1936. Barclays Bank declared that in this year approx. £17.4M was advanced to individuals for land and house purchase purposes and this represented 10.1% of total advances. It should be noted that such advances were not all made to speculative housebuilders, however the proportion that was is not known. Building Industries Survey, Feb. 1937, p.505.

the joint names of himself and his bank, and to deposit them with the bank manager. On this security the bank was then willing to provide him with sufficient finance to enable him to build twelve dwellings at a time. ¹

The importance of the commercial banks as a source of such finance should not be underestimated. It was probably more significant in their land purchase considerations than many of the builders interviewed admitted, particularly for the medium- and perhaps also the smaller-sized firms. In the earlier land purchase activities of R.Lancaster & Sons Ltd., it was suggested that the bank played a significant role, though almost certainly Lancaster was also very dependent on his solicitors in this respect. ²

Later in the period, however, Lancaster apparently began to secure some finance from a third source, the Skipton Building Society, with whom he had close contacts, also on the basis of mortgages secured on pieces of land. ³

The only actual documentary evidence which has come to light of housebuilders adopting the practice of securing

1. Harston, interview, 25.8.69.

2. In 1933 when William Lancaster was considering the possibilities of housebuilding using a non-traditional method of construction (see British Patents Office, Patent Nos. 320, 353 (1928), 367, 562 (1931), 382, 723 (1931)) his solicitor went to inspect a site in Molesey, on which the system was being used, in order to consider its potentialities. Lancaster, interview, 22.1.70.

3. Lancaster, interview, 22.1.70; Mr Lancaster suggested that in fact his father acted as a London agent during the 1930s for the Skipton Building Society. The fact that an office (probably the London office) of the Society during the 1930s was at the same address as R.Lancaster & Sons Ltd. in Ealing Road, Wembley, would appear to add substance to this suggestion. Harrow Gazette and Observer, 10 June 1932, p.7.

mortgages on pieces of land in their possession relates to the activities of New Ideal Homesteads Ltd., as a subsidiary of the Ideal Building & Land Development Company Ltd. This evidence emphasizes the possible role that building societies, especially during the later 1930s, may have played in the provision of finance to speculative housebuilders for land purchase and residential development purposes. However it also perhaps indicates that not all such mortgages were secured from institutional sources, or through solicitors.¹ Of the six examples found in this evidence unfortunately only one relates to the first half of the 1930s. The other five mortgages noted were all secured after November 1938. Furthermore, on the basis of the evidence at hand, only for the first example is it possible to suggest, even approximately, how close to the date of the completion of the land purchase the mortgages cited were secured by the speculative housebuilding firm, or its parent company. Thus on the 4th July, 1934, New Ideal Homesteads Ltd. secured a mortgage of £20,000 from a Mr B.J.Meigham on two-thirds of an estate which they had bought in the Harrow Weald area.² The site of New Ideal Homesteads' Belmont Park Estate, a section of a 90-acre site bought by a developer/housebuilder during the late 1920s, was probably bought by the firm some time during 1933.³ In this particular case the mortgagee was neither a solicitor nor an institution, but he was by no means disinterested in either

1. Companies House, File No. 243565.

2. Companies House, File No. 243565.

3. See above pp. 470-1; Beckett, interview, 18.11.69.

land development in general or in that site in particular. In fact, at this time B.J.Meigham was a partner in a local firm of civil engineering contractors, Ruddock & Meigham: the firm which had been contracted by the developer/house-builder to lay out the estate with roads and drainage. ¹

The other five examples, all found during the last two years of the period, although lacking evidence of how soon after the purchase of land mortgages were secured, ² do indicate the potential significance of building societies as providers of finance for purposes outside their more recognized role of moneylenders to house purchasers. Further, the examples show that this was by no means restricted to the smaller societies, like the Skipton Building Society which were anxious to find outlets for their relatively plentiful reserves for investment in a highly competitive sphere, but that some of the larger societies were willing to lend relatively large sums of money on this basis. For example, on three occasions between November 1938 and March 1939 the Bradford Third Equitable Building Society gave mortgages on the security of land within the OSA to either New Ideal Homesteads Ltd. or Ideal Building and Land Development Co. Ltd. totalling almost £140,000, while on two occasions, in January and in May 1939, New Ideal Homesteads Ltd. secured mortgages on land in Crewe and in Southampton totalling nearly £20,000

1. Op. cit.

2. Although it is probable that these sites had not very long been purchased, since at the time when the mortgage was secured on them they would obviously have been undeveloped and unsold by the company.

from Britain's largest building society, The Halifax.¹

It is disappointing that this source did not reveal how New Ideal Homesteads Ltd. was able to finance the purchase of its four large estates in Kent soon after its establishment at the beginning of the 1930s. Unlike George Wimpey & Co. Ltd. and John Laing & Son Ltd. for example, firms like New Ideal Homesteads Ltd. and others which concerned themselves solely with housebuilding and grew rapidly right from their formation, during their early years were unable to mobilise ploughed-back profit from their other building and construction interests for investment in speculative housebuilding, and land purchase. They were therefore forced to rely on alternative sources. However, for the moment this must remain an area of mystery on which evidence is completely lacking.

However, apart from the various sources of finance mentioned above, such as banks, solicitors, building societies,² and private individuals which could have been, and

1. Companies House, File No. 243565. The Third Bradford Equitable Building Society granted the mortgages on 14th November 1938, 13th January 1939 and 25th March 1939. The first of these for £60,000 was on 43.5 acres of land, formerly part of Sudbury Park Farm, in Sudbury, Middx. The second was a mortgage of £70,000 on 134.247 acres of land in Monken Hadley and 62 acres in East Barnet, Hertfordshire. While the third, somewhat smaller, was of £7,000 on land in Chingford, Essex.

2. One contemporary writer suggested that the speculative housebuilder had other sources of land purchase finance during these years similar to building societies. He suggests that the speculative builder bought land "helped by [an] insurance company or building society", although he provides no evidence to support this point. G.N. Boumphrey, The House - Inside and Out (1936), p.20.

propably were, influential in the land purchase considerations of suburban speculative housebuilders, one further potential source has yet to be acknowledged, that is the general public. Such a source of course was only relevant for the few larger firms which were able to establish themselves as a public company and offer their shares for dealing in the stock market. It appears that one such firm, going public during the mid-1930s, used an important part of the money raised from the share issue to increase its stock of land.¹ It is possible that other speculative housebuilding firms, for example New Ideal Homesteads, Wimpey, and Costain, which became public companies prior to 1939, may well also have used part of their issue money for this purpose. On the other hand, once established, it is probable that, whatever borrowing may have followed the completion of the purchase, for a very large number of firms in the industry both large and small, ploughed-back profits formed the basis of the finance used for the actual purchase of land. This was almost certainly true of Geo. Wimpey & Co. Ltd., which, even in the 1960s, had retained a reputation for distributing only a very small proportion of its profits in order to preserve a large flow of cash with which to finance its projects, both in hand and in the future.²

2. Land purchase policy.

(a) The use of options in land purchase.

1. Steadman, interview, 14.11.69.
 2. This of course would have included provision to finance land purchase. Anon, interview, 29.8.69; O.Marriott, The Property Boom (Pan Edn. 1969), p.129.

The important difference between a piece of land being purchased under a phased purchase agreement and under an option agreement has already been noted.¹ In brief, an individual who had secured an option upon an area of land was under no contractual obligation to purchase that land, although normally he would have been contracted to make his decision to buy or to reject the land within a certain period of time. The options adopted in land purchase procedure prior to 1939 broadly took two forms: the short-term option and the option which remained open for a somewhat longer period; the latter being the more common. Each will be considered in turn.

The short-term option was not such a feature of interwar land purchase procedure as it was to become during the 1950s and 1960s. From the point of view of the speculative house-builder, the function of the short-term option was to make secure his hold upon an available and potentially economically viable piece of land, while research was undertaken into such things as density regulations, access to main drainage and public utilities, and the possibility of obtaining the desired form of building approval.² Prior to 1939, in fact, securing such evidence normally presented the builder with little difficulty, so much so that often any research carried out by the land purchaser had been completed before many, if any, of the purchase arrangements had been made with the vendor or his agent.³ On the other hand, the oral evidence collected does

1. See above pp. 609-12.

2. Or, post 1947, the more strictly controlled 'planning permission'.

3. See above Ch. 9. Section 1.

indicate that between the wars such short-term option clauses were in use, even though the practice was very far from widespread.¹

Very much more common was the use of longer term option agreements. There appears to have been very little variation in the fundamental form which such option agreements took prior to 1939, and they were incorporated into agreements for the transfer of ownership of both developed and virgin building sites. On the other hand, the scale of the land deals in which they were adopted appears to have varied considerably.

The earliest documented example found was in Middlesex in 1929, although without doubt options of this description had been used in earlier years. On 3rd October 1929 the Charity Commissioners gave the Governors of St. Bartholomew's Hospital their formal sanction to the sale of the freehold of 249 acres, 3 roods and 32 perches of land in Stanmore for £62,736.10.0. (plus the costs of the transaction) to the Hughes Syndicate. At the same time they gave their sanction to the offer of an option being made to the purchasers on an adjacent site of 95 acres, 2 roods and 8 perches at a price of £24,137.15.0, so long as that option was exercised, or rejected, within twelve months of the sale of the first site.² One and a half years later another large area was sold by the Hospital: in 1931, the Hospital Governors agreed to the sale of 112 acres, 3 roods and 27 perches of land to John Laing & Son Ltd. for

1. E.g. Interviews with Steadman, 14.11.69; Harston, 25.8.69; Townsend, 18.2.70.

2. The Times, 4th Oct. 1929, p.11.

approximately £45,930 (plus any transaction costs), while also offering the builders an option on a further area of approximately 83 acres for approximately £39,070 exercisable within three years.¹ This option was taken up by the house-building firm some time in 1934.

Here then are two examples where very sizeable areas of land were involved. They, and the following examples, should illustrate sufficiently the more typical pattern that land purchase took where the agreement included an option clause. In such cases most frequently the land was purchased in two sections: the first normally being purchased outright, where the land was undeveloped; the second being purchased or rejected within a certain previously specified time. It was in this form that William Lancaster of R. Lancaster & Sons Ltd. was considering buying two adjacent sites, together sufficient for 141 dwellings, in south London in 1933: "[the] second take [being] under an option to be exercised within 12 months from the date of the first purchase".²

In Essex, A.W.Jaggers of A.W.Jaggers & Sons Ltd. purchased an area of land, running either side of what is now St. Barnabas Road in Woodford, on exactly these same terms.³ While, in the western suburbs, a further example has been found. It has been suggested that on one occasion when the then Chairman of the General Housing Company Ltd. discovered a well-located farm as a result of personal search, he

1. The Times, 28 March 1931, p.20.

2. This document is held by Mr G.D.Lancaster. Interview, 22.1.70.

3. Jaggers, interview, 20.10.69.

proceeded to negotiate the purchase of a section in two lots. Approximately five acres of the land were purchased outright, while the rest of the area subsequently purchased by the G.H.C, was to be available for the company to purchase at any time within two years of the original purchase. ¹

Smaller builders also found themselves able to negotiate such purchase agreements, and they serve as examples of the other end of the size spectrum from say the St. Bartholomew's Hospital examples cited earlier. In north Enfield, for example, the local speculative housebuilding firm, Townsend & Collins, on their first estate of any consequence, were able, by the payment of a deposit, to take possession of as few as six plots, and still negotiate an agreement with the vendors by which they were able to pay the balance for the plots on the sale of the dwellings built, and were given option on the rest of the land on the site (approximately 30 plots) on the same terms. The option was later most profitably exercised. ² Similarly in neighbouring Southgate, a small firm of jobbing builders, Storr Bros., was able to make an agreement with a local estate agent whereby, on a relatively small site, the builders took on eight plots with the sole option on the remainder exercisable according to their success on the first few plots. Their initial lack of success on this site led them to cancel their option agreement. ³

However, while such two-section purchase agreements appear

1. Ellis, interview, 27.8.69.

2. Townsend, interview, 18.2.70.

3. Storr, interview, 23.9.69.

to have been the more typical way that the principle of option was used prior to 1939, evidence of two examples have been found whereby the builders were able to divide their purchase into a rather larger number of lots. And this was by no means only the case where the builder was relatively small, since the first example concerned a site in Dagenham (Essex) purchased by Wates Ltd. in 1936.¹ This site, formerly Fritzlands Farm was an area of just under 70 acres in all, and was divided by the vendor into some 14 lots which varied between four and six acres in size. On this basis, the sale purchase agreement required Wates to have purchased the 14 blocks of land within approximately three years of the signing of the agreement, but it also provided the firm "with the option to cancel at any time".

Such a form of contractual agreement thus allowed the speculative housebuilder, if he wished, to spread the purchase of almost 70 acres of land over a period of approximately 36 months by taking up and paying for individual blocks of land only when they were required for the proper progression of the estate. A similar form of agreement was negotiated between Philips & Cooper Ltd. and the owners of an approximately 150 acre area of land in Great Stanmore (Middlesex) some time during the first half of the 1930s. Like Wates' Dagenham estate, this sizeable estate was to have been taken up in a large number of blocks; the first in fact being five acres. Although the date by which the purchase had to be completed is

1. Building Dept. Memo. to the Directors of Wates Ltd. 30th June 1936.

not known, it is not important, for during the mid-1930s the area, with the exception of the five acres already purchased by the housebuilders, was compulsorily purchased by the Middlesex County Council as Green Belt.¹

What then was the function of the longer-term option agreement as part of a land purchase agreement between the wars? Clearly its purpose and function was different from that of the short-term agreement. Where options were offered to builders it seems likely that, except on occasions when the area involved was large and the option period was relatively short as for example the agreement between St. Bartholomew's Hospital and the Hughes Syndicate in 1929, the vast majority were exercised within the specified time period. Thus it is reasonable to assume that, when the vendors of land included an option on a further area of land within any land sale/purchase agreement, it was with the hope and anticipation that it would be exercised. On this assumption doubtless landowners considered that the advantages of option agreements lay in the convenience and in the sale costs saved by having secured, in a single purchaser, the probable purchaser of all, or a large area, or at least a part, of the area up for sale. And clearly at least some vendors of land for housebuilding purposes considered that these probable savings were well worth waiting for over the possibly one to three year option

1. In 1935 the LCC launched its Green Belt scheme offering grants to the surrounding County Councils with which to buy up land. The response appears to have been immediate. Between 1935 and 1936 Middlesex C.C. bought up 6.9 square miles of land. D.Thomas, London's Green Belt (1970), pp. 80-1.

period, and well worth the costs that this wait might involve.

The advantages that such option agreements had for the purchasers of land between the wars are probably easier to state with certainty. They were two-fold. In the first place option agreements, where they were exercised, represented a very real form of financial assistance to the housebuilder in the purchase of land, and, as can be readily appreciated, this was especially true of agreements such as that by which Wates purchased Fritzlands Farm in Dagenham. It was in effect another means by which a builder was enabled to spread the capital burden of the land purchase. Secondly, it allowed the speculative developer or housebuilder, to better judge the risks he was taking by purchasing a particular piece of land in a particular area. This was particularly important when the area in which the land lay was unknown to the purchaser. An option provided him with the opportunity to lessen the initial risk involved in such a land purchase, while at the same time it provided him with the scope to expand his activities within that particular area, if his building on the first section of land were to prove sufficiently profitable. Furthermore, in not one of the examples located, did this facility involve the purchasing housebuilder or estate developer in any cost before the date on which he exercised the option. The reason for this being that, in each of these examples, it was only at this date that the purchaser exercising the option became in any way responsible, financially or otherwise, for the area, or areas covered by it.

There is one other aspect of these option agreements which

may be mentioned here. It would appear from the limited evidence presented that, although the latter form of option arrangement involved a longer period of time within which the option could be exercised by the purchaser, the period involved does not appear to have been an especially long one. The limited nature of the evidence naturally makes generalisation extremely dangerous, but it is possible to make one or two observations. In two of the four examples for which the length of the option agreed in the sale/purchase agreements were cited, the purchaser was allowed twelve months only in which to make his decision. Clearly the length of the period allowed for any piece of land may have depended upon a number of factors, including such variables as the size of the area involved, the speed at which the vendor and/or the developer expected the area to be developed, and the individual attitudes and whims of the vendor of the land and the urgency with which he required the money from the sale. However, little evidence has been found which helps to resolve the question of to what extent 12 months was a common or an exceptional period in this respect.

The only documentary evidence located which sheds any light on this question was a comment made in The Times following the announcement of the anticipated sale of the St. Bartholomew's Hospital lands in Stanmore to the Hughes Syndicate in the autumn of 1929. The impression given by this newspaper was that, for an option of this type, twelve months was undoubtedly a brief

period.¹ Presumably the Governors of the Hospital agreed with this for when, a year and a half later, they sold land to John Laing & Son Ltd., the period allowed had been increased to three years.² Unfortunately The Times made no comment upon this fact in 1931. However, considering the earlier comment in the newspaper and the examples cited, it would appear that for an area of any size an option period of at least two, and perhaps more normally three, years was adopted. Although doubtless on occasions when options were included in land sale/purchase agreements for smaller areas of perhaps several acres, landowners tended to stipulate a somewhat shorter period.³

(b) Land amalgamation and annexation.

With respect to the size and shape of many estate developments, clearly the pre-existing land ownership patterns were likely to have been, and often were, of great significance. Furthermore, within any locality such patterns, particularly in terms of the land ownerships, were likely to have been of greater significance to the activities of individuals and firms interested in the development of larger-sized estates than they were to the activities of builders interested in relatively small housing estates. Although

1. The Times, 11 Sept. 1929, p.7. It should be remembered that the area involved was large: the first take being almost 250 acres, and the area under option being just under 100 acres.

2. See above pp. 641-2. It should also be remembered that the Hughes Syndicate had failed to exercise their option.

3. No evidence has come to light to suggest that this period went much, if at all, below 12 months.

naturally in areas where the individual land-ownership units were not large, the impact of the pre-existing pattern would have made itself felt in the activities of a greater proportion of the residential development industry.

It has been suggested by Dr James H. Johnson while writing specifically on the provision of houses within the OSA between the wars that, as a direct consequence of the pre-existing pattern of land-ownership within many parts of this area, ". . . frequently . . . large-scale building operations had had to be preceded by the purchase and amalgamation of a number of pieces of land".¹ An example was cited to illustrate this point: an estate in north-west Middlesex "on which about 400 houses were built and rather more were planned". It appears that in order to form a compact estate "efficiently orientated towards main roads and . . . convenient to existing railway stations" the housebuilder, before commencing construction, had had to negotiate the purchase of six separate parcels of land.² However, this was the only evidence presented by Dr Johnson in support of his very general statement. In view of this, it is perhaps relevant to see whether any of the documentary and oral evidence collected for this thesis serves to add weight to or to detract from this statement, especially the use of the word 'frequently'. And from this to attempt to discover in very general terms what manifestations, if any, the pre-existing pattern of land

1. Johnson, *op. cit.* p.158.

2. Johnson, *op. cit.* p.158. Dr Johnson's source for this example was a Mr R.W.Wells of the Artisans' and General Property Co. Ltd.

ownership in the outer suburbs had upon the land-purchasing practices of interwar speculative housebuilders and estate developers.

It should be noted immediately that there appears to be an extreme shortage of evidence on the amalgamation of areas of land by speculative housebuilders in the OSA prior to the Second World War. In fact, no one individual interviewed considered that during these years such practice had ever been necessary for the housebuilding firm for which they worked. However, amalgamation was not the only way that a housebuilder was able to enlarge a given site. In the example cited above, the amalgamation or combination of a number of separate parcels of land previously under separate ownership took place before the housebuilder had begun any development. But the enlargement of a site could also be achieved by the housebuilder after the commencement of its development by the annexation of separate but adjacent areas to the site originally purchased.¹

Superficially at least, it would appear that at times the distinction between amalgamation and annexation was, at the most, marginal. Two examples may serve to some extent to illustrate this point. Both examples concern the interwar activities of R.T. Warren during the late 1920s and early 1930s; one in Hayes (Middx.), the other in Isleworth. In October 1927, Warren put a deposit on 5 acres of land which lay just off Yeading Lane in Hayes. By December he had completed the

1. The importance of such a distinction, especially in terms of the extent of the risk committed to, is noted below, pp. 666-8.

purchase, and had worked out plans to build nearly sixty dwellings of which the first was completed and occupied on 5th May 1928.¹ Only two months after the sale and occupation of this house, Warren purchased a further area of approximately 42 acres which extended the size of his site to approximately 47 acres. There was therefore no more than seven months between the commencement of development and the first enlargement of the estate.²

In the case of Warren's Woodlands Estate, near Isleworth Station, the margin of distinction was even finer. Very late in 1927 Warren laid a deposit on a sizeable area of land in Isleworth, completing the purchase in the March of the following year.³ It is probable that Warren did not commence activity on this estate immediately since the first deposit on a house was not laid until 18th October 1928 and the first house was not occupied until 3rd January 1929.⁴ However, activity had been commenced before, although possibly not long before, Warren purchased some more land to enlarge the site. The money was paid for this relatively small area of possibly not more than 2 - 3 acres on 8th November 1928, that is, less than a month after the first house-purchaser laid his deposit. The estate was further extended in April 1929 by the purchase

1. R.T.Warren Ltd., Land Purchase Account; R.T.Warren Ltd. Sales Book.

2. In fact Warren further extended this site, the Hayes Gate Estate, when in April 1931 he placed a deposit on on a further 35 acres of adjacent farmland. R.T.Warren Ltd., Land Purchase Account.

3. Ibid. Although no relatively precise statement of the area of the site can be made from the price paid for it, it was possibly in the region of 17-21 acres.

4. R.T.Warren Ltd., Sales Book.

of land in total costing approximately 86% of the first purchase, but by this time the estate must have been well progressed since a month before this at least 13 dwellings had already been occupied.¹ Close as the enlargement of the original site may have been to the commencement of development activity in these two examples, the distinction between amalgamation and annexation still remains: the vital differentiation lying in the far greater level of commitment, and hence risk involved, where a builder purchased by amalgamation the complete site for the projected estate before he commenced his development, as opposed to where he chose to extend his site by one or more purchases of land after the development had commenced, and after he was to some extent able to assess the economic viability and potential of the project.

Apart from the example cited by Dr Johnson, only one example of amalgamation by a speculative housebuilder has been located. This concerned a site in Charlton, S.E.7., an amalgamated site which in total comprised an area of some 24.949 acres.² It had been purchased in a number of sections by the South London firm of speculative housebuilders, John Cronk & Sons Ltd. In January 1936 Cronk purchased an area of 20.752 acres, made up of a number of different land-ownerships, and in February 1937 purchased an adjacent area of 4.197

1. R.T.Warren Ltd., Land Purchase Account; R.T.Warren Ltd., Sales Book.

2. NHE, Aug. 1938, pp. 24, 26, 28.

acres.¹ In all, the land had cost Cronk some £44,000. However, though active in speculative housebuilding, the firm had not amalgamated the site for its own use, and in late 1936 terms had been agreed between Cronk and a firm of speculative estate developers to sell the land at a price of £2,500 an acre, that is, over £63,000 for the whole area.² Apart from anything else this example suggests that in not all cases could projects which had been preceded by the purchase and amalgamation of a number of pieces of land be described as large-scale building operations. And further, if the oral evidence collected is to be believed, it would appear that the accuracy of the statement made by Dr Johnson and cited earlier, that frequently large-scale operations prior to 1939 had had to be preceded by such amalgamation, is open to considerable doubt.

The evidence collected for the present work suggests a number of things. For example firstly it suggests that, where a speculative housebuilder or developer wished to create a larger site in a specific area than was possible from the purchase of a single land-ownership, he more normally appears to have preferred to have waited until after he had commenced construction on his initial land purchase and had had time to further assess its potential before he attempted to enlarge the

1. i. The number of different ownerships involved was not stated.

ii. John Cronk & Sons Ltd. had by this time become well-known as the defendant (supported by the speculative housebuilding industry) in the 'Cronk Case', the test case concerning the timing of the taxation, as housebuilder's profit, of the money deposited as collateral with building societies under 'builders' pool' agreements.

2. See also above p. 447.

site by annexing adjacent land. Secondly it suggests that, although single extensions were probably the more common during these years, evidence has been found where builders made two or more annexations of land in order to extend a particular site. And thirdly, the evidence indicates, perhaps obviously, that it was primarily the larger- and the medium-sized housebuilders who at times found it desirable and feasible to add adjacent areas to their sites,¹ although in only one known case did such a builder use this method to enlarge a site into an estate of over 1,000 dwellings.² Predominantly, the estates created in this way appear to have ranged in size from approximately 300-400 dwellings to approximately 700-800 dwellings. A few examples may serve as an illustration.

The purchase by R.T.Warren of estates in Hayes and Isleworth has already been noted. In both cases the initially-purchased sites were extended by at least two further purchases of land between 1927 and 1933. However, although clearly there must have been other instances in the OSA between the wars where housebuilders extended their estates more than once, it has been possible to locate only one other example. This took place between 1932/3 and 1934, when George Wimpey & Co. Ltd. were purchasing land for its New Farm Estate in North Cheam.

1. Of course it might be argued that an 'option agreement' which was exercised was a form of site extension, and earlier it has been noted that small firms were able to buy land in this way (see above e.g. pp. 643-5. However, while this is to some extent correct, invariably, indeed by its very nature, an option agreement did not involve the purchase of land under different ownerships.

2. See above pp. 650-1. R.T.Warren's Hayes Gate Estate.

The initial purchase was of a site for 150 dwellings, probably made in 1932 or in early 1933. Having almost completed the construction of these, a piece of adjoining land sufficient for approximately 100 dwellings was purchased, which increased the size of the site to some 250 dwellings.¹ A few months later a further purchase more than doubled the size of the site, providing land for an additional 360 dwellings.²

Rather more examples have been located where speculative housebuilders enlarged an estate by making only one additional purchase of land. The location of these estates varied from Hinchley Wood to Edmonton, and from Worcester Park to Ruislip. For example, in early 1934 Wates Ltd. had already purchased sufficient land adjacent to their Ruskin Road Estate in Worcester Park to extend the almost completed 200 dwelling estate by something over 320 dwellings, while somewhat later in the decade it was reported in the Wates house magazine that the land purchase and plans had been completed for a considerable extension to their Barrington Park Estate in Sutton.³ Another builder active in the Malden and Sutton areas during the early 1930s was Lavender & Farrell Ltd. Although the annual output of this firm was somewhat below that of Wates, between 1930 and 1939 they developed several medium-sized estates in the southern suburbs. It was on to one of their estates in Worcester Park, an estate of approximately 65 acres, that in 1934 they annexed a relatively

1. PB, Oct. 1933, p.232.

2. IBL, Jan. 1934, p.296.

3. PBI, Feb. 1934, p.314; Wates News Sheet (No. 47), 11 March 1939.

small piece of land adjacent to Sparrow Farm Road.¹

To the west of Worcester Park lay Esher, in which area another firm of south London builders, E. & L. Berg Ltd., was developing an estate at Hinchley Wood. The site originally purchased was planned and laid out for some 150 dwellings and at this time Ellis Berg had no specific thoughts of enlarging it in any way. However, when during the construction of the site an adjacent area of land became available, the success of the initial project up to that point encouraged him to bid for it. In this way the firm more than doubled the size of their Hinchley Wood enterprise from 150 to 350 dwellings. It appears that, from this point, estate extension became a conscious policy of the firm, even though prior to 1939 another occasion did not present itself.² Examples of the single extension of estates may also be found in areas north of the River Thames. In the north-western corner of Middlesex during the early- and mid-1930s for example, English Houses Ltd. were developing an estate in Ickenham, adjacent to the boundary which divided Uxbridge U.D. from Ruislip-Northwood U.D. Although the size of the estate is not known, clearly its success satisfied this particular speculative housebuilding firm for by 1939 they had purchased an adjacent site which lay just the other side of the local authority boundary line in Ruislip.³

It has been suggested in a number of examples cited above

1. PB, Nov. 1932, p.258; PBI, April 1934, p.314.
2. Berg, interview, 21.10.69.
3. SE, 25 Jan. 1939, p.27.

that in general a speculative housebuilder, assuming that the opportunity presented itself, would only choose to extend a site where he considered that his enterprise on the first site had been sufficiently rewarded. However, although this was almost certainly true, it should be recognized that the success and profitability of the initial development did not necessarily guarantee the housebuilder similar success in the development of the site or sites annexed. This fact was discovered, to their cost, by George Reed & Sons Ltd. on an estate they were developing in Edmonton (north London) during the mid-1930s. In 1932/3 Reed purchased an undeveloped area of approximately 20 acres of land lying adjacent to Firs Lane (N.21) which the firm proceeded to develop over the following two years. Towards the completion of this estate they were approached by a local estate agent, who, knowing of their success on this site, offered them the site of an adjacent nursery, an extension which would increase the size of the estate to approximately 500 dwellings. In spite of the higher price and the fact that the land was located to the west of their first estate, that is away from both shopping and transport facilities, Reed decided to buy the almost 30 acres of land. However, probably because of its location, between 1935 and the outbreak of the war the houses built on this site sold very slowly, with quite a number of dwellings built remaining unsold in September 1939.¹ On the other hand it would probably be wrong to stress the point illustrated by

1. Reed, interview, 12.11.69.

this example too strongly since the evidence at hand indicates that a greater number of firms, and probably the great majority, which were able to extend their speculative housebuilding sites during this period, did so with both success and profit. It seems likely therefore that the experience of George Reed & Sons Ltd. on its Firs Lane Estate during the 1930s. tended to be rather more the exception than the rule.

The discussion so far has considered amalgamation and annexation from the point of view of the firms and individuals who eventually erected the dwellings on the site. It should therefore be recognized that this could possibly understate the extent to which areas of different land-ownership were merged to make building-sites in the OSA prior to 1939. The reason for this is that it fails to take into account the possibility that amalgamation might have taken place before the land was actually offered to the house-builder. This might have been a result of the activities of perhaps a landowner, a speculator, or an agent who felt that by increasing the size of the area of land for sale and/or by securing for the site a better access to such features as, for example, a main road, open space, shopping facilities or a railway station, they would be able to secure a better price either for themselves or their clients.

The activities of John Cronk & Sons Ltd. in Chalton are interesting in this respect. Here is an example where a speculative housebuilder amalgamated a number of pieces of land into a single site of approximately 25 acres. However,

in this particular case, Cronk was acting in a role separate from his activities as a housebuilder for he had no intention of developing the site himself, but rather aimed at reselling it at a profit in its amalgamated form.¹ In this instance therefore Cronk was adopting the role of a land speculator, and, had the local authority not used its compulsory land purchase powers, the would-be estate developers, the Property Finance and Land Corporation Ltd., would have developed a site which had been purchased as a single land-ownership. Thus, if questioned later on this point the company could have quite truthfully stated this fact, although in reality, perhaps only twelve months before the negotiations had taken place, the 25 acre area had been divided under the ownership of perhaps four or five different individuals.²

Only one other example has been found where amalgamation had taken place before a site came under the ownership of the purchasing housebuilder. This concerned the Worcester Park Polo Syndicate (which in 1925 became Worcester Park Estate Ltd.) and the site which was later to become the Wates Wilverley Park Estate.³ During the mid-1920s the polo club began to run into financial difficulties and as a result, on the 7th July 1927 at

1. It was suggested in Cronk's evidence before a court of arbitration on the compensation due to the landowner that, had Greenwich BC. not placed a compulsory purchase order on the site, he would have earned an average profit of approx. £730 per acre (i.e. a profit of approx. 42% on the original cost of the land) from its sale to the Property Finance and Land Corporation Ltd. negotiated in 1936. NHB, Aug. 1938, p.24.

2. NHB, Aug. 1938, p.24.

3. Worcester Park Estate Ltd. Minutes of Directors' Meetings. This book is held by Wates Ltd. at Norbury.

the seventh directors' meeting of the Worcester Park Estate Ltd., the surveyor to the company was asked his opinion as to the desirability of offering their land for sale for building purposes. Part of the surveyor's advice was to acquire "the land north of the Polo Ground, about 14 acres, so as to obtain a way out in the future to Motspur Station from the suggested interior road".¹

Between this date and June 1930, the company made overtures to more than four different landowners. Two of these overtures were completely unsuccessful, but at a special meeting of directors on 28th October 1928 a contract was signed to purchase 16.75 acres of land adjacent to the polo ground from Nicholls Charities at a total price of £5,000.² In the middle of 1930, the death of one of the other landowners previously approached led to the purchase from the executors of the will of a small, but what was considered to be an important, area of land (i.e. 1 rood 16 perches) which connected the Polo Ground to the newly-constructed arterial road;³ while just a year earlier, the surveyor to the company had succeeded by various land dealings in obtaining 400 feet of frontage on Malden Road.⁴ Thus prior to the sale of their land to Wates (Streatham) Ltd. late in

1. Worcester Park Estate Ltd. Minutes of Directors' Meetings.

2. Even though not two months later it was agreed by the Board that part of this land should be resold to the Columbia Gramophone Co. Ltd. (ibid. 11th Directors' Meeting, 12th Dec. 1928), while in 1930 the Southern Railway Company applied for Parliamentary powers to lay a line across, and to take over, another section of this land. Ibid. 14th Directors' Meeting, 21st Jan. 1930.

3. Ibid. 16th Directors' Meeting, 26th June 1930.

4. Worcester Park Estate Ltd. Minutes; 13th Directors' Meeting, 25th June 1929.

1933, Worcester Park Estate Ltd. had added to the original polo ground at least three pieces of land which, although relatively small, had each been under different land-ownerships; while they had also attempted to purchase two other rather larger areas. In this way the company had attempted, and had in part succeeded, in enlarging their land-ownership, and more importantly from the point of view of improving the potential of the land as a site for a speculative house-building development, had succeeded in improving the access of their landholding to two major roads and one railway station.

Further evidence has unfortunately proved impossible to find. In consequence an evaluation of the extent and the significance of this practice must await further research and further evidence. Moreover, answers to other questions, for example on the extent to which variations existed, if at all, in the incidence of such pre-sale amalgamation between different areas within the outer suburbs during these years, must similarly await further evidence. Even the evidence presented above has very real limitations. In the first place, only one of the examples refers to land which lay within the OSA for the enterprise of John Cronk & Sons Ltd. was located in Charlton, and thus lay within the inner suburbs where presumably the land available for housebuilding was relatively scarce and more likely to have been found in relatively small land-ownerships.¹ Therefore, although this may be seen as a good

1. In this area it is likely, although in no way necessary, that the larger and more easily developable pieces of land would have been developed during an earlier period when the locality had first been seen to be economically profitable by those interested in residential development.

example of how amalgamation of a number of different land-ownerships could have taken place before the eventual house-builder or developer appeared on the scene, in view of the fact that almost all of the interwar residential development activity within Greater London took place outside the boundaries of London A.C.¹ it appears that its use in any general argument concerning the incidence of, ^{and} the need for, the amalgamation of land in the process of speculative residential development within the Greater London area between the wars would be of rather dubious value. Secondly, in both examples cited, the 'landowners' amalgamating land were limited liability business organizations with boards of directors: one a building firm, the other a polo syndicate. Therefore, as examples, they tell the observer nothing of the possible activities of the many individual private landowners who had no corporate responsibility to maximise and materialize the financial potential of the land in his ownership when deciding to sell it for building purposes. To what extent private individuals thought or acted in a similar way to business organizations when selling land must in consequence remain unknown at the present time.

On the other hand, the evidence, and particularly the latter example, does appear to suggest that, where amalgamation was carried out by a landowner intending to sell a site as building land, access to such features as main roads and/or railway stations took a very high position in his

1. See above Chapters 1 and 2.

considerations. Furthermore, they carried at least as high, if not higher, a place in his considerations as did the other feature: the eventual size of the amalgamated site.¹

Although it is possible that before they began any development interwar speculative housebuilders frequently amalgamated a number of pieces of land in order to make up an economically attractive site for residential development and particularly one of any size,² on the basis of the evidence collected for this thesis it would appear that this was not in fact the case. On the basis of this evidence, for the firms and individuals who actually developed the sites and built the dwellings, the purchase and amalgamation of a number of pieces of land within the OSA was a rarity. Moreover, where it did take place, it is probable that it was very largely adopted as a means by which the housebuilder could obtain improved access for his site to some feature or amenity of the locality, such as a main road, a railway station, or shops, as opposed to the creation of a very greatly enlarged building site. Of course, as has been admitted earlier, it is not possible to suggest to what extent such amalgamation took place within the OSA prior to the sale of the land to the eventual housebuilder and/or developer. Thus the evidence suggests that the extension of building-sites by means of the

1. Such features had clearly also been high on the list of priorities of the housebuilding firm which developed the estate in N.W.Middlesex cited by Dr J.H.Johnson. See above p. 649.

2. As claimed by Johnson, op. cit. p.158; see also above p. 649.

annexation of adjacent, but separate, areas of land after the residential development process had started, appears to have been a far more common feature of the land purchase policy of the interwar speculative housebuilder.

Briefly, there would appear to have been a number of factors contributing to this situation. The first was the combined effect of two features of the interwar situation. It has been noted above that most interwar speculative housebuilders, even the very largest in the field, tended within limits to be fairly flexible with regard to the size of the estates which they were prepared to develop.¹ Thus, where firms were interested in building within a specific area but found that because of the prevailing pattern and scale of land-ownership, they were unable to find a single landholding which was both available and as large as they required, it appears that the vast majority of housebuilders were prepared to develop smaller sites than perhaps they felt to be ideal. Having purchased and developed, or perhaps while in the process of developing, such a site, it was a small step for the housebuilder to extend the estate by annexation, if the opportunity presented itself and the builder was sufficiently satisfied as to the profitability of the project.

The second feature of the interwar situation which is relevant is that it would appear overwhelmingly evident, particularly from the oral evidence collected from housebuilders, that in general terms the pre-existing pattern of land ownership within the OJA was not sufficiently small in

1. See above pp. 280-332, esp. 315-8.

scale, and the land available for residential development was not sufficiently scarce, to create a situation where the areas of the individual landholdings available were too small for large and/or medium-sized firms to be interested in them for estate development purposes. Time after time, and quite independently, the different individuals interviewed made unprompted comments to the effect that prior to 1939 there was no need for the medium or large speculative housebuilding firms to amalgamate a number of pieces of land in order to create sites of sufficient size to be a satisfactory commercial proposition. This would obviously seem to imply that during these years, even large-scale housebuilders had always found it possible to locate sites which were under single land-ownership and were adequate and potentially sufficiently profitable to satisfy their needs. It appears that it was only during the 1950s and 1960s that the position changed and amalgamation became a common feature of the speculative housebuilder's land purchase policy and one which required very serious consideration. For example, it was noted by a director of a leading suburban and national speculative housebuilding firm that at times during the last twenty years it had been necessary for his firm to purchase and amalgamate between 20 and 30 separate parcels of land in order to obtain a site of the size that they required. ¹

1. i. This firm has been prominent in this sphere both before and after the Second World War. (Anon, interview, 14.11.69). Although this individual was not alone in making such comments, he was the only person interviewed whose comments were in any way specific enough to be used as an example.

(Footnote continued on next page)

A number of reasons have been suggested why the interwar speculative housebuilders working in the OSA rarely included amalgamation as part of their land purchase policy. However, apart from such rather negative reasons, why was annexation more common? Did annexation have any positive advantages for the speculative housebuilder? And to what extent did the pre-existing pattern of land ownership influence the speculative housebuilder's actions in this respect?

The willingness of most speculative housebuilders to develop smaller sites than were perhaps ideal, where this was necessary and where it did not too greatly affect the profitability of the enterprise, has already been noted. Also, it has been noted that where this was the case and where a piece of land adjacent to the original site became available, it was possible for such a builder to enlarge his estate. Clearly both of these features of the period help to explain why annexation was at times adopted by members of the industry, and simultaneously why amalgamation tended to be a rarity. There were however other reasons why housebuilders wanting a larger site within a given area than a single land-holding provided generally chose to enlarge by annexation rather than amalgamation. In the first place enlargement by annexation was a means by which a housebuilder was able to spread the capital

Footnote 1 continued. ii. Within the OSA after 1950, most of the virgin land available for development was that left between the larger and more easily developable areas which had been taken by the interwar speculative housebuilders. Tighter and more specific public control over land use after 1947 added to, and helped intensify, this situation of scarcity.

cost of buying the site for an estate over a period of time, whereas if he amalgamated the various pieces of land involved at the beginning of the development process he would have had to bear the full weight of the burden of land purchase throughout the whole operation. There were also further positive economic advantages which the housebuilder was able to derive from annexation, whether by choice or by chance. Annexation had the effect of limiting the immediate speculative commitment of the builder to a specific area and a specific location. In this way the builder was able, if he wished, to wait and see the accuracy of his initial assessment of the potential of that particular site before deciding whether to extend his speculative commitment by enlarging the site by the annexation of adjacent areas. Thus he was able to 'try out' the area before he perhaps committed himself to it any further, either physically or financially. ¹

The significance of the pre-existing pattern of land-ownership within different areas for the incidence of the inclusion by builders of annexation in their land purchase policies (within those areas) is extremely difficult, indeed impossible, to assess, on the basis of the evidence gathered. It would require a detailed and comparative study of the land ownership pattern and the land purchase policies of the

1. In this light it could be suggested that the small-scale pattern of land-ownership within certain areas could have been to a builder's advantage in a very positive way, assuming of course that a relationship did exist, between the pre-existing pattern of land-ownership and the actions of the speculative housebuilder and estate developer.

speculative housebuilders within at least two different areas even to begin to resolve this particular question. On the other hand, on the basis of the evidence gathered, it is perhaps possible to suggest that it is unlikely that the land purchase policies and the actions of the suburban speculative housebuilders, particularly the medium-sized and larger firms, with regard to annexation, were entirely independent of this pre-existing pattern and the size of individual land-ownerships within the areas in which they were active between the wars.

(c) The reduction of risk in land purchase in an unknown area, and 'satellites'.

To some extent the practice of obtaining option agreements may be seen to have been related to the practice of extension by annexation.¹ Both practices allowed the builder to 'try out' a site and area before undertaking any further commitment or risk. Some builders who annexed land may well initially have been unconscious of this aspect of their actions, but, particularly among larger firms, this 'trying out' principle appears to have been applied as a conscious part of their land purchase strategy. This was particularly true where firms were considering the possible development of an estate in an area in which they had not previously been active and/or where they felt its potential to be rather more uncertain than had normally been the case. For example, it was acknowledged during interviews with individuals who were

1. The distinction has been noted above p. 654.

employed by such large-scale housebuilding firms as R. Costain & Sons Ltd., Wates Ltd., and Hilbery Chaplin Ltd. during these years, that where such firms were uncertain of the economic viability of a particular area in which they were interested, they would initially purchase only a relatively, or sometimes very, small site to test the demand.

The size of such sites naturally varied according to the building firm concerned; also probably according to the land-ownership pattern and the incidence of housebuilding activity in the area. In an example which emerged from the oral evidence, one site, purchased by a large south London firm, was only approximately 175 feet of made-up frontage (that is, sufficient for seven dwellings).¹ On the other hand, it was suggested that when another large speculative housebuilding firm, active north of the river, first ventured into areas of which its knowledge was limited and in which the firm had never previously built, the first site purchased had never been greater than 10 acres, normally being something between 5 and 10 acres in size (that is, perhaps between 50 and 120 dwellings).² To what extent smaller or medium firms acted in a similar way in a similar situation, the evidence collected unfortunately does not reveal. However, the former example is perhaps worth noting in greater detail, even though as it will be seen, as a test of the economic viability of the area concerned for housebuilding purposes it turned out to be

1. Kelso, interview, 10.2.70.

2. E.g. St. Joseph's Drive, Southall. Chaplin, interview, 5.1.70.

something less than successful.

During the very early 1930s a large area of land stretching across from what is now Grand Drive to Martin Way (Morden), an area sufficient for approximately 2,000 dwellings, came to the notice of a director of Wates Ltd. As this area was almost twice the size of any estate previously attempted and was, as the crow flies, over a mile and a quarter away from any previous development of the company, it was decided that the firm should purchase frontage on Grand Drive, on which could be built two pairs of semi-detached dwellings, and one block of three, of their small 'Tudor' type of dwelling. At the time this exercise appeared to have been very worthwhile since not one of the dwellings was sold. Eventually Wates were forced to let them. Naturally, in the light of this experience, the directors decided to go no further in their overtures to the landowner of the adjacent 180-200 acre site. In the event, however, this turned out to be a misjudgment for when the site was sold for development to another South London housebuilder two and a half years later, the enterprise met with great success.¹

The above example therefore, apart from being a description of an occasion when a speculative housebuilder

1. The inauguration of a bus route, shortly after work had commenced on this site, running between Raynes Park (SR) Station and the newly-opened Morden Underground Station and along two sides of the estate (Kelsoe, interview, 10.2.70) possibly had something to do with the newly-found popularity of this particular location.

'experimented' with a location, is also an indication that by itself such a practice did not necessarily provide an entirely accurate indicator of the situation even in the near future. There were, inevitably, other factors, and in particular possible future improvements to transport facilities and the access of the site to them, which also had to be taken into consideration in any decision. On the other hand it did provide the builder with a guide, and in this way reduced the likelihood of an expensive mistake being made as the result of the purchase of a relatively large site in a location which turned out not to be popular with house purchasers.

The minimization of risk was a principle which the interwar housebuilder applied to other features of the speculative housebuilding process apart from land purchase.¹ The manifestations of the application of this principle in the land purchase practices of interwar speculative housebuilding firms have already been seen to have been varied, particularly where the firms were of some size. However, one manifestation has yet to be mentioned. This took the form of the purchase of what might be described as a 'satellite' estate; that is, the purchase of one or more separate sites within the locality of a currently active estate. Clearly housebuilders would quickly become aware and gain detailed knowledge of active and potential housing sites in the neighbourhood of their estates. And where an estate had met with success, the purchase of another site in the locality involved a reduced risk in that

1. See e.g. Bowley (1966), op. cit. pp. 377, 390.

the area had already been successfully 'tested out'. There were other advantages for the builder in that the development of the 'satellite' site could be organised from the first estate with corresponding economies of supervision, site equipment, and eventually sales effort. The limited evidence available suggests that the satellites tended to be smaller than the initial development, and where they were situated within about three-quarters of a mile from the main site were invariably administered from it. Only where such estates were separated by a greater distance was it more normal to find the secondary sites administered more as individual and separate units. Other advantages of 'satellite' sites appear to have included the ability to send prospective purchasers on to one or more satellites, normally in a salesman's car, where nothing was suitable on the first site. This became especially important towards the end of the first estate when demand was still strong but the selection of dwellings and dwelling locations increasingly limited.¹ Also in such a situation it was possible for the builder increasingly to organise and administer the first estate from the second where its development was coming to an end and the 'satellite' estate was still in progress. In such cases the primary sites eventually became the satellites.

It has been possible to discover three clear examples of the purchase of 'satellite' estates by housebuilding firms where, initially at least, the second estate was administered

1. Seaton, interview, 23.1.70.

from the main site. In each of the cases the building firm was large, and only one 'satellite' estate was purchased. The first was in South London during the mid-1920s when Wates Ltd. purchased the site for their Grove Road Estate in Mitcham. This site, sufficient for perhaps 300-400 dwellings, was located not a quarter of a mile from an earlier 1,000 dwelling estate, and until this latter estate had been completed, the Grove Road Estate was treated for administrative purposes, as an annexe for it.¹ Similarly, though for a shorter period of time, Costain's Old Farleigh Estate in South Croydon was organised and administered from the earlier and larger nearby Croham Valley Estate. The latter estate had been started in about 1932 and it took the company at least three years to develop its 800-900 dwellings. In approximately 1934, Costain began the almost 300 dwelling Old Farleigh Estate no more than a couple of hundred yards away, and for something under a year its development was controlled and organised from their first estate.² The third example took place, at a slightly later date, in west London. During the first half of the decade New Ideal Homesteads Ltd. purchased and began developing, with great success, a large site adjacent to Powder Mill Lane, Twickenham.³ The estate was planned for over 1,000 dwellings, and its success led the company to feel that the locality would stand further exploitation. To this end a smaller site was purchased not a quarter of a mile from the western corner

1. Interviews with Seaton, 23.1.70 and Kelso, 10.2.70.

2. Winstanley, interview, 3.9.69.

3. Later re-named the Woodlawns Estate.

of the first estate.¹ In this particular case in fact both sites were run concurrently, the smaller site being organised directly from the Powder Mill Estate.²

In each of these three examples the motivation behind the further purchase of land was similar to that behind annexation, with the exception that the area of the initial site purchased was in each case far greater than that in any of the examples of annexation noted above.³ In all three examples the success of the first estate appears directly to have encouraged the builder to extend his activities within the particular locality. Moreover it also appears that in each of these cases local conditions, for example possibly the absence of any available adjacent site or the already large area of the first site, led the builder to choose to purchase a site which, although separate from the first estate, was near enough to it to allow the builder to take advantage of the economies in development which he obviously considered such an administrative arrangement would afford.

The activities of New Ideal Homesteads Ltd. in West London also provide an example of occasions when further sites purchased in a locality in which a builder had met with success were run entirely as separate units. Thus following the company's success at Powder Mill Lane, New Ideal Homesteads not only bought the Pevensey Road site, which was run as a direct satellite, but also purchased two other estates in

1. I.e. in the northern corner of the Uxbridge and Hounslow Road Junction.

2. Hefford, interview, 31.10.69.

3. See above Ch. 10. Section 2(b).

Feltham ¹ both of which were situated within one and a quarter mile's distance from the large Woodlawn Estate and administered as discreet development units. ²

(d) Land stocks.

It would appear that on the whole it was the larger speculative housebuilding firms which consciously maintained land stocks during the 1930s. The replies to the interviews suggested that although inevitably a number of firms of medium size also held land stocks, others found it difficult, if not impossible, to buy land very far ahead of its anticipated development, and thus were unable to amass a land bank of any significant size. ³

Of course it could well be argued that to some extent almost all speculative housebuilding firms, with the exception of the very small concerns, maintained some element of land stock in the form of the land which they had 'in hand' on any project under construction. This form of land stock naturally varied greatly in size from one builder to another, and obviously in part depended on the extent of their building activity (the number and size of concurrent estates), the state of their progress on individual projects, and the extent they had been able to negotiate option agreements. By noting two extreme examples the extent of this variation may to some extent be appreciated. For example, one of the large South

1. I.e. Rochester Avenue and Fernside Avenue. Companies House, File No. 243565.

2. Hefford, interview, 31.10.69.

3. See below p. 612.

London housebuilding firms had land 'in hand' on 7th June 1939 which was valued (at cost price) at £133,324.10.0., while a small housebuilder active in the Harrow and Wembley areas never reckoned prior to 1939 to own more than five plots of land (that is, under an acre) ahead of construction.¹

It seems almost certain that for most housebuilding firms land 'in hand' represented the major, if not the whole, part of their total land stocks. This in fact was probably true even for the large-scale house producers and indeed the only specific example which has come to light supports such a suggestion. Thus, in mid-1939, the cost value of the undeveloped land² 'in hand' owned by the above-mentioned South London firm on their estates in progress represented approximately 62% of the cost value of the firm's total land stock at that date.

That land 'in hand' should represent such a very large proportion of the total land stock of smaller speculative housebuilding firms should not cause any great surprise. Clearly small builders were not in a good position to make such forward land purchase. Not only could they not afford to tie up internal capital resources in 'non-productive' land investment, but also they would have found it more difficult and expensive than larger firms to raise external finance for such 'risk' ventures if this were necessary. Furthermore,

1. Watson, interview, 14.10.69. The source for the first example must remain confidential.

2. Here 'undeveloped land' describes land on which up to that date house construction had not started.

when the size and/or number of the estates built by some medium- or large-sized housebuilders are considered, it should not be very surprising that such land constituted such an important element in the land stock of the larger operators. An idea of the number of concurrent estates being developed by a number of the larger firms active in the OSA, and also the provinces, has already been given.¹ The size of the sites involved varied tremendously. At Elm Park for example Costain purchased a site in approximately 1932-3 which in itself represented a land bank which could have kept a firm building 2,000 dwellings a year, active for approximately $3\frac{1}{2}$ years. Even by the outbreak of the Second World War Costain still had sufficient land 'in hand' on this estate alone to build approximately 4,000 dwellings.² Other large estates have been mentioned, including the estate of George Ball (Ruislip) Ltd. in South Ruislip. This estate of almost 3,300 dwellings took the company six and a half years to complete. After two years' activity the company still had approximately 228 acres undeveloped (i.e. 73% of the total site), while after four years there was 117 acres still unbuilt upon (i.e. approximately $35\frac{1}{2}$ % of the total site).³ In Enfield between 1934 and 1939 Newman, Eyre & Petersen Ltd. built an estate of almost 1,000 dwellings of which by the end of 1936 Eyre still owned approximately 40 acres of land on the site upon which no dwellings had been built. In this same

1. See above pp. 536-7, 548.

2. See above pp. 477-8. Between 1933 and 1939 Costain's annual average output on this estate had been approx. 500 dwellings.

3. Ruislip-Northwood Register.

period John Laing & Son Ltd. were developing a similar sized estate in western Enfield. Activity had commenced by 1933 but by the outbreak of war the company still had approximately 25 acres of the estate on which to build houses. ¹

The vast majority of the builders of large estates of approximately 1,000 dwellings and over, and perhaps over 800 dwellings, normally took between approximately three and five years to complete them. As has been seen from the few examples given above, sometimes they took longer than this, but only rarely was such an estate covered in a shorter period of time. Where large-scale operators developed estates smaller than this it is perhaps reasonable to assume that frequently they were completed within a shorter space of time. Thus it is probable that where a large firm mainly developed medium-sized estates, land 'in hand' as an element of total land stock would have been less important. On the other hand it should also be remembered that, unless such a firm was able to obtain as great an aggregate annual level of production and sale on each estate, as he would have done on a larger site, it would be necessary for the builder to organise a greater number of estates at any one time in order to maintain his overall level of annual output. Given this, although there may well have been less land 'in hand' on any particular medium-sized estate, the greater number of estates being concurrently developed would tend to minimize the diminished significance of such land in

1. Enfield Register.

terms of the total land stock held by the firm.

Apart from land 'in hand', the land stock or land bank, of any firm was made up of sites which for some reason had been purchased by the builder ahead of his intended use of it. These sites were normally held by the builder as virgin land until they were required by him for building, although not necessarily as an unproductive asset. At least one large building firm attempted to maintain the land in its previous usage until the time arrived when the directors felt the best advantage could be gained from its development as a housing and/or industrial estate. In this way, where it was both appropriate and possible, the land was let on a short lease as farm or nursery land. ¹

On the basis of the interviews it would appear that it was not until the 1930s that a number of the larger firms began to develop land banks as a conscious policy, ² although undoubtedly earlier than this such firms had been planning their activities a fair way ahead. ³

1. This practice is still applied by the company today: to land owned by John Laing & Son Ltd. in Cumberland. Stokes, interview, 27.1.70.

2. Interviews with Anon, 26.8.69; Seaton, 23.1.70; Hefford, 31.10.69; Chaplin, 5.1.70.

3. In late 1929 for example William Lancaster of R.Lancaster & Sons Ltd. informed his sub-contract carpenter/joiner, G.Ward of Jacob Ward & Sons Ltd., that he had got 'land and schemes to last 5 years or even 10 years'. Even accepting that this estimate may have been an exaggeration for effect, it does suggest the existence of at least a degree of planning and anticipation of future activity. Letter written by G.Ward on 24th Sept. 1929 to the home office of Jacob Ward & Sons Ltd. in Accrington. At the time Ward was living in, and operating from, a house built on the Sudbury Heights Estate, Greenford, Daling on which his firm was working for Lancaster. My thanks to Mrs B. Howard of G.Ward (Daling) Ltd. for access to this letter.

The conception of what represented an 'adequate' stock of land obviously varied from builder to builder. But why did such speculative housebuilding firms consider purchasing land ahead of their immediate requirements? What advantages did it have for their business operations? Undoubtedly a major consideration which appears to have influenced housebuilders in their decision to purchase land ahead of their requirements was the desire to ensure the continuity of their building operations and activity levels, within the constraints of their perception of future market conditions. This point was made by almost all the interviewees whose firms maintained some form of land bank during the 1930s. However, for all the obvious importance of such a consideration, the advantage of land stock accumulation most frequently emphasised by builders interviewed concerned the locational assets of the sites involved, both at the date of purchase and in the future. As the developed area of the suburbs spread outwards, building sites were to a greater or lesser extent continually coming on to the land market. It would appear that those firms which felt their financial position sufficiently secure, quite commonly would buy what they considered to be well-located sites, even though at the time they did not wish to extend their actual building operations. The reasoning is not difficult to understand. By buying such sites when they first were placed on the market, firms were able to secure sites which, if well-located at the time of purchase, were likely to improve in terms of their locational quality and desirability, as residential development gradually moved outwards and well-located and available building land in areas which a few

years earlier had been on the fringe of the built-up area became more difficult, and hence also expensive, to obtain. In this way therefore firms were able to secure, and in fact did secure, sites which would help ensure the continuing success of their activities, perhaps three, four, or even five or six years in the future. In appraising the performance of the speculative housebuilding section of George Wimpey & Co. Ltd., an Evening Standard financial journalist wrote late in 1937:

Wimpeys are interested . . . in estate development. Unlike some other companies, whose results have been a grave disappointment to shareholders, they are continuing to make money from this side of their business. This is partly due to the care with which the sites were originally chosen three or four years ago. 1

It has been implied in the previous paragraph that the shrewd speculative housebuilder and/or developer, by purchasing land ahead of requirements, found that the value of the land had appreciated between the date of purchase and commencement of development. Indeed a number of builders interviewed (all of whom for various and obvious reasons wished to remain nameless) frankly admitted that this element had a significant influence on their land purchase decisions. However it would appear that more commonly such considerations tended to be rather secondary in any land purchase decision of this nature. 2

Probably the main reason for this was the fact that in general

1. Quoted in NHB, Dec. 1937, p.32.

2. Although, of course, where any chosen site was well-located from a residential development point of view, as time passed it may be safely assumed that its value normally increased with its attractiveness for development.

land prices between the wars did not increase either very greatly or very rapidly.¹ Moreover, while speculative land profits could be, and were, made, pure land speculation was apparently not considered by speculative housebuilders to be a particularly profitable enterprise when compared with alternative investment possibilities; especially when considered in the light of the level of capital investment, the length of the gestation period which might have been required, and the probability of a satisfactory return.²

The ownership of a land bank was of course not without its costs. It involved the capital burden of both the purchase and the holding of the stocks. This was clearly too great for many firms, particularly the smaller concerns. For example, a partner in a successful medium-sized South London speculative housebuilding firm admitted that it had never been possible for his firm to purchase building land too far ahead of any projected development during these years, and acknowledged that

1. i. For a brief and far from full consideration of changes in land prices within the Kent outer suburbs between the wars, see Waugh, op. cit. pp. 208-11.

ii. The major exceptions to this statement were to be found within areas immediately affected by the construction of new railway or Underground lines (and to some extent new stations on existing lines), or new major or arterial roads. Howkins (1938), op. cit. p.11; for a number of examples see also Newby, op. cit. p.23; BSG, April 1931, p.262; NHB, March 1937, pp. 5,6; Jackson, op. cit. pp. 250-2.

2. i. Howkins (1938), op. cit. p.10.

ii. Certainly individuals who speculated in suburban building land before the Second World War were unable to realise a margin of profit from their enterprise which could compare with the margins obtained by individuals active in this sphere during the later 1950s and the 1960s.

the reason for this was the lack of sufficient capital at any particular time, over and above its current activity needs, with which it could finance a land bank. " . . . it was always a tremendous job to be able to find the money to buy an estate".¹

Clearly, although land was a considerably less expensive commodity between the wars than it has since become, the fact that holding land in an unproductive state involved both the initial capital cost of its purchase and also the sacrifice of any return which might have been derived from the exploitation of alternative investment opportunities available meant that the cost of developing a land bank was of considerable financial significance to housebuilding firms. On the other hand, it does appear that to some extent it was possible for the housebuilder to limit the burden of such costs on his firm.

The favour given to land as a security for loans has already been noted.² Although it has not been possible to obtain any detailed evidence on this point, the responses made during the interviews leave little doubt that builders found it far easier to obtain loans, particularly from banks, when they were able to give details of land stocks. It would appear that by using newly acquired land as security, speculative housebuilders were often able to borrow sufficient money to offset much of the drain that land purchase had made on their

1. Anon, interview, 21.10.69.

2. See above pp. 630-6.

capital reserves.¹

In this way it was possible for a housebuilder to reduce the cost of purchasing and holding a land bank to an annual charge (i.e. the annual charge on the bank loan plus the annual return sacrificed by initially choosing to place the capital sum in an unproductive investment), and hence defer the full impact of the immediate capital burden involved on the financial structure of the firm until such a time when he felt ready to start developing it. Also the costs involved in the accumulation and holding of a land bank were likely to be to some extent offset, for example, by the appreciation in value of that particular building site, and, in a number of cases, by the rents derived from the leasing of the site while not required for building purposes. Another method used by builders to minimise the cost of holding land stocks was through the use of option agreements. The use of options in land purchase by speculative housebuilders has already been discussed,² and clearly by negotiating such agreements builders were able to secure 'land stocks' over the short, and at times even the medium, term. Of course in such cases the price of the land at the take-up of the option would have been nearer prevailing/actual building land prices than if the freehold had initially been purchased outright. But this could not have been a serious discouragement.

There can be no doubt that a good number of housebuilders, particularly the larger firms, considered that the advantages

1. I.e. the 'reverse purchase' principle. See above pp. 632-3.
2. See above Ch. 10. Section 2 (a).

of holding significant land stocks were worth the carrying costs involved. As was noted earlier the stock of land considered 'adequate' varied from builder to builder.¹ The number of years' land stock held by any builder of course would have depended on the area owned, the density of the projected development(s), the prevailing annual selling rate, and the builder's perception of likely future selling rates.² By the later 1930s it appears that most of the larger firms had built-up stocks of sufficient size to provide themselves with land for at least three years in the future, while almost certainly most had stocks sufficient for an even longer period. Between 1934 and 1939 for example it was estimated that Hilbery Chaplin Ltd. maintained a stock of land above their immediate requirements sufficient for perhaps two to three years' activity;³ while the report in the Evening Standard noted above implies that some time during the early 1930s George Wimpey had bought land perhaps three or four years before it was scheduled for development by the firm.⁴ Wates Ltd. provides a further example, for it appears that by 1937/8 this firm had accumulated sufficient building land to allow them to build in the region of 1,750 to 2,000 dwellings a year for some four to five years in the future.⁵ The evidence for the

1. See above p. 680.

2. The last two factors in turn would have been influenced for example by the locational characteristics of the sites selected, the dwelling characteristics and prices, as well as general demand trends.

3. Chaplin, interview, 5.1.70.

4. See above pp. 681.

5. Interviews with Seaton, 23.1.70; Bland, 13.1.70.

longest such period for which information has become available however is the statement made by William Lancaster to his sub-contract carpenter/joiner, Jacob Ward, in 1929 that he had secured land and planned schemes to last five or even ten years.¹ The truth of this statement however is uncertain: in the first place it was made by Lancaster to reassure a sub-contractor, and secondly Lancaster did not distinguish between the size of his land stock and the extent of his projected schemes which at that time may well still have been largely theoretical and based on plans made between himself and Van Dooren.² Other evidence has since indicated that in terms of the size of Lancaster's actual land stock, the former figure was probably the more realistic.³

What then was the importance of the accumulation of land stocks to those firms who adopted such land purchase policies during the earlier 1930s? The statement made in the Evening Standard late in 1937 indicates one answer to this, in the suggestion that part of the continued good fortune and success of the speculative housebuilding activities of George Wimpey & Co. Ltd. during 1937 was due to the fact that a number of years earlier the company had had the foresight to purchase and accumulate a number of well-located building-sites with an aggregate area sufficient for their activities for some time into the future.⁴

1. See above p. 679-80.

2. See above p. 402-3.

3. Lancaster, interview, 22.1.70.

4. NIB, Dec. 1937, p.32; see above p. 681.

Moreover the oral evidence available indicates that this was probably the essential answer to the question. The individuals interviewed who had been employed by house-building firms which pursued such policies unanimously agreed that, had these stocks not existed, and hence, had their particular firms been forced to depend primarily upon sites which were available during the closing years of the 1930s, both from the point of view of the constructions of dwellings and their sale, the quality of the building-sites developed by them would have been vastly inferior. And almost certainly this would have had an adverse influence on the production and turnover levels of these particular firms at this time of gradually waning demand.

Plate 16



**Haymills Ltd.
The Ridings, Ealing. 1933-5**

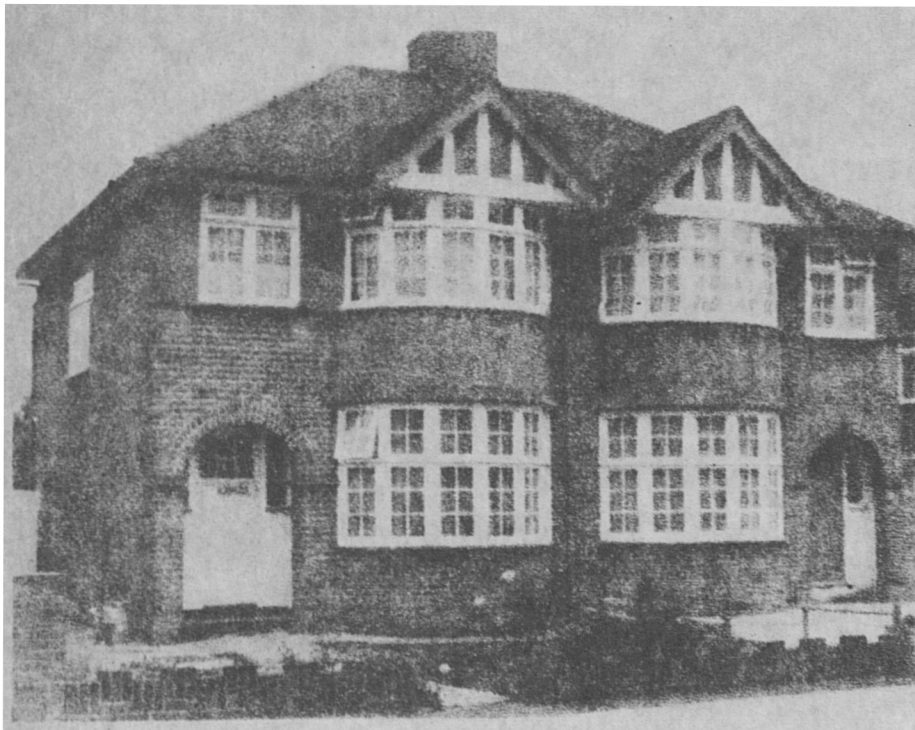


**H re Ltd
Lansdowne Road, Edgware. 1934-5**

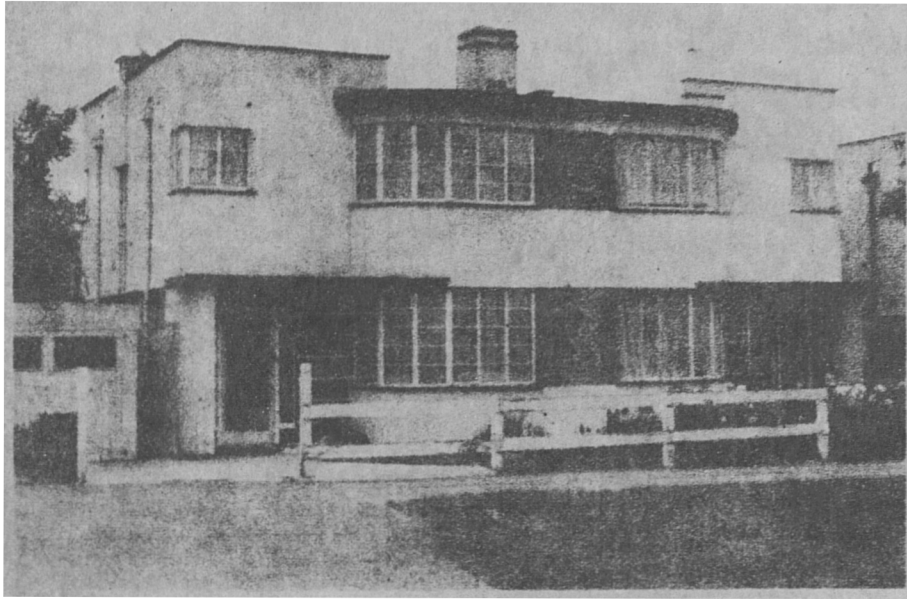
Plate 17



A. F. Davis Ltd. (later Davis Estates Ltd.)
Rugby Road, Queensbury. 1931



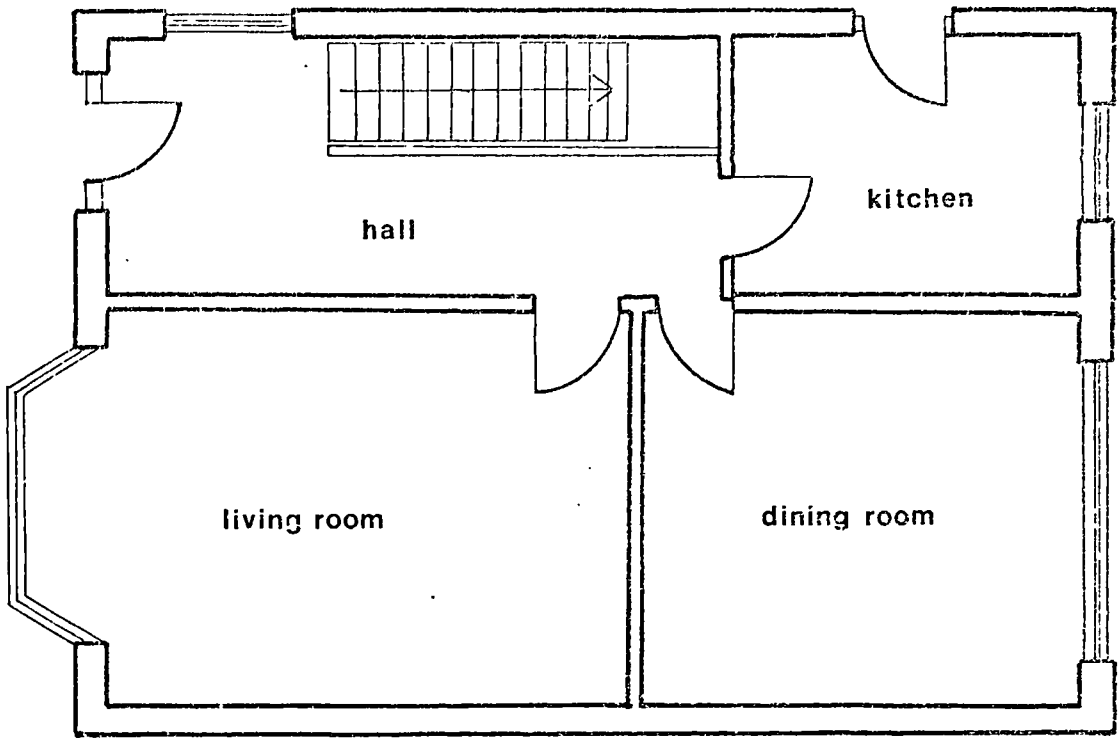
As Above



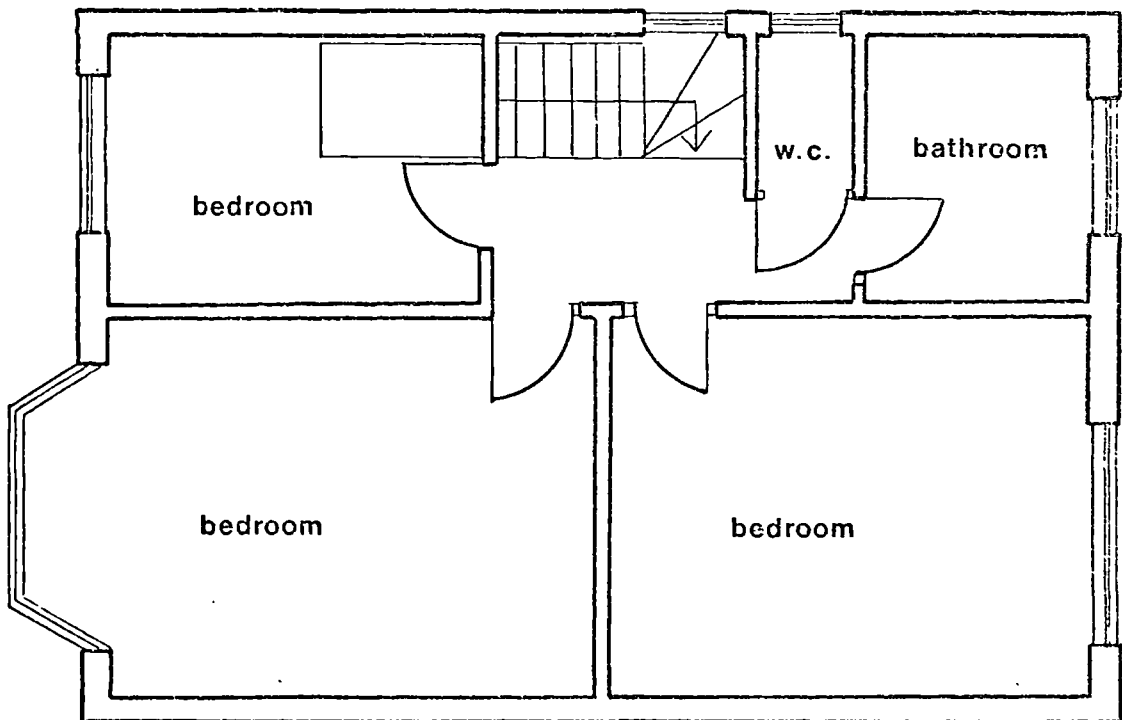
Davis Estates Ltd.
Beverley Gardens, Stanmore. 1935-6



As Above



Ground Floor



First Floor

Plate 19. Layout of the 'universal house'.

VISITING ROYALTY APPROVES OF THE SPRING PARK FARM ESTATE SHIRLEY



On his recent visit the Maharajah of Alwar said it was a pleasure and a privilege to visit the Spring Park Farm Estate, Shirley. He had heard of the offer made for the house "Alwar," named after his own State, and felt he would like to make an offer himself. He said the day would live long in his memory when he visited this Estate. Town planning, he said was an hobby of his in his own State, but he felt that comfort in one's house was the first consideration if people were to live happily. He congratulated the Company on their enterprise, the workmen upon their skill and the tenants on their good fortune.

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CHAPTER 11. Conclusion.

The body of this thesis has fallen into two parts. First, the activities of the interwar speculative house-builder within the OSA of Greater London have been examined on the more general level of an analysis of the incidence and distribution of both private subsidised and unsubsidised housebuilding between 1918 and 1933, and the distribution and fluctuations of unsubsidised housebuilding between 1933/6 and 1938/9. The work has then moved downwards in its level of focus to an examination and analysis, in some detail, of the characteristics of interwar speculative housebuilders active within the OSA, and also of certain aspects of their work and operations. Up to this point however there has been no attempt to explain the reasons for the generally rising trend in, and the continually high level of, housebuilding activity throughout almost all of the interwar period. It is therefore necessary in the first part of this concluding chapter to analyse the various social and economic forces which underlay the remarkable levels of private housebuilding achieved by the industry between the wars. This analysis will precede a consideration of a number of the findings of the research which in turn will be followed by an indication of some of the directions which future research in this sphere might perhaps profitably take.

1. Forces underlying interwar trends and fluctuations in private housebuilding.

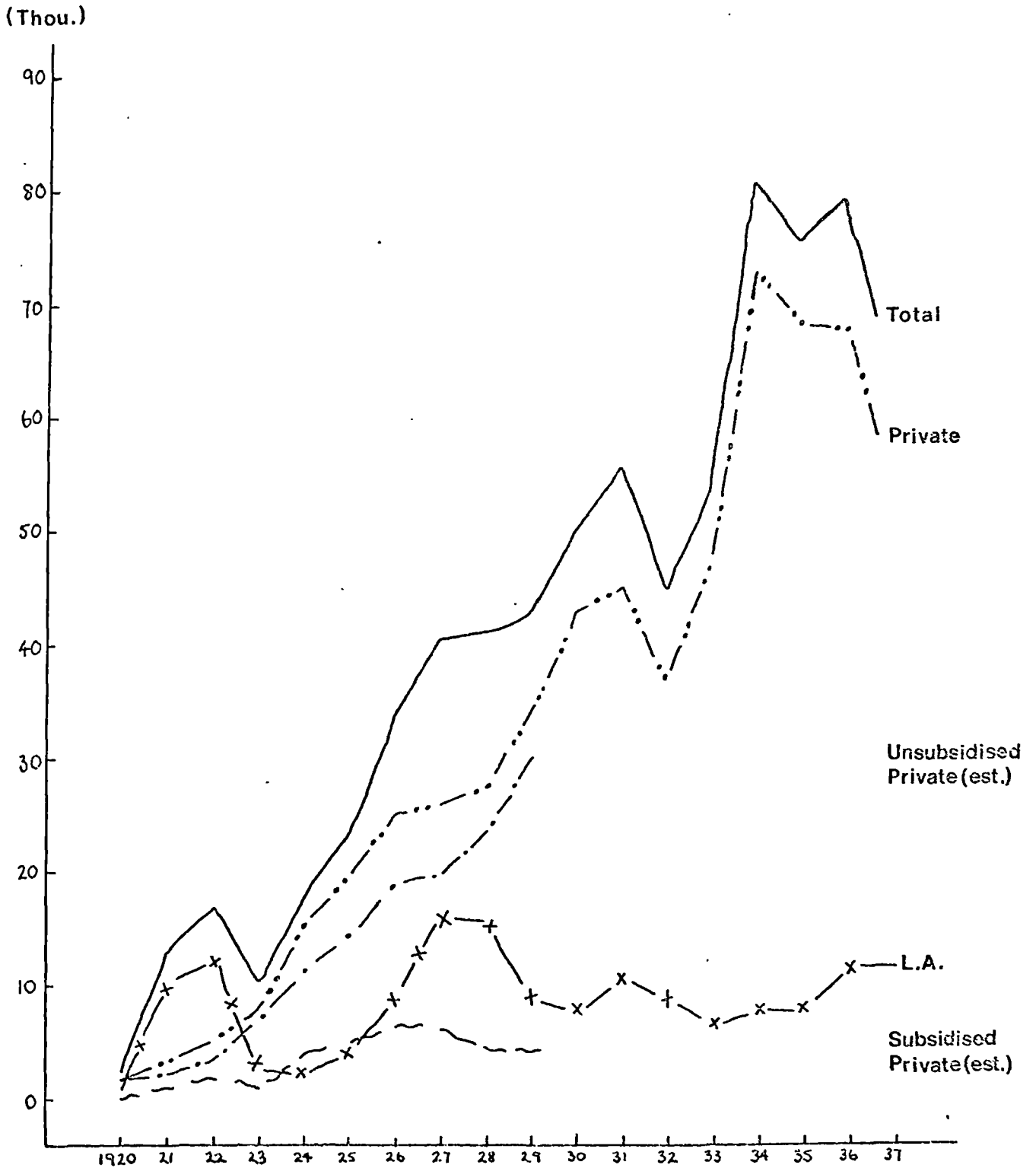
As was noted in Chapter 1, the level of private housebuilding activity within Greater London between the wars was

far greater than had ever previously been experienced. Rising steadily and at times quite dramatically, by 1928 housebuilding output was as great as that achieved at the turn of the century (i.e. 27,381 dwellings), the year of greatest activity prior to 1914. Moreover after 1928 annual production in this area never fell below around 35,000 dwellings and in 1934 reached a peak of some 72,756 dwellings, that is approximately 166% greater than the 1899/1900 level.¹ The reasons for this remarkable period of activity will be considered in two stages. Firstly the main factors influential in the generally high and rising level of activity will be considered, while secondly, and more specifically, there will be an examination of the factors influential in the short-term fluctuations which took place during these years.

Broadly speaking the explanation of the generally high level of interwar housebuilding activity lay primarily with demand factors. This was true within both Greater London and the country as a whole, and included such factors as (1) changes in the household structure of the population, emphasised within Greater London for example by the effects of migration, (2) changes in tastes and expectations in housing, and (3) rising real incomes. Certain supply factors however were also of considerable importance in this respect and largely concerned (1) the initial shortages of housing supply, due largely to the cessation of housebuilding during The Great War and the immediate post-war factor shortages,

1. Annual details of housebuilding between the wars can be found in Fig. 11.2 (Greater London) and Fig. 11.3. (England and Wales) below pp. 714-5.

Fig.11.1. Fluctuations in housebuilding activity in Greater London, 1920-37.¹



Source : LCC (1939), op. cit. p. 172.

1. See below Fig. 11.2.

and (2) the changing financial structure of the housing market between the wars, and particularly the emergence of owner-occupation as a major form of tenure.

In 1921 the Census of Population for England and Wales revealed a deficit of some 872,000 private dwellings.¹ While between the wars (1921-39) the England and Wales population increased by 9.3% (37,932,000 to 41,460,000),² and that within Greater London (MPD) increased by 16.5% (7,480,201 to 8,728,000).³ In relation to housing demand however, more important were the changes which took place in the number and structure of households within this increasing total population. In fact between 1921 and 1937 the average family size in England and Wales fell from 4.17 persons to 3.61 persons, while over the same period the number of households increased by over a fifth.⁴

In 1939 The Economist suggested that it was in fact this "fanning out of the population into smaller family units that ... largely accounted for the unprecedented building activity...[over the previous] decade or so."⁵ Although such a suggestion may tend to exaggerate the significance of increases in the number of families on housebuilding activity,

1. Bowley (1945), op. cit. p.269. That is, when total dwellings were compared with total private households.

2. Mitchell and Deane, op. cit. p.10.

3. 1931 Census of Population, London County Report (HMSO, 1932), p.viii. 1951 Census of Population, London County Report (HMSO, 1953), p.xiii.

4. Economist (Building Societies Supplement), 1 July 1939, p.8. See also Stolper, op. cit. pp. 83-94; M.Abrams, The Condition of the British People, 1914-45 (1945), p.41. Unfortunately it has proved impossible to obtain Greater London equivalents.

5. Economist (B.S. Suppl), 1 July 1939, p.8.

Richardson and Aldcroft point out that, for the U.K. as a whole between 1921 and 1938, the net increase in the housing stock both public and private (i.e. 3,487,000) barely kept pace with the estimated net increase in families. Thus by the outbreak of war over the nation as a whole there had been little diminution in the overall housing shortage.¹ Of course the extent to which any housing shortage was perpetuated by a continued mismatch between supply and demand will have varied from area to area according to local conditions, while the effect of the relatively rapid increase in net family formation was almost certainly made stronger in a number of areas which, as a result of immigration, held a disproportionately high number of families. Greater London as a whole, but more particularly Middlesex during the 1920s and early 1930s, probably provide good examples of this process, and Prof. Bowley calculated that in Middlesex where the new light industries were developing the housing shortage was significantly greater in 1931 than it had been a decade earlier.²

Net changes in the number of families show no short-term relationship with housebuilding activity, they represent more a longer term demand pressure (or relaxation) on housing supply. A similarly longer term demand factor of importance between the wars was the shift in consumer preferences and

1. Richardson and Aldcroft, op. cit. p.196. The higher rate of household formation relative to new housebuilding was particularly evident during the 1920s.

2. Bowley (1945), op. cit. p.71. Although it must be admitted that it is very difficult to isolate the effects of migration on housing demand, see e.g. Bowley (1938), op. cit. p.183; Richardson and Aldcroft, op. cit. p.88.

the increase in the standard of housing considered acceptable by a substantial proportion of the population. Shifts in social attitudes and housing preferences are likely to affect the level of demand and/or the structure of demand.¹ Between the wars the latter effect showed itself, for example, in a preference for smaller and/or suburban houses. It is true of course that changes in tastes and social attitudes during these years were interrelated with other demand factors such as demographic and income changes, however this fact in no way detracts from their importance, and their impact on housing demand should not be underestimated.²

Changing tastes in housing may have arisen for any number of reasons. For example, both falling household size and the increasing scarcity and cost of domestic service may have resulted in a demand for smaller, more easily manageable houses with labour-saving kitchens and equipment; a growing dissatisfaction with 'urban living' may have led to a desire for more rural surroundings, perhaps in a leafy suburb; while changing ideas in house and estate design and layout, accompanied by experiments fostered by the Garden City Movement and the example of Hampstead Garden Suburb, almost certainly had a profound effect on the level of housing quality many new and established households aspired to, particularly since such ideas and standards were accepted

1. Bowley, op. cit. p.95.

2. Richardson and Aldcroft, op. cit. pp. 97-8.

as the norm for all public housebuilding after 1918.¹ As Prof. Bowley has put it, "the demand for new houses was in part at least a demand for a higher standard of housing, or at least for a standard consistent with modern ideas".²

Sir Harold Belman, the Chairman of the Abbey Road Building Society (BS), for obvious reasons put the point rather more strongly, claiming that it was the "almost revolutionary conception of what are tolerable housing standards among a vast section of the population" which provided "the essential driving force" for the high level of interwar private housebuilding activity.³ Clearly this was an exaggerated viewpoint, however it is not difficult to understand the temptation of the small, modern, and light outer suburban house to those established households living in, or the new households whose alternative was to live in, three or four bedroomed Victorian houses.

The long dark passages, cold and depressing sculleries, sordid bathrooms and villainous scarlet brick of Victorian lower middle-class villas could, in the post-war era, be abandoned in exchange for compact houses with all sorts of modern conveniences and fittings. The new villas may be stigmatized as jerry-built, they may be despised as pseudo-Tudor or ugly by the sophisticated, but there is no denying their attraction for the young couple with a small family,

while transport improvements made the areas of new suburban housebuilding more cheaply and readily accessible.⁴

1. Cd. 9191, Report of the Committee on Building Construction in connection with the Provision of Dwellings for the Working Classes in England and Wales, and Scotland (1918). (The Tudor Walters Report).

2. Bowley (1945), op. cit. p.83.

3. H. Belman, 'The Building Trades', in British Association, Britain in Recovery (1938), p.432.

4. Bowley (1945), op. cit. pp. 74-5.

Moreover for many households during this period a new house in new suburban surroundings became a symbol of some status, and naturally the speculative housebuilding industry and, in a different way, the building society movement did their best to foster both this attitude and a sense of dissatisfaction with pre-1914 housing by means of advertising and giving publicity to the advantages of the new suburban housing. While the rapid progress of the electricity industry and the increasing availability of electrical domestic appliances as the period wore on would have done much to feed further this discontent.¹

Clearly between the wars there were substantial longer term potential demand pressures on the housing market arising from demographic factors and shifts in social attitudes and tastes. However for such latent demand pressure to become effective it was necessary for it to exist concurrently with other demand, and also supply forces. Perhaps one of the most important factors in this context was an upward shift in the level of real income enjoyed by the population, or rather by particular sections of the population, since no matter how much a household might have needed or desired a new house without the ability to pay the cost this need or desire would have had to remain frustrated, necessitating for example an increased level of sharing. Other influential factors in this respect during these years worked from the supply side of the equation and

1. Interwar landlords of pre-1914 inner suburban housing would have had little incentive to install electricity and so replace the gas lamp with the electric lamp for their tenants.

included downward movements in building costs, and, in the absence of favourable conditions for investment in new housing to let, increasingly easy access to a supply of funds with which to finance house purchase.

According to the Chapman-Knight index of annual average real incomes of wage-earners between 1920 and 1938, the trend of real earnings of those in employment rose relatively steadily over this period. Only in 1922-3 and 1935-7 did slight falls occur, while between 1920 and 1922, and 1929 and 1933 there were increases of approximately 9% and 12.7% respectively.¹ The effect of this trend on house-building activity of course will depend on the extent to which the increase in disposable income enjoyed by the middle- and lower middle-classes (rarely to be found among the unemployed in Greater London at least) was devoted to additional housing consumption and/or investment in agencies active in financing housebuilding or purchase. It is very probable that encouraged by other factors, some of which having already been mentioned, many people during the 1920s and 1930s were willing to use at least some of their increased income in this way.² And although there is considerable debate on the elasticity of housing demand to shifts in income,³ almost certainly changes in real income will be more influential in the housing consumption decisions of potential owner-occupiers than of

1. Mitchell and Deane, op. cit. p.353.

2. E.g. Economist, 2 Nov. 1935, p.844; Richardson and Aldcroft, op. cit. p.95; Cleary, op. cit. pp. 188-9.

3. See e.g. R.F.Muth, 'The demand for non-farm housing', in A.C.Harberger, ed. The Demand for Durable Goods (Chicago, 1960); M.G.Reid, Housing and Income (Chicago, 1962); L.Needleman, The Economics of Housing (1965), pp. 68-9.

potential residential property investors.

Alone the course of real incomes can never totally explain short-term fluctuations in housebuilding activity; not only because short-term shifts are rarely sufficiently substantial to influence expenditure on housing, but also, because house purchase normally requires a substantial and regular commitment over quite a period of time, it is probable that some lag will occur between any short-term shift and a long term decision made on the basis of that shift. Against this, to the extent that shorter-term movements in real income do influence housing expenditure, they are likely to be more effective when the movements are positive ¹ and when any housing expenditure made is for house purchase. In fact both these conditions appear to have been present between the wars and it is notable that a prominent feature of ^{the} interwar housing market was the successive extension of house purchase opportunities down the middle band of the social and economic scale. ² In view of this, in the context of its coincidence, particularly during the middle ten years of the period, with certain supply factors as falling building costs and easier access to purchase finance (later on more favourable terms) and various forces creating potential demand pressure, it is clear that the importance for housebuilding activity between the wars of both shorter term upward shifts and the longer term secular trend in real income should not be overlooked.

1. Richardson and Aldcroft, op. cit. p. 90-1.

2. Bowley (1945), op. cit. pp. 81, 82.

Without doubt one of the most remarkable features of the housing market between the wars was the dominance of owner-occupation within the new housing sub-market and the dramatic growth of savings institutions interested in financing house purchase. Within both Greater London and England and Wales as a whole, by far the greater part of private housebuilding between 1919 and 1939 was purchased for owner-occupation, whether it was subsidised or not.¹ Prior to 1914 on the other hand the evidence suggests that perhaps only a tenth of all new private housing, or even less, was purchased by its occupier.²

The growth of owner-occupation was, of course, very much related to the expansion of the building society movement. Building societies were the primary means by which house purchase by owner-occupiers was financed during both decades.³ The relationship however was by no means one way since just as the expansion of owner-occupation was dependent on the growth of institutions such as building societies, so the growth of building societies on a large scale was dependent on the expansion of owner-occupation.⁴

1. See above Ch. 3 and 4; also Marshall, op. cit. p.189. and The Marley Report, Cmd. 3911, p.19.

2. Economist, 26 Aug. 1939, p.394; Cleary, op. cit. p.185.

3. NB, 14y 1930, p.307; The Times (1938), op. cit. p.46. In the region of 75% of purchases were financed in this way (being slightly greater in the 1930s). Among other agencies financing house purchase were banks, employers, LAs, insurance companies, and co-operative societies, while on very rare occasions houses were purchased outright, see e.g. Wates Streatham (1928) Ltd. Sales Ledger; Richardson and Aldcroft, op. cit. p.206.

4. Bowley (1945), op. cit. p.92.

Prior to the Great War, growth in the building society movement was slow.¹ In contrast, the growth between the wars has been described as "truly sensational".² In 1913 total building society advances on new mortgages totalled £13 million and in 1923 approximately £32 million.³ By 1929 the value of total new advances had increased by well over one and a half times to £74.7 million, with the amounts advanced in 1933 and 1936 standing at £103.2 million and £140.3 million respectively. The rise in the number of borrowers was similarly rapid, increasing from 553,900 in 1928 to 948,500 in 1933 and 1,295,200 in 1936,⁴ while the number of shareholders increased by approximately 3.7 times between 1922 and 1938.⁵ During the 1920s signs of a growing concentration within the building society movement became apparent, the larger societies benefiting disproportionately from the favourable conditions, and for the first time a number of societies became more nationally-oriented.⁶ Between 1926 and 1936 the number of borrowers from the Abbey Road B.S, the largest London-based society and nationally second in size only to the Halifax Permanent B.S, increased seven times from 9,300 to 82,000.⁷

It would appear in fact that the strong demand for new

1. Economist, 27 April 1929, p.915; S.Moos, 'Building Societies and Building Finance', Bulletin of the Oxford Institute of Statistics, VII (1945), p.150.

2. Abrams, op. cit. p.5^h.

3. Nevitt, op. cit. pp. 29, 86.

4. Bowley (1945), op. cit. p.279. Prof. Bowley's sources were the Annual Reports of the Chief Registrar of Friendly Societies.

5. Cleary, op. cit. p.188; the number in 1937 was 2,083,900. Bowley (1945), op. cit. p.279.

6. Cleary, op. cit. p.203.

7. Jackson, op. cit. p.194.

housing to buy, and consequently for mortgages, in and around London gave the London societies, such as the Abbey Road B.S., the Co-operative B.S., and the Westbourne Park B.S., a considerable advantage in the race for expansion during the 1920s. Within a non-nationally oriented movement their proximity to such demand enabled them to charge relative high mortgage rates, offer relatively high rates to investors,¹ and thus provide a particularly attractive investment prospect within an economic climate already conducive to investment in building societies. Indeed it would appear that the demand for mortgages in and around London during the later 1920s and the 1930s was also important in the expansion of many provincial societies. In 1939, for example, The Economist declared that the "growth of many of the provincial societies, in fact, owes much to the rapid growth of housing estates in the London suburbs in the last decade . . . "²

There can be little doubt that without the expansion of owner-occupation, interwar private housebuilding activity would have run at a considerably lower level. What then were the reasons for the rise of owner-occupation as the dominant form of tenure in the new housing market between the wars? The explanation given by representatives of the building society movement mainly centred around the virtues of thrift and level-headedness. Statements such as "a country of house owner-occupation is a country firmly entrenched against revolution - a level headed country" were not unusual.³

1. Cleary, op. cit. pp. 203, 204.

2. 18 Feb. 1939, p.348. See also NHB, Oct. 1937, p.26.

3. BSG, March 1936, p.196. See also e.g. H.Bellman, The Thrifty Three Millions (1935) and Bricks and Mortals (1949), esp. ch.8-9.

However, although clearly owner-occupation had a number of advantages for house searchers over private renting (e.g. greater choice of location, the satisfaction of property ownership, freedom from interference and the whims of a landlord in the provision of shelter for himself and family, and freedom from arbitrary rent increases)¹, it is important "to dispel . . . the myth that the increase of owner-occupancy has been due either to a remarkable increase in the virtue and thrift of the population or . . . to some factor of the 'Act of God' type."² As Walter Harvey wrote in 1933, "home buying since the war has not been a voluntary gesture",³ owner-occupation developed at the pace and to the position of significance that it did, as a result of the desertion of private investment in housing to let, and the fact that for many the gap could not be filled by local authorities. Thus for those with houses who wanted a modern house (especially one 'in the country') and for new households without houses the only option open was to buy.⁴

What then were the causes of the shifts in the attractiveness of investment in new housing to let after the Armistice? In brief, during the 1920s there were both short and longer

1. There were also certain financial advantages. Between the wars the r.v. on new housing was derived with ref. to rental incomes of controlled pre-1914 houses hence (1) it was estimated in 1939 that occupiers of new housing were paying 30% less in rates than the convenience of the houses warranted, and (2) the under valuation and infrequent revaluations meant that owner-occupiers were gaining more from their tax concession on their interest payments than they were to pay in Schedule A tax on their houses imputed rental value. Nevitt, op. cit. pp.56,59.

2. Bowley (1945), op. cit. p.85.

3. B3G, April 1933, p.233.

4. See e.g. Bowley (1945), op. cit. pp. 85-6; Richardson and Aldcroft, op. cit. p.206; Cleary, op. cit. p.187.

term factors operating against such investment. Although rent restriction may have been perhaps a psychological deterrent to some investment, without a doubt the high building costs and interest rates of the early 1920s, with the certainty of falls some time in the future, were major short term influences deflecting investment from the private rented sector; no doubt supported by the increased post-war levels of taxation.¹ However, as Prof. Bowley pointed out in 1945, there were also more deep-seated, fundamental forces at work during these years since changes in the investment market meant the permanent diminution of both the usefulness and attractiveness of such a form of investment, particularly in relation to the benefits available from investment in institutions such as building societies.

Prior to The Great War the organisation of the housing investment market was primitive in comparison with other investment markets.² In the post-war years on the other hand there was a growth in the habit of indirect investment through such agencies as investment trusts, insurance companies and, particularly important from the point of view of the housing market, building societies. Obviously the question must be asked: why did such changes in investment patterns take place, and in particular what were the reasons for the rapid growth of the building society movement during the 1920s and 1930s?

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the housing investment market was in general a local market

1. Cleary, op. cit. pp. 185-6; Bowley (1945), op. cit. pp. 85-7; Mitchell and Deane, op. cit. p.429.

2. See for details ibid. pp. 87-8; also Nevitt, op. cit. pp. 37, 38.

based primarily on the private mortgage. Most private mortgages were made with trustee or other funds under the control of solicitors. However, the private mortgage was far from an ideal form of investment even prior to 1914 since it not only tended to be very illiquid but also involved relatively large units of investment which normally could only be realised by finding another investor within the locality willing to buy.¹ Apart from the strength of the belief in the soundness of property as an investment, this type of market probably survived, as Nevitt notes, because of the favouring of mortgages by solicitors whose knowledge of property law would have far outweighed their knowledge of financial institutions and investment economics.² During the Great War this investment outlet closed up, but after the Armistice solicitors were again able to create new mortgages with funds under their control. However, during the post-war years, with much investment tied up in the National Debt, the changing structure of the new housing market and a trend in favour of more attractive indirect investment forms, there began a deflection of funds away from private mortgages. This, in turn, will have aided building societies by reducing an important element of competition in a sphere in which, and at a time when, building societies with their accumulated funds from the war years must have been one of the few significant mortgage sources available to

1. Bowley (1945), op. cit. p.87; Nevitt, op. cit. pp. 37, 38.

2. Ibid., p.38.

accommodate the demand for new housing.¹

During the 1920s there were several important categories of funds looking for investment opportunities. For example there were those funds which for various reasons were deserting the investment market in new dwellings to let. There were also those funds which derived from the small savings efforts of a sizeable middle section of the population. "There was no obligation on such people to save, but the intense savings drives of the First World War no doubt did something to spread the savings habit, and once acquired it was likely to continue."² Moreover no doubt this habit was reinforced by the rising trend in real incomes enjoyed by this group among others which developed from the mid 1920s.

For a number of reasons building societies provided attractive havens for such funds. In the first place the risks involved in such investment were substantially smaller than under any private mortgage system. Building societies provided a means whereby a large number of short-term investments of modest denominations could be accepted, pooled, and lent in turn to a fewer number of people in larger denominations and over longer periods under a system of regular but small repayments of the capital and interest. In this way the risk to which individual investment was exposed was both reduced and spread very widely. No longer

1. Nevitt, op. cit. pp. 38, 39. Nevitt has calculated that the decline in the percentage of total personal property lent on mortgage first became significant in 1920-1 falling sharply from 6.4% in 1913-4 to 4.5% in 1920-1 before declining more gradually to 2.7% in 1937-8.

2. Cleary, op. cit. p.188.

need any investment be tied up with an individual borrower or the value of a particular house, nor an investor be forced to invest in relatively large investment units. Moreover with the regional, and later national, development of the activities of individual societies no longer was any investment limited to a particular local housing market. Indirect investment in housing through societies also gave investors far greater liquidity since societies held approximately 15% of all their monies in the form of cash or highly liquid assets to meet day to day withdrawals. Indeed it was almost as easy as investing in a savings bank, while the return was significantly higher.¹

Throughout the interwar period the return from investment with building societies in general compared very favourably with yields on alternative forms of investment. The differential between building society yields and the returns from savings bank investment, for example, has already been noted, while during the 1920s building society net yields (around 4½%) ran closely with the gross yield on Consols, the form of investment closest in character to that provided by building societies.² It is true that according to one estimate an average dividend yield on ordinary shares during the late 1920s was just over 6% while an average earnings yield was over 10%.³ However again these yields were gross yields, and of course investment in industrials

1. Nevitt, op. cit. p. 37; Bowley (1945), op. cit. pp. 91-2; Cleary, op. cit. pp. 203-5.

2. Cleary, op. cit. p.190. Table XVIII. B.Soc. yield was equivalent to about 6% gross.

3. London and Cambridge Economic Service, The British Economy: Key Statistics, 1900-66 (1967), p.16.

was associated with a greater element of risk than investment in building societies.

The importance of the building societies' ability to offer a tax-free return on investments and deposits was clearly of some significance in their expansion during the 1920s and 1930s, since where the potential investor was a taxpayer it gave the societies a significant edge over gilt-edged securities,¹ and during the later 1920s (before the collapse of the stock market in 1929) narrowed the gap between the actual return on building society and industrial investment. In part at least the building societies' ability to offer such relatively attractive net yields to the investor stemmed from the peculiar relationship which existed between themselves and the Inland Revenue during the interwar years. This developing relationship first emerged during the 1870s and concerned the difficulties which confronted the Inland Revenue in their efforts to collect the small amounts of tax due on the annual income earned by each of the large number of building society investors. The conflict which developed between the societies and the Inland Revenue was partially resolved by agreements in 1894 and 1916.² In 1921, under a renegotiation of the earlier agreements, the societies agreed to pay tax at half the standard rate on half the total share and deposit interest it paid annually to its investors. The effect of this was to quarter the rate of tax that investors had to pay, a substantial incentive to

1. Apart from any other advantages such as greater liquidity.

2. Nevitt, op. cit. pp. 50-1.

those who paid tax at the standard rate. A further modification in 1926 affected only investors with 25,000 or over in societies.¹ This situation held into the early 1930s and, although further modifications were made to the arrangements in 1932 and 1935, in 1938-9 the effective rate of tax on societies' returns to investors was still only approximately 36% of the standard rate.²

Nevitt, in her important study of the financial and economic aspects of housing, suggests that the tax concessions obtained by building societies from the Inland Revenue " were highly significant in the 1920s (the period when investment in building societies grew most rapidly) . . . " ³ However, not only were these tax concessions important during the 1920s, ⁴ they were also almost certainly influential in directing investment funds towards building societies after the collapse of the stock market in 1929. In 1933 Harold Bellman noted the growing interest "of more substantial investors" in building societies between 1919 and 1931. ⁵ A proportion of these would have been individuals who before the war had, or would have, invested in housing to let, other during the 1920s were individuals and companies specifically attracted by the tax arrangements. ⁶ After the

1. Nevitt, op. cit. p.52. Increased taxation post-war would have emphasised the incentive provided by the tax concessions.

2. Ibid., pp. 52-3.

3. Ibid., p. 54.

4. While for the very small investor, the non-taxpayer, the convenience and liquidity of building society investment were probably sufficient to attract them away from government stocks.

5. 'Building Societies - Some Economic Aspects', Economic Journal, XLIII (1933), 17.

6. Nevitt, op. cit. p.52.

crash in industrials and overseas investment prospects in 1929, these investors were joined by both large and medium investors looking for a safe short-term haven for their funds and attracted to building societies,¹ in preference for example to Consols, by the taxation differences and the liquidity provided. Between 1929 and 1930 for example building society liabilities to shareholders and depositors rose by some £58.3 million (46% more than between 1928-9).²

Between 1931 and 1936 it is probable that tax concessions were of less importance in the attraction building societies held for investment, although still not without significance. After 1931 there developed a divergence between the advertised yields on Consols and society shares, to the society's advantage. For example, the difference between the two advertised rates after the great War Loan Conversion of 1932 stood at around 0.8%, and in 1933 the gap was around 0.6%.³ The reason for the relative stickiness of society yields relative to changes in Bank Rate and the yield on gilt-edged securities stemmed from the societies' reluctance to reduce mortgage lending rates without greater certainty on the permanence of the lower structure of interest rates which had begun to emerge in 1931.⁴ In real terms of course the investment yield differentials during these years were substantially greater than those advertised and were

1. Bowley (1937), op. cit. p.177.

2. Bowley (1945), op. cit. p.279. Between 1930-31 the increase was 344.8M.

3. Stolper, op. cit. p.44; Cleary, op. cit. p.190.

4. Ibid.

probably in the region of 2.3% and 1.9% during 1932 and 1933 respectively. ¹

The rapid influx of funds seeking safe temporary accommodation at relatively high rates of return was a considerable embarrassment to the societies which again had to face the problem of arresting investment which if withdrawn quickly could undermine their stability. The influx was of particular embarrassment during the early years of the 1930s, a period when demand for new mortgages tended to mark time. Between 1931 and 1932 share and deposit liabilities increased by some £50.2 million. ² During the middle of 1932 a number of larger metropolitan societies began to take action to restrict investments and other societies soon followed. ³ Most societies placed severe restrictions on share investments, while some ceased to accept any further share investment at all. ⁴ Moreover in the second half of 1932 the interest offered on society shares began to fall as societies became more sure of the stability of the lower interest rate structure. Between 1932 and 1933 the annual inflow of funds fell by two-fifths to £30.6 million. ⁵

One consequence of the large inflow of funds between 1929 and 1932 was the further intensification of competition between societies for business. The inflow of funds at a time of slowing mortgage demand encouraged societies to take steps to liberalize their lending arrangements. From 1932 at the same

1. RSG, July 1932, p.487.

2. Bowley (1945), op. cit. p.279.

3. BSG, July 1932, p. 487-8; BSG, Aug. 1932, pp. 540-1.

4. Economist, 16 July 1932, p.134.

5. Bowley (1945), op. cit. pp. 278, 279.

time as mortgage rates were being reduced, societies were gradually lengthening the period over which they would lend money. Both these actions worked to reduce the weekly payment required on any mortgage. However of greater significance in widening the effective demand for new housing was the rapid development and adoption of collateral security arrangements by which the initial deposit required on a mortgage was reduced from that required on a normal building society advance (i.e. between 25% and 20%) to approximately 5%. As a result no longer did a potential purchaser need to have saved £150 or £120 before he could buy a dwelling valued at £600, but only the substantially lower sum of £30.

A number of methods were devised during these years whereby collateral security was provided,¹ however by far the most commonly adopted was the method which came to be known as the 'Builders' Pool'.² This method was first developed during the mid 1920s and its adoption spread rapidly, particularly during the early 1930s.³ The suggestion by Richardson and Aldcroft that "this system began to develop in 1934 . . ." is clearly untrue, as is their suggestion that during the early 1930s it was rare to find advances of greater than 80%.⁴ Statements by both Bellman and Harvey in the

1. See Cleary, op. cit. pp. 193-4.

2. For a description of this particular method see e.g. Economist, 18 Feb. 1939, p.348; also J. Laing, 'Increased Mortgages on Builders' Guarantees', in Betham, ed. op. cit. pp. 87-8 and Hbldr, May 1937, pp. 3-4.

3. For an example of its operation in the Kent suburbs in 1926, see Abbey Road B.S, Pool Deposit a/c no. D.2136.

4. Richardson and Aldcroft, op. cit. p.205.

Building Societies Gazette between 1930 and 1932 make it clear that the method was well-established by this time, particularly in the London area.¹ While in April 1932 the objection of many societies to the Building Societies Association Executive's recommendation of a 90% maximum for advances² indicates how common mortgages of greater than 90% must have been and the importance placed on them by societies as a means of maintaining and expanding the effective demand for mortgages.³ During 1932 also evidence has been found of housebuilders who were willing to provide what amounted to second mortgage facilities, accepting a proportion of the required deposit on the basis of an agreement to complete the deposit payment in instalments over a stated period. As a copywriter put it for Richard Costain & Sons Ltd:

No need to disturb your savings, you can move for a cash payment as low as £10. The rest is as simple as A.B.C. Fifteen weekly payments complete the deposit while you are in occupation enjoying the comforts of your new home. 4

The importance of the growth of the building society movement and the growing competition between societies, the adoption of advertising and the employment of agents on

1. E.g. March 1930, p.146; March 1931, p.158; Jan. 1932, p.35. See also BSG, Oct. 1929, p.342; July 1931, pp. 514-5; and Bethan, ed. op. cit., p.87.

2. S.J.Price, Building Societies: Their Origins and History (1958), p.412.

3. See also Economist, 18 Feb. 1939, p.348.

4. Arrow Gazette and Observer, 9 Sept. 1932, p.15. Also e.g. Homefinders' Small Property Guide, 22 March 1932, p.22. G.T.Crouch Ltd. termed their arrangement the 'Crouch Deposit Savings Club', interviews with Daniel, 7.11.69; Jones 10.10.69.

commission to attract custom, and the adoption of innovations such as the improvement of loan terms and particularly the Builders' Pool and other collateral arrangements, all serve to help explain not only why, in the absence of investment in new housing to let, owner-occupation was able to establish itself as the dominant tenure within the market for new private housing, but also the generally high levels of activity achieved by the housebuilding industry between the wars.¹ As Prof. Bowley has written, "it was the development of the building society system [its own development on a large scale being dependent on the growth in demand for owner-occupation] that made the large volume of building by private enterprise possible."² And it was only with the development of such institutions that owner-occupation could permeate down through the middle band of the socio-economic scale, the phenomenon which was such an important feature of private housing demand between the wars.³ Moreover there can be little doubt of the importance of both the rapidity of the movement's growth, and the at times intense competition which existed between societies, in this 'percolation' process.⁴

A satisfactory analysis of the causes of short-term fluctuations in private housebuilding activity within Greater London is seriously limited by the lack of disaggregation in

1. In interaction with other factors such as rising real incomes from the mid 1920s, falling building costs between 1925/6 and 1933/4, shifting tastes and standards, general demographic pressures, and during the 1930s the lower structure of interest rates.

2. Bowley (1945), op. cit. pp. 92, 93.

3. Ibid. pp. 81, 82.

4. Interacting of course with shifts in real incomes and building costs.

the available time-series data into subsidised and unsubsidised activity. There is also the problem of attempting an explanation of local fluctuations by reference to national data and trends in such spheres as building costs, incomes etc. since the more limited the spatial scale, the greater the influence that local factors are likely to have had on house-building activity. Detailed analysis of local fluctuations will unfortunately have to await future investigation. However by applying a crude assumption to the available data it is possible to make a number of tentative suggestions. The assumption is that between 1920 and 1929 annual private subsidised activity within Greater London varied in the same proportions as it did within England and Wales as a whole. Thus, since private subsidised activity (1920-29) within Greater London totalled 33,017 dwellings¹ and approximately 11.4% of the total (1919/20 - 1929/30) within England and Wales was undertaken in 1924/5,² it is assumed that around 3,760 private subsidised dwellings were built within Greater London in 1924 (see below Fig. 11.2). Clearly the accuracy of this assumption will vary from year to year, however the relatively low level of subsidised activity within Greater London during the 1920s means that the significance of such inaccuracies for any analysis is likely to be much less than if such activity had been high.

1. L.C.C., London Statistics 1928-30, XXXIV (1931), p.133.

2. Bowley (1945), op. cit. p.271. Unless otherwise stated, all subsequent housebuilding statistics for England and Wales will be taken from this source.

FIG. 11.2. The number of dwellings completed in Greater London¹ by local authorities and private enterprise, 1920-37.²

Date	L.A.	Private Enterprise			Total
		sub-sidised ³	unsub-sidised ³	total	
1920	1,147	6	1,489	1,495	2,642
1921	9,696	1,080	2,151	3,231	12,927
1922	12,047	1,670	3,190	4,860	16,907
1923	2,482	850	6,936	7,786	10,268
1924	2,247	3,810	11,384	15,194	17,441
1925	3,826	5,080	14,575	19,655	23,481
1926	8,353	6,430	18,749	25,179	33,529
1927	16,017	6,030	19,761	25,791	41,808
1928	15,019	3,980	23,382	27,362	42,381
1929	8,570	4,070	30,048	34,118	42,688
1930	7,531	42,652		42,652	50,183
1931	10,707	44,805		44,805	55,512
1932	8,325	36,288		36,288	44,613
1933	6,421	47,988		47,988	54,409
1934	7,856	72,756		72,756	80,612
1935	7,662	68,015		68,015	75,677
1936	11,134	67,704		67,704	78,838
1937	11,290	57,805		57,805	69,095

Source: LCC (1939), op. cit. p.172.

1. MPD + CPD
2. Jan. - Dec.
3. Estimated. No evidence is available for subsidised activity between 1930 and 1939, however it is known to have been negligible.

FIG. 11.3. The number of dwellings completed in England and Wales by local authorities and private enterprise between the Armistice and 31st March 1939 ('000s).¹

Date	L.A.	Private Enterprise		
		subsidised	unsubsidised	Total
1919/20 ²	0.6	0.1		
1920/21	15.6	13.0		
1921/22	80.8	20.3	53.8	97.5
1922/23	57.5	10.3		
1923/24	14.3	4.3	67.5	71.8
1924/25	20.7	47.0	69.2	116.2
1925/26	44.2	60.8	66.4	129.2
1926/27	74.1	79.6	63.9	143.5
1927/28	104.1	74.6	60.3	134.9
1928/29	55.7	49.1	64.7	113.8
1929/30	61.8	50.2	90.1	140.3
1930/31	55.9	2.6	125.4	128.0
1931/32	70.1	2.3	128.4	130.7
1932/33	55.9	2.5	142.0	144.5
1933/34	56.0	2.8	207.9	210.7
1934/35	40.2	1.1	286.4	287.5
1935/36	53.5	0.2	271.7	271.9
1936/37	71.8	0.8	274.4	275.2
1937/38	78.0	2.6	257.1	259.7
1938/39	100.9	4.2	226.4	230.6
Total	1,111.7	430.4	2,455.6 ³	2,886.0 ³

Source: Bowley (1945), op. cit. p.271.

1. All figures are for April-March.
2. Includes dwellings built between the Armistice and 31 March 1919.
3. Includes 21,500 dwellings built with L.A. guarantees under the 1933 Act. These have not been included separately for individual years.

Initial factor shortages and high costs prevented the boom in private housebuilding which had been expected by many to arise during the early 1920s. In the place of boom, within both England and Wales and Greater London, there was a gradual growth in activity. Throughout the 1920s the cost of new houses was undoubtedly a restraining influence on effective demand, in spite of the obvious potential demand pressures which existed. On the other hand, it is important that the boom in private housebuilding activity experienced during the 1930s should not lead the observer to underestimate the expansion which took place during the 1920s. As was seen in Chapter 1 the greatest peak of activity achieved before 1914 within Greater London was 27,381 in 1899-1900.¹ By 1928 total private activity within this area had already reached the 1899-1900 level, and by 1929 unsubsidised activity had without question passed this figure by well over 1000 dwellings.² Thus, by any previous standard, the 1920s saw a boom in private housebuilding whether the figures are taken with or without subsidised activity.

What then were the factors which led to the expansion of housebuilding activity during the 1920s? Within England and Wales as a whole the expansion in unsubsidised activity experienced during the early 1920s first slowed down around 1924/5 before falling by approximately 3,000 dwellings in each year to 1927/8. In general the reason for this change can probably be explained in terms of the Chamberlain subsidy

1. See above Fig. 1.0.

2. A conservative estimate, see above Fig. 11.2. Unless otherwise stated all subsequent housebuilding statistics for Greater London will be taken from this source.

deflecting the attention of a section of the industry from unsubsidised to subsidised activity, and also the gradual exhaustion of the pool of effective demand which existed at the prevailing cost levels. In 1928/9 trend in activity turned and unsubsidised activity began to expand once more (e.g. by 7.3% in 1928/9 and 40.6% in 1929/30). Prof. Bowley explained this reversal of the downward trend largely in terms of falling building costs and the effect on latent demand. According to the Maiwald Index, after fluctuations between 1922 and 1925, building costs fell in each year (except 1929) between 1926 and 1934. Between 1926 and 1928 costs fell by about 5.8% and between 1926 and 1930 by about 7.3%.¹ Prof. Bowley argued that:

it was not until 1923, that the accumulated fall in costs had become really substantial . . . [and that] at this level of costs houses were becoming a reasonable financial proposition for the whole group of families accustomed to living in houses with rateable values between £13 and £26, provided they had the capital available for the initial lump sum repayment required. ²

While earlier she had argued that "it is clear . . . that by 1930 the continued fall in costs had become in total sufficient to stimulate an expansion of unsubsidised building of houses of all sizes."³

Almost certainly changes in cost, in the context of considerable latent demand, was an important factor in the upward trend in unsubsidised activity. On the other hand too

1. Maiwald, *op. cit.* p.192.

2. Bowley (1945), *op. cit.* pp. 80-1.

3. *Ibid.* p.78. In general, fluctuation in subsidised activity was a function of changes in subsidy arrangements.

great an emphasis on this variable tends to underplay the other component of the cost/effective demand equation, i.e. the ability to pay. Between 1925 and 1928 for example real incomes rose by some 4.7%, while between 1925 and 1930 the increase was 10.1%.¹ Moreover it has been argued earlier in this chapter that competition between building societies during the 1920s had resulted in greater attention being paid to the development of various forms of collateral security, including the Builders' Pool, as a way of decreasing the proportion of the valuation which a purchaser had to find under a mortgage scheme.² Although this latter point should perhaps not be over stressed, it is also important that, with the existence and use of the second mortgage (whether from a bank, a builder, or other private source), it should not be overlooked as would appear to have been the case in the past.

On the basis of the assumptions made earlier, unsubsidised private activity within Greater London rose in each year between 1920 and 1931 and thus did not experience the falls in activity during 1926/7 and 1927/8 found within England and Wales as a whole. On the other hand the Greater London experience is not necessarily inconsistent with the explanation for national fluctuations suggested above. Thus for Greater London also it can be suggested that a fundamental feature of the housing market was the provision of dwellings for successively lower income groups within the broad middle-class

1. Mitchell and Deane, op. cit. p.353.

2. In the earlier days of the development of collateral agreements, it appears that much greater use was made of them within and around London than in the provinces, see e.g. Bentham, ed. op. cit. p.87.

sector of the household population as, for various reasons, their latent demand became effective.

Two points suggest this. The first is the slowing down which took place in the expansion of unsubsidised activity during 1927. The second point concerns the idea that differences between the national and the local trends during these years can perhaps be explained in terms of the greater number of households within the Greater London area (than within other areas of the country) which could be placed, in terms of their incomes, within all sections of the 'middle-classes'. In the context of this second point, of particular importance between 1920 and 1926 were the greater number of households which, in terms of their ability to pay, were at the top of the housing demand ladder and which could afford to buy houses rated at between £20 - £35 r.v., particularly perhaps within the top half of this r.v. range. And given the increasing availability of funds from the expanding building society movement and the probable increasing dissatisfaction with pre-1914 dwellings as the suburbs were seen to extend outwards, it is likely that increasing numbers of such households which had both the income and the savings necessary became interested in acquiring new houses in leafier surroundings. When taken together, these two points suggest that, broadly speaking, what was happening between 1925 and 1927 in England and Wales as a whole (i.e. the gradual exhaustion of effective demand at prevailing cost: real income levels) was beginning to happen within Greater London around 1927. While after 1927, in both areas, falling building costs and rising real incomes were both facilitating the release of the pent-up

demand of households in the socio-economic strata below this level.¹

Although to aid clarity the situation during the 1920s has been examined in isolation from that within the 1930s, it is important to appreciate that in terms of short-term trends in unsubsidised housebuilding this chronological division of the period is unreal. With the modification and the eventual withdrawal of the Chamberlain subsidy in 1927 and 1929 respectively, private subsidised activity within both Greater London and England and Wales first declined² and then all but ceased.³ In contrast, unsubsidised housebuilding activity within England and Wales as a whole rose in each year between 1928/9 and 1934/5, while within Greater London it is probable that, with the exception of 1932, the rising trend began very early on in the period and continued right through the peak in 1934.

In the past much attention has been focused on the causes of the 1930s housebuilding boom. However, as both Prof. Bowley and Richardson and Aldcroft have pointed out, it was during the later 1920s that unsubsidised housebuilding activity began to turn upwards.⁴ It has been seen that within England and Wales this was certainly the case, while within Greater

1. Superficially this explanation has a great appeal, although in view of the limited amount of evidence available further work will have to be awaited before it can be hopefully accepted without reservations.

2. Part of this decline may also have been accounted for by a deflection of some builders' attention into unsubsidised activity as conditions in this sphere became more favourable.

3. L.C.C., London Statistics, XXXIV (1930) - XXXIX (1937); see above Fig. 11.3.

4. Bowley (1945), op. cit. p.271; Richardson and Aldcroft, op. cit. pp. 200-1.

London the trend had been upward from the early 1920s. Moreover the statistics of completions for Greater London at least clearly reveal that, by 1931, there was already an unsubsidised boom of considerable proportions, output standing at approximately 63% above the 1899-1900 level.

Significant as this evidence is however, it is important that attention to it should not deflect attention from the very sharp acceleration in unsubsidised activity which took place in 1934 within Greater London, and in 1933/4 and 1934/5 within England and Wales as a whole. The increases involved were of the order of 75%, and 46% and 33% respectively. Clearly it is not inconceivable that the forces which explain the expansion of unsubsidised activity during the 1920s may have differed either in character or importance from those which explain the dramatic acceleration noted above. For example, although the effects of the 1931 financial crisis and the move towards a 'cheap money' policy were obviously of no influence during the early stages of the growth in unsubsidised activity, this clearly does not preclude them from having possibly been in some way influential in the more dramatic acceleration found around 1934.

The causation of short-term fluctuations in private housebuilding activity is often both complex and intricate. It is true of course that the path of such activity is particularly sensitive to changes in certain factors but it is important to stress that any suggestion of a 'single factor causation' would be quite mistaken. There can be little doubt for example that the growth in activity during the 1920s was a

consequence of the inter-relationship of trends in building costs, real incomes and accessibility to purchase finance, in the context of strong latent demand forces. During the early 1930s also it was the coincidence of, and the inter-relationship between, a number of favourable forces which provided the stimulus for the rapid acceleration of activity found around 1934.

Broadly speaking there has been agreement on the group of factors which were in some way influential in movements in housebuilding activity during the first half of the 1930s. The controversy which has arisen has stemmed from the relative emphasis placed on particular factors, and especially the search for a dominant factor. Naturally the temptation to argue for a predominant factor is great. For example, in 1935 The Economist concluded that

although the falling costs of building, lower rates of interest and reviving confidence had all played their parts in [the] generation [of the boom], the dominant factor was the great increase in purchasing power of the mass of the population . . . 1

Ten years later, Prof. Bowley was more balanced in her assessment, but tended to favour the accumulated fall in building costs in combination with a reduction in interest rates. 2

While in 1955 Prof. Nevin argued strongly that the dominant factor in the acceleration of housebuilding activity between 1931 and 1933 had been the move into an era of cheap money. 3

1. 2 Nov. 1935, p.844.

2. Bowley (1945), op. cit. p.81. Although in 1938 she also acknowledged the significance of rising real incomes, see Bowley (1938), op. cit. pp. 185-6.

3. E.Nevin, The Mechanism of Cheap Money (Cardiff, 1955), pp. 268-96, esp. 272-6.

More recently the extreme viewpoint held by Nevin has been challenged by Richardson and Aldcroft who dismissed cheap money as a force of crucial significance during the initial upswing in activity, ¹ although ^{they} accept that "all the evidence lends support to the conclusion that [cheap money] was by far the most important agent helping to maintain the rapid rate of housebuilding once the boom was under way"; ² conclusions in fact which correspond closely to those arrived at by Stolper in 1941. ³ On the other hand even Richardson and Aldcroft could not resist the temptation to stress one factor above all others for they suggest that

since [the] changes [in building costs between 1930 and 1933 and their repercussions] took place before the first 1 per cent reduction in mortgage rates became operative, it suggests that the initial upswing in building was a reaction to a fall in building costs. 4

Even in a relatively brief examination of the reasons for the developing boom in private housebuilding during the first half of the 1930s it is necessary first to outline the actual path of housebuilding activity. Within England and Wales as a whole the upturn in unsubsidised activity began during 1928. ⁵ The importance of movements in building costs and real incomes in the rising trend has already been mentioned. Another factor which added to the impetus of these more fundamental forces was the reductions made to the Chamberlain

1. Richardson and Aldcroft, op. cit. pp. 200-11.

2. ibid. p. 211.

3. Stolper, op. cit. p.55.

4. Richardson and Aldcroft, op. cit. p.204.

5. See above Fig. 11.3.

subsidy during this year. Between 1927-8 and 1930-1 annual unsubsidised output had increased by some 66,100 dwellings or almost 110%. Thus while, as a result of the withdrawal of the Chamberlain subsidy, subsidised activity fell from 50,200 dwellings in 1929-30 to 2,600 in 1930-31, over that same period unsubsidised activity rose from 90,100 to 125,400 dwellings. The following two years however saw a slowing down in the growth in unsubsidised activity, particularly in 1931/2. This however was probably more to do with the economic uncertainty associated with the 1931 financial crisis than adjustment as a result of any more fundamental forces. And from 1931-2 the growth in annual unsubsidised output began accelerating once more with increases of 11.5% (14,500) in 1932/3 and 46.4% (65,900) in 1933/4. In 1934/5, although the percentage increase (38.2%) was lower than that experienced during the previous year, in actual terms the increase was greater by some 13,600 dwellings. While from this date to March 1939 unsubsidised activity was maintained on a falling, though still relatively high, level.

The expansion of unsubsidised output during the 1920s within Greater London, already examined earlier in the chapter, continued into the 1930s. During 1931 however the deceleration noted in the national figures was also evident within Greater London, while during 1932 unsubsidised house-building activity actually fell by over 14%. The financial crisis of 1931 is again likely to be of significance here, the uncertainty resulting in both the slowing down of work on dwellings commenced and the delay of new starts. The with-

drawal of funds from London on a large-scale began during the summer of 1931 and it was only in April 1932 "with the pound stabilized, a balanced budget and effective protection", that the crisis was overcome.¹

The timing of the crisis has important implications for the interpretation of the national and Greater London data since the annual periods taken for these two series run from April - March and January - December respectively. In consequence although the uncertainty resulting from the crisis would have affected national statistics of housebuilding activity almost entirely within only one time period, in terms of the representation of activity within Greater London it would have affected the figures for both 1931 and 1932. Moreover any effect such uncertainty might have had on starts during the last four months of 1931 would be revealed in the completions statistics for 1932, while completions during 1931 would have also reflected starts during late 1930 and early 1931, that is before the financial crisis hit Britain. These considerations therefore perhaps help explain why activity, as shown by the statistics, did not slow quite as sharply in Greater London in 1931 as it did nationally in 1931/2, and why it fell in London in 1932 while gradually rising nationally in 1932/3. Also, because of their proximity to the City, it is possible that housebuilders in and around London were affected more strongly by the uncertainty than were builders in the provinces. During 1933 activity began to rise once more.

1. Pollard, op. cit. pp. 227-9.

Output in 1933 in fact was a third higher than that in 1932, although it should be added that, when compared with private activity before the temporary recession, the increase was much less impressive and was in the region of only 7%. Thus within Greater London at least the dramatic acceleration in activity came during 1934 when output increased by over 72% to 72,756 dwellings. During the following two years private activity remained high at between 4,500 and 5,000 below the peak level, after which it declined to 57,805, a fall of nearly 15%.

It is clear that within both England and Wales and Greater London the upward trend in unsubsidised housebuilding activity was well-established before 1930. It would consequently be erroneous to ascribe this upward trend solely to the first half of the 1930s. It would also be a mistake to conceptualise the causation of this trend as a constant set of forces throughout its duration. One consequence of such an approach to the analysis of a housebuilding trend such as that during the middle of the interwar period is that it hinders flexibility in interpretation, and as a consequence appears to encourage conclusions which stress 'dominant' factors and to obscure the idea that perhaps the apparently continuously upward trend was the consequence of varying relationships between the various influential forces at different points in time.

The cumulative importance of falls in building costs

and increases in real incomes in the upward trend in demand during the late 1920s and early 1930s is too widely documented to require very much comment. According to the Maiwald Index a fall in costs of 7.3% between 1926 and 1930 was followed by a further fall of 8.2% between 1930 and 1932 (or 10% between 1930 and 1933).¹ While an increase of 9% in average real incomes between 1926 and 1930 was followed by a further increase of 4.6% between 1930 and 1931, 5.5% between 1930 and 1932, and 7.3% between 1930 and 1933.² The means by which falling building costs facilitated the extension of effective demand down the socio-economic scale was two-fold since not only did it influence the weekly cost of buying a house on a mortgage but also it lowered the actual sum required for a deposit on any given percentage mortgage arrangement. While, for the many households which appear to have been willing to devote their gains in real income to the improvement of their housing standards, rising real incomes both facilitated the accumulation of funds to finance a deposit and enabled such households to undertake greater weekly commitments, in absolute if not in proportional terms, with respect to their expenditure on housing.

In view of the fact that the rising trend in unsubsidised private housebuilding activity began before 1930 it is clear

1. Maiwald, op. cit. p.192. In the construction of this index Maiwald assumed a 50:50 ratio between wage and material costs. For housebuilding during these years a more accurate ratio appears to have been 33:66 (interviews). On this assumption the falls noted would have been: 1926-30, 7.5%; 1930-32, 8.5%; 1930-33, 11.1%.

2. Mitchell and Deane, op. cit. p.353.

that, for example, Richardson and Aldcroft are right in their claim that the effects of cheap money were unimportant in "the initial upswing in building".¹ On the other hand, such a statement without elaboration may be misleading since it tends to deflect attention from the particularly rapid acceleration in the increase of activity which took place during 1933 and 1934 in both England and Wales as a whole, and Greater London, and also from the actual size of the output produced at the peak of the upward cycle. Thus, even though the lack of significance of 'cheap money' during the early stages of the upswing in activity may readily be admitted, it is perhaps pertinent to ask whether the complete dismissal of the influence of 'cheap money' in the later acceleration of activity to the peak, and hence the ultimate size of the peak, may be a mistaken viewpoint; albeit a natural reaction to the extreme view argued by Prof. Nevin in the mid-1950s.

The implications for housebuilding of the movement towards and into a period of 'cheap money' are likely to have been rather wider than simply a downward effect on mortgage repayments, the consequence of the lowering of building society lending rates. As has been mentioned above the interwar period, and particularly the early 1930s, was a period of particularly severe competition between building societies.² Their popularity as a medium of investment between 1929 and the mid-1930s was particularly strong, the

1. Richardson and Aldcroft, op. cit. p.211, also p.201.

2. See above pp. 707-12.

massive inflow of investment funds stimulating societies to adopt a variety of methods as a means of encouraging their lending activity.¹ Initially the inflow of investments was unrelated to any 'cheap money' considerations, but was a response to the stock market collapse.² However it is clear that from the second half of 1931 onwards many industrial investors, who had previously looked to societies to provide a short-term haven, responded to a certain revival in stock exchange activities and began to turn once again to industrials.³ Some societies experienced heavy withdrawals and feared an even greater level of withdrawals as economic conditions improved. Falling interest rates, the growing differential between the yields on building society shares and Consols, and the conversion of the War Loan announced in July 1932. however meant an inflood of funds and the fears of a drainage changed to concern once again over stability.⁴ One consequence was a renewed wave of competition between societies for custom which resulted not only in an increased willingness to lend money, but also an even greater inclination to undercut lending terms and make collateral agreements with builders and developers.⁵ Cuts were also made in mortgage rates.

The falls in mortgage rates during the second half of

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1. See above p. 712.
 2. See above p. 707-8.
 3. Stolper, op. cit. p.116.
 4. See above pp. 708-9. The great conversion resulted in the release of a large volume of liquid funds on to the market.
 5. Stolper, op. cit. pp. 49-55.

1932 and in 1933 have been well documented by Stolper in 1941 who concluded that they were too slow and too late to be considered the sole explanation of the rise in building activity.¹ This of course is not in dispute. What is being questioned, however, is the apparent understatement by the most recent workers in this sphere of the significance of the manifestations of 'cheap money' in the development of the boom and the eventual activity peak achieved.² As the authors accepted, "the influence of cheap money on the housing market can be expected to be widespread and intricate . . ." ³ Moreover it is important not to consider the influence of each manifestation of cheap money in isolation, but to visualize the probable aggregate effect, including the effects of the easier and cheaper borrowing enjoyed by housebuilders requiring capital finance.

However an important question has still to be posed. Was there time for the effects of these manifestations to work their way through the demand/supply process and still exert an influence on the rising trend in activity? The answer would appear to be positive both for Greater London and England and Wales as a whole. Within England and Wales for example, although activity began to rise directly following the temporary interruption in 1931/2, the first major acceleration in completions did not occur until 1933/4 (April-March). While during the following 12 months the jump in

1. Cleary, op. cit. p.209.

2. Richardson and Aldcroft, op. cit. pp. 200-12.

3. Ibid. p.199.

actual completions was even greater.¹ Within Greater London the dramatic acceleration occurred during 1934 (Jan. - Dec.).² Clearly therefore, even allowing for a lag of 12 months between the conception of housebuilding activity by the builder and the completion of the resultant dwellings, in both cases there was plainly sufficient time for the various influences of 'cheap money' to work their way through the process and contribute to the period of most rapid acceleration in activity and thus also to the size of the peak obtained.³ Indeed it is notable that, after an exceptionally detailed and thorough analysis of the determinants of the 'boom', Stolper felt able to conclude that there can be little doubt that the fall in mortgage rates (let alone the other manifestations of cheap money) "greatly helped to develop . . . the boom, whether one looks for direct evidence or considers the jump [of 41%] made by the estimated cost of dwelling houses approved in the fourth quarter of 1932."⁴

In view of Stolper's conclusions and the various points made above it would appear that argument as to the role and

1. See above p. 724. By describing 1933/4 and 1934/5 in their discussion as 1933 and 1934 respectively, Richardson and Aldcroft tend to give the impression that the dramatic acceleration occurred earlier than in fact was the case.

2. See above p. 726.

3. For building society comments on the effect of reduced mortgage rates on demand for mortgages towards the end of 1932, also the possible influence of press publicity and exaggeration of the falls in the rates, see e.g. BSG, Nov. 1932, p. 770; Dec. 1932, p. 882; Sept. 1932, p. 599.

4. Stolper, op. cit. pp. 48, 55. Under this index the rise in housebuilding costs generally took place from this date, although Maiwald put the turning point in building costs some time during the following 12 months. op. cit. p. 192.

significance of cheap money in the acceleration of house-building activity in these years is not as dead as perhaps Richardson and Aldcroft imply. Moreover there would appear to be scope for further detailed research on, and thought to be given to, this question, even though it may well prove to be impossible to establish in any quantitative way the precise significance of each variable, and the nature of their inter-relationships, at various points in time over these few years. Indeed it is likely to be only after such work has been undertaken that it will become possible for economic historians to be as confident in their interpretation of the role of the various determining factors in the acceleration of activity to, and the size of, the peak as they are now in their analysis of the forces influential in maintaining and sustaining the high level of activity after the peak had been passed. ¹

2. Summary and conclusions.

The central theme of this work has been the activities of the interwar speculative housebuilder within the Greater London OSA. It has not in fact been the intention of the writer to develop any single thesis in this study, but rather to examine and analyse various aspects of the work and characteristics of the speculative housebuilder within this area during these years. Thus in Chapters 2, 3 and 4

1. In particular the central role of cheap money via its effects on the cost of purchase and construction finance, the liberalisation of mortgage lending terms, and the increasing adoption of collateral arrangements.

detailed attention has been given to the results of speculative housebuilding activity, both subsidised and unsubsidised, by means of an analysis of house completion statistics. While in Chapter 4 attention has also been given to the contribution made by the private housebuilder during these years to the provision of working-class housing, particularly working-class housing to let. In Chapters 5 to 10 the emphasis of the work has shifted. Firstly, in Chapters 5 and 6, it has shifted to a consideration of the characteristics of interwar housebuilders, in terms^{of} their background prior to venturing into speculative housebuilding, their spatial and temporal origins, and the structure of the industry within particular outer suburban areas. While secondly, in Chapters 7 to 10, it has turned to an examination and analysis of certain aspects of the operations of interwar speculative housebuilders, which in turn has cast light on certain of the processes involved in residential land development within the CSA between the wars.

It is clear from the general analysis in Chapter 2 that, in spite of the emergence of substantial local authority involvement in housebuilding in most parts of England and Wales between the wars, the private sector continued to dominate the provision of new housing. In England and Wales as a whole private housebuilders were responsible for some 72% of all house completions, while in some areas, for example the Greater London CSA, the sector's domination was almost total (i.e. 93%). It is also clear from house completion statistics that, in terms of actual production, the interwar

industry far outstripped its late nineteenth and early twentieth century performance.

In at least one respect the 1920s were unique in the history of housing policy since subsidies were available to private builders on any dwelling which conformed to certain statutory specifications. The statistical analysis in Chapter 3 reveals the existence of considerable areal variation in the take-up of these subsidies, both over the country as a whole and within more limited areas such as the OSA of Greater London.¹ In general the level of take-up in the South-East, and particularly the outer suburbs, was well below the national average. To some extent the explanation suggested by Prof. Bowley for this variation, that in general the dwellings built within the South-East and OSA were too large to be eligible for such subsidies, may have had some truth, but it fails to explain satisfactorily the irregularities in the level of take-up between small areas.² Moreover the analysis of the more detailed evidence for the OSA reveals too many inconsistencies and irregularities to support conclusively any generalised relationships such as "the better-off districts [tended] to benefit from subsidy more than the poor districts".³

It is suggested in Chapter 3 that the attitudes of individual builders to the idea and practice of subsidy and

1. Subsidised private housebuilding as % of total private housebuilding:

England & Wales	= 31	S.suburbs	= 13	N.suburbs	= 2.
OSA	= 11.6	S.E.suburbs	= 10		
E.suburbs	= 19	W.suburbs	= 11		

2. Bowley (1945), op. cit. p.59.

3. Ibid. p.39.

government interference may well have been an important factor in the irregularity of the spatial incidence of subsidy take-up. On the question of the type of area or family which benefited most from the subsidy arrangements, it is acknowledged that the areal basis of the statistical data is insufficiently sensitive to allow categorical conclusions to be drawn. On the other hand, it is acknowledged that in general the majority of subsidised dwellings were rated at above 0.13 r.v. (£20 r.v. in MPD) which, in the light of the findings in Appendix 4.3, does go some way to support the view that by far the greatest benefit of subsidy provision was going to relatively well-to-do families.

In view of the importance of unsubsidised private housebuilding within the OSA, particularly during the 1930s, space has been given in the first part of Chapter 4 to a descriptive analysis of the trends and fluctuations which took place in such activity within the outer suburban areas from October 1933. It is hoped that this analysis, with the accompanying tables, and perhaps also the first part of the present chapter, has laid a useful foundation for further thought and analysis, perhaps for a relatively small area of the outer suburbs, of the underlying and more profound forces influential on fluctuations in the housing provision of various qualities. On the other hand it is important that the analysis should not simply be seen as a descriptive exercise since the findings are important as a means whereby, for the OSA at least, (1) two hypotheses relating to changes in the qualitative pattern of private housebuilding activity during a

period of declining housebuilding activity may be examined, and in turn (2) the contribution of the private sector to the provision of working-class housing during the middle and later 1930s can be assessed.

The first hypothesis examined suggests that during a period of declining demand, and hence activity, private enterprise would be expected increasingly to turn towards the production of smaller and cheaper houses in an effort to maintain output levels. If this hypothesis was applicable to the OSA between the wars it would be expected to find a more rapid decline in activity in dwellings of intermediate r.v. (i.e. B dwellings) than in dwellings which fell within the lowest r.v. category (i.e. C dwellings). The evidence examined by no means provides strong support for such a hypothesis. Over the OSA as a whole for example the decline in activity in B dwellings was only 4% greater than that in C dwellings, while within three of the five suburban sectors defined for analysis purposes (i.e. over 56% of the OSA) the percentage decline in C dwelling activity was greater than that in B dwellings.

The second hypothesis also finds only very limited support from the evidence analysed. This hypothesis turns on a similar idea and suggests that, during a period of declining demand, activity in C, and particularly B, dwellings sold would decline, accompanied by increased activity in B, and particularly C, dwellings let. Within the OSA as a whole between 1933 and 1939 however not only did the private sector show a greater interest in supplying rented dwellings to the

middle of the market than the bottom end but also it showed less inclination to reduce its interest in B dwellings sold as opposed to C dwellings sold. Within the individual sectors only the situation within the northern suburbs conformed with the hypothesis both in terms of sold and let activity, while that within the western suburbs conformed only in terms of sold activity. Thus over 56% of the OSA the second hypothesis was inapplicable in terms of the market in dwellings sold, while over 84% of the area the interest of the private sector in B dwellings let increased at a more rapid rate than its interest in C dwellings let.

The reliance on unassisted private enterprise for the provision of new housing for 'general needs', and hence for the 'ordinary working-class' market, was a fundamental principle of Conservative housing policy during the 1930s. For many years the most accepted viewpoint has been that during these years private enterprise was unable to provide new housing which the vast majority of working-class families could, or would, afford. More recently however, one writer, J.L.Marshall, has argued for a revision of this consensus view of the role of the private sector as a provider of working-class housing, in particular working-class housing to let.¹ And in turn, implicitly, has suggested that the Conservative belief in the ability of private enterprise to provide new housing for the 'ordinary working-class family' was more justified than it has previously been believed.

Clearly important in any such discussion is an idea of the type of dwelling an 'ordinary working-class household'

1. J.L.Marshall, op. cit. pp.189-191.

could, or would, afford. And, because of the limited nature of the available statistical data, dwellings newly rated below £14 r.v. (£21 r.v. in MPD) have generally been assumed to have been 'ordinary working-class dwellings'. This assumption however has been challenged in Appendix 4.3. in which it is clearly shown that substantial numbers of middle-class families were occupying newly-built C dwellings, while for the majority of working-class families such dwellings were beyond their reach. It is therefore clear that in this context, statistics of C dwelling completions cannot be used without substantial qualification.

In terms of working-class owner-occupation of new dwellings, it is true that as a result of changes in building costs and house purchase finance during the late 1920s and the first half of the 1930s ownership was being extended down the socio-economic scale. However it is unlikely that many working-class households below those better-paid artisans in 'good risk' occupations were able to afford owner-occupation, while even families occupying local authority housing and ranked among the elite of the working-classes apparently experienced difficulty when they attempted the move from council tenancy to owner-occupation.

The more traditional working-class tenure however was renting, and indeed it was mainly in this sphere that Marshall concentrated his arguments for a revision of the traditional wisdom. Unfortunately however it is possible to fault Marshall on a number of points, for example on his use of quotation, his ambiguous use of data, his mistaken view as to

the precise characteristics of C dwellings, and his understanding of the variables which a private investor would have used for his rent calculations during the 1930s. Of course it is undeniable that there was an expansion in the number of newly-rated dwellings which were let, but, although movements in building costs and interest rates may well have had an influence on the attraction of private investment into housing to let during those years, probably of greater importance were the higher rents at which dwellings could be let. This fact clearly undermines any suggestion that the quantitative increases in private rented stock noted could have had a significant positive impact on the working-class housing problem, particularly in view of the evidence that, proportionately at least, the increases in real income experienced by fully-employed working-class households were almost certainly below the difference in rent between a new uncontrolled and an older rented dwelling. It must therefore be clear from what has been written that the author believes Marshall to be mistaken in his analysis and conclusions, since on the basis of the evidence examined it is almost certain that the majority of the working-classes were unable, or unwilling, to afford the economic rent for even the most economically-built and cheaply-financed house built during the mid or later 1930s. Moreover within the CSA not only was the private sector unable to provide housing to let within the reach of the 'ordinary working-classes', but also over substantial areas of the suburbs the industry appears not to have been interested in making any attempt at

such a provision.

In Chapters 2-4 it has been possible to consider, in the context of the OSA experience, a number of questions relating to interwar speculative housebuilding in general terms. However, apart from one or two major firms, little is known about the housebuilding industry which was, or the speculative housebuilders themselves who were, responsible for this building activity. Who were these speculative housebuilders? What were their origins? What sort of people and/or firms made up the interwar industry? What was the relative contribution of the different sizes of firm to the residential development of the interwar OSA, or at least particular parts of it? In Chapter 6 an attempt has been made to examine the origins of interwar housebuilders. The problems connected with obtaining a representative sample have unfortunately meant that in many respects the analysis can only be impressionistic, however it is still possible to draw a number of broad conclusions.

It is apparent for example that the industry was a predominantly local one: the vast majority of firms originating from within the OSA itself, or adjacent areas, while a substantial number of firms, particularly the smaller and medium-sized firms, were extremely locally-orientated in their activities. On the other hand during these years there also occurred a significant migration of housebuilders from the provinces into the London area, while a number of examples of City and centrally-based London firms were also interested

in suburban housebuilding. Broadly speaking the central London firms fell into three groups: those which constructed dwellings, frequently flats, for their own investment; those previously suburban-based housebuilders which moved their main offices into the centre; and those centrally-based building and/or property firms which organised speculative developments in the suburbs, either as developer or financier. Overall the impact of such firms was not particularly great, although within particular areas they were unimportant. Of probably greater significance were the provincial firms. Between the wars firms probably migrated to the OSA from most parts of the country. For example, builders from Scotland, Wales, the Midlands, and Yorkshire (particularly south Yorkshire) are known to have been active within the OSA, while of course many from the South-East itself will have made the move. Among the most important areas in this respect appears however to have been the North-West of England. Apart from such firms as Laing, Costain, and Taylor Woodrow, this area produced a relatively large number of firms which made the move south. There is unfortunately a lack of evidence on the reasons why particular firms made the move, although no doubt the lure of the prosperity and the potential opportunities and profit associated with the rapidly expanding London suburbs was important in many cases. Moreover in a number of cases the direct impetus to move was probably the result of the entrepreneurial actions of estate agents and land developers, which in turn had certain snowball effects as the news passed around the local housebuilding fraternity.

On the basis of the sample examined, over half of firms active within the OSA during the 1930s were probably founded some time during the 1920s, while approximately a third had been active before the First World War. Naturally on this particular question the unrepresentativeness of the sample is likely to be a problem, and in particular may possibly result in an underestimation of the number of firms founded during the 1930s. With more certainty however it can be said that the vast majority of firms had been founded with speculative housebuilding as their specific intention. Also it can be said that the vast majority had had some sort of building or land development background before entering the industry, a substantial proportion stemming from a direct craft base. Other backgrounds from which housebuilders came included, for example, building contracting, civil engineering, speculative factory development, builders merchants, professional and non-professional design work, estate agency and land development work, apart from various occupations unrelated to development of any form.

In general it is probably true to say that firms with a direct craft base remained relatively small and rarely grew above small-medium in size. The most common structure of such firms appears to have been a partnership between two craftsmen, frequently from the same trade, one of which took charge of the building work and the other the financial aspects of the business. Although there were important exceptions, the importance of the woodworking trades in this context was particularly noticeable. In contrast to the trade

based firms, those housebuilders with a civil engineering and/or contracting background were most frequently found among the larger operators, while the size of those which had previous experience in estate agency and/or land development work varied to a much greater extent. It was rare, on the other hand, for a firm with no previous experience in the industry to have grown^{to} any significant size.

Prior to this work almost nothing was known about the structure of the interwar housebuilding industry at any level of spatial disaggregation. This was primarily the result of the paucity, if not total absence, of relevant data. Indeed it must be accepted that the local data used in Chapter 5 is not without its limitations, however it does represent a considerable advance on the data base adopted during earlier work. In Chapter 5 the industry within two outer suburban local authority areas was examined and the data used has allowed a number of conclusions to be suggested. For example it is noticeable that neither area revealed an increase in the number of small firms relative to firms of other sizes during a period of increasing activity. This, for example, is interesting in view of the findings of the 1935 Census of Production concerning the growth in the importance of small firms in new construction activity during this period, and the conclusion that such firms probably shared significantly in the increase in new housebuilding activity. The apparent discrepancy between these two findings may perhaps be explained by the possibility that although small firms probably shared in the increased activity in new housebuilding it was not so much as speculative housebuilders

but as sub-contractors on speculative sites. The absence of small firms from the ranks of the housebuilders may also be partially explained in terms of a 'moving up' process within the industry with small firms emerging to fill the gap left by medium-sized general builders who forsook, albeit perhaps temporarily, jobbing work for the potential returns of the housebuilding sector.

The evidence from neither area supported the idea that it was the flexibility of small firms which allowed the industry within particular areas to respond flexibly to variations in demand. Rather it was the larger firms which were important in this respect. Another idea widely held among housebuilders and commentators was that in general the medium-sized firm represented the 'core' of the industry. Within the two areas studied however this was found to have been untrue over the short term during a period of expanding output, although when considered over a longer term it could be argued that they represented what may be described as a more lasting 'core' within this sector.

The trend towards the growing significance of larger firms, and the consequent erosion of the importance of the small and particularly the small-medium concerns, was first apparent during the later nineteenth century but during the interwar period was not only maintained but significantly advanced. Indeed the growth in the size of the larger firms active in the industry was particularly marked between the wars, while many more firms building between 60 and 600 dwellings a year were evident in the industry during the

1930s than ever before. Among the larger builders the 'large locality' and the 'regional' firms were of greatest significance. The former type of firm in fact had developed, albeit on a smaller scale prior to 1914, but for various reasons has failed to survive into the post-1945 period. The more 'regionally' involved firms emerged for the first time between the wars and, although within the two areas studied ^{were} not as important as the large locality biased housebuilders, after the Second World War ^{they} were to become an increasingly common feature of the industry. There can be little doubt that in many ways the interwar period represented just one time-phase in the development of the present-day structure of the housebuilding industry.

At the heart of the speculative housebuilding process has always lain the development of land. The examination of housebuilder characteristics undertaken in Chapters 5 and 6 has therefore first been followed, in Chapter 7, by an examination of the land development process found within the OSA between the wars, with particular attention being paid to the characters involved in this process and to the role and involvement of the speculative housebuilder. The remainder of the study has then been devoted to those aspects of the activities of the speculative housebuilder which involved land and its acquisition for housebuilding purposes.

During the nineteenth century the speculative land developer played an extremely important role in the residential development process within London. As the interwar period wore on however it would appear that increasingly, within the OSA at

least, the initiative was being taken away from commercial land developers by speculative housebuilders. In Appendix 7.4. there can be found a discussion of some of the reasons for the movement away from the leasehold-based development process characteristic of nineteenth century residential development to the freehold-based process found between the wars. And, among other things, emerging from this discussion has been the suggestion of a number of explanations of the origins of the shift in initiative away from speculative land developers. For example, as a consequence of legal changes freehold land became more easily, cheaply, and quickly available; changing economic and social conditions, in particular in relation to land-ownership, made landowners less interested in retaining land; increasingly there became less need for financial intermediaries in the residential development process with, on the one hand, the interwar development of the building society movement and, on the other, the increased interest of the joint-stock banks in financing the activities of speculative housebuilders; while fourthly, among other things, the favourable conditions for housebuilding activity facilitated the growth in the size, and the number, of larger firms active in the industry for which the purchase and development of relatively large sites was perfectly feasible. Moreover it is clear that in many ways the changes mentioned and their manifestations were very much interrelated.

On the other hand, although land developers were becoming of decreasing importance in the residential development process between the wars, they were by no means entirely

eclipsed during these years and were of some significance to the interwar development of certain localities. In general terms, speculative land developers between the wars most commonly took one of two forms, that is either (1) they restricted themselves purely to a land development function and undertook no house construction activity of any form, or (2) they also undertook, or at least organised, the construction of housing on all, or part, of the site which they had prepared. The evidence examined seems to indicate that land and estate agents were among the most active in this type of activity, sometimes acting purely for others but more frequently with a direct financial involvement in the enterprise. In general, as in the nineteenth century, it was rare to find landlords directly involved, although in the north-western suburbs the Spencer-Churchill estate was an important exception. Other actors included private individuals working on their own initiative and with their own capital, and speculative housebuilders themselves. For most housebuilders this form of activity represented an incidental and very minor part of their activities, but for some, like perhaps H.B.Silver and R.Lancaster, it was almost certainly of far greater importance even though it normally required the involvement of third parties to provide financial support. Where speculative land developers also undertook house construction on their sites, this was normally carried out by means of labour only or labour and materials contract with one or more builders, or the formation of a subsidiary building company with which again contracts would be made. It

is probable that the difference in practice stemmed from varying evaluations of the costs, work and risks involved in the alternative approaches.

Although there is evidence of 'fieldranging' activities by speculative housebuilders prior to 1914, it is clear that between the wars this process evolved as the dominant process by which land was developed for residential purposes. Moreover clearly the more dominant that this form of activity was, the greater the probable impact the speculative housebuilder as an individual was likely to have had on the pattern of suburban development. However, how important was the speculative housebuilder in this respect between the wars? Unfortunately the paucity of evidence and the scale at which the analysis has been undertaken in this work makes firm conclusions difficult. There can be little doubt that in some cases the speculative housebuilder as a consequence of his individual initiative and actions was probably of considerable influence on the form and status of the evolving suburbs. However, the existence of other probably influential variables must be stressed, for example land ownership patterns, the timing and the reasons for the timing of land release by landowners, the size of area released and its acceptability to the industry, the form and character of pre-existing development in the locality. It may well be that such factors were of greater importance in this respect than the actions of individuals or groups of speculative housebuilders. One thing at least is clear however, and that is the need for more detailed studies of much more localised

areas which focus on, among other things, the sort of ideas and questions raised in this chapter and the work as a whole.

In Chapter 8 the work moved on to consider the availability of land for residential development in the inter-war suburbs, to consider some of the forces instrumental in making land available, and to examine the effects of the changing land availability situation on the speculative house-builder and his activities. Broadly speaking the most that can be said about the forces making land available for development and the timing of land sales is that they were very largely haphazard. Very often the factors were extremely local in character, and indeed not unusually were associated with the individual attitudes and circumstances of the landowners concerned. In general land prices were depressed between the wars. Changes in the economics of landownership, among other things, resulted in land price levels during the 1920s of approximately half the 1907 levels, except in the established areas (e.g. Hendon, Golders Green). While the low densities encouraged by town planning legislation helped to keep values low. Indeed only towards the end of the period did land prices recover to their 1907 levels.

However, to what extent did this, albeit slow, rise in values reflect an increasing scarcity of suitable building sites towards the later 1930s? And to what extent, if this change in availability took place, did this require speculative housebuilders to adjust their business strategies

to the changing circumstances, for example in terms of the location, the size, and/or the number of the sites which they had under development? It is probable that later in the 1930s, although there still remained a considerable area of land available for development in the OSA, the land tended to be less well located, of a less ideal size, and/or harder to develop than much of that which had been available earlier in the period. As the period wore on a centrifugal movement was noticeable in the activities of many housebuilders, particularly where they were interested in developing sites of any size. Moreover a number of the larger firms were found moving part of their housebuilding activities away from Greater London and/or, to a lesser extent, into more central areas. While there was a move by some towards a diversification of their activities into contracting work. Obviously the centrifugal tendency noted was associated with the increasing shortage of attractive sites in the more inner areas of the outer suburbs as they became more and more built up. However to what extent were the moves away from, and into, London, the result of housebuilder reaction to an increasing shortage of, and the increasing difficulties of getting, suitable sites within the CSA?

On the basis of the evidence examined it appears unlikely that increasing land scarcity was the critical factor influencing the initiation of such policies. It is probable that it was much more to do with the ambition of the housebuilders and the expansion and/or diversification of their business. The relative scarcity of housing land, at least in

terms of the activities of the medium-sized and larger builders, was more probably reflected in the size of the new sites which were purchased. Although also it should be quickly added that, in view of the willingness of many of the larger firms throughout the period to develop smaller sites if they were considered potentially profitable, the significance of a changing land availability situation may not be as significant as it might at first appear. Moreover it is not true that because of the land situation such firms were forced to accept estates as small as 40 to 50 dwellings, or forced to amalgamate a number of adjacent sites in order to construct satisfactorily located estates of an economically viable size. Thus in general even at the end of the 1930s it is probably true to say that there was still a sufficient number of large enough and well enough located sites available within the OSA to provide satisfactory estates even for the larger housebuilding firms.

Lastly to what extent did the tendency of the larger firms to increase the number of their estates under concurrent development reflect increasing land scarcity? Naturally this is a possibility, however it would appear likely that the tendency towards an increased number of concurrent estates combined with a smaller size of estate noticeable in the development policies of larger firms can more accurately be explained in terms of actual, perceived, and/or anticipated changes in demand. This view is supported to some extent by the fact that the trend towards an increased number of concurrent sites was apparent before any signs of any squeeze

in the availability of housebuilding land. In view of this a tentative hypothesis is suggested which explains the continuing trend among larger firms to increase the number of their concurrent sites in terms of the anticipation and/or reaction of housebuilders to two different types of demand situation. That is, housebuilders tended to increase the number of their sites, or 'shop fronts', when demand was expanding in order to exploit more fully the advantageous trading conditions, and then tended further to increase the number of their 'shop fronts', albeit smaller in size, in anticipation of, or response to, a contraction in demand in order best to maintain their output levels. This latter phase was also probably to some extent reinforced and further encouraged by changes in the land availability situation.

The approach of most firms to land search between the wars was largely passive, although approximately half of the sample, albeit statistically unrepresentative, did adopt both active and passive measures at one time or other. The most important actor in the communication of information on land availability to builders during these years appears to have been the estate agent and surveyor, with both solicitors and bank managers also being active in this sphere. The interwar outer suburban land market was comprised of a large number of highly local markets each with their individual characteristics. Local knowledge was therefore crucial when dealing in land. The small- and medium-sized firms normally developed a network of contacts (some personal or social, others through agents,

solicitors etc.) within their area of operation. However the wider the area of operation, the wider the information network required, and hence the greater the problem of obtaining local knowledge. Broadly speaking, there were two ways in which a firm could tackle this problem. It could either internalise the function of the purchase of information by adapting its internal structure and instituting an active land exploration policy, or purchase information from outside actors, such as estate agents. Between the wars very few firms favoured the former process, largely, it appears, for reasons of cost and convenience. There appears to have been a strong desire to keep fixed costs to a minimum, and indeed some builders apparently were prepared to pay commission to outside agencies when land had been acquired, even if it had not been directly earned, in order to purchase goodwill and hopefully future service. It is clear that estate agents were emerging as an increasingly significant factor in land search and acquisition processes between the wars, even though only rarely, prior to 1939, were they able to insist on the sole selling rights of the dwellings built on any site they had found for a builder.

The second half of Chapter 9 has considered that part of the process which, having found a site, led up to the decision as to whether or not the housebuilder was willing to make a definite speculative commitment to a particular site and/or locality. This involved some form of study or investigation of the site discovered, although the thoroughness of such investigations varied from relatively thorough

appraisals of the site and its potential right down to very subjective personal evaluations combined with 'back-of-the-envelope' type calculations and mental estimations. Indeed a lack of attention to, and precision in, such calculations appears to have been common, particularly among small and medium-sized builders, and even among some of the larger concerns. Moreover, although to a greater or lesser extent some large builders instituted relatively rigorous appraisal procedures, in the last analysis it appears that the final decision was often based as much on the instinct or intuition of the housebuilder or directors as on any detailed workings.

As to the importance of a thorough study to the success or failure of a speculative development, clearly it could be crucial (and undoubtedly in some cases it was), whether the inadequacy of a study led to the misjudgment of the physical problems of development, the site location, or the type of housing the site could commercially take. On the other hand, for a number of reasons, interwar housebuilders were probably able to get away with poor and imprecise studies in many instances. For example, firstly the relatively low cost of land meant that throughout the period the importance of land as a component of the development costs was in general small. Secondly, the relative abundance of available land allowed housebuilders to be more selective in their land purchase activities and hence to buy only the relatively easily developable sites. Also, because of the relative abundance of land, there was, thirdly, less need for the smaller and medium-sized firms to look outside a relatively limited area

for suitable sites which meant that for them complicated calculations were less necessary since instinct and their own local knowledge was likely to have been sufficient to avoid serious misjudgments. While fourthly there was a general buoyancy in demand for housing for most of the period from the mid-1920s. Together these factors probably did much to shelter the industry from the adverse manifestations of poor land purchase decisions based on inadequate or non-existent land study. Also their existence meant that in all probability during these years a less than rigorous study in most cases could be almost as reliable, and almost as frequently result in a profitable decision, as a rigorous and detailed study.

Broadly speaking there were three forms in which land was purchased by interwar speculative housebuilders, that is, either as a virgin, green-field site, as a site developed with roads and basic services, or as a site part virgin and part developed (normally where the site fronted a pre-existing road). While there were two basic approaches adopted in the sale and purchase of land, that is by deferred, or credit, payment, and by outright payment.

In Chapter 10 it has been seen that during the 1920s developed land was apparently normally purchased by means of the initial placement of a deposit followed by the payment of the balance of the cost over a stated time period. This arrangement was particularly advantageous to the smaller builders who had only limited capital resources since it allowed much greater activity to take place than otherwise

would have been possible. It also of course had advantages for the land developer since it enabled him to dispose of his land more quickly, to charge higher prices, and to use his 'sales' as security for borrowing with which to finance further enterprises. Land developers were of course able to offset part of the costs of this sale approach by charging the purchasers interest on the outstanding balance. During the 1930s it would appear that the approach most generally used changed to some extent, in that the payment of the whole of the outstanding balance on each plot was deferred until after the completion of the dwelling, and sometimes after the actual sale. This later variant of deferred purchase clearly involved the vendor in much greater risk, although normally any contract will have included a security clause and also provided for the payment of interest on any sum outstanding after a certain period of time. It should be added that this variant also had disadvantages for the unsuspecting or less able builder since, by making it easier for the builder to take on commitments, it opened up the possibility of unfair practice by unscrupulous developers.

Purchase by outright payment was normally the practice adopted where the transaction involved virgin land. In such cases it was normal for the full payment to have been completed well within twelve months. In some cases an interest charge was levied over the whole payment period, although normally there was a limited interest-free period. The finance of an outright purchase agreement invariably involved the housebuilder in an early financial burden of

some size. A common method of financing this form of purchase arrangement appears to have been by means of a 'reverse purchase' arrangement which necessitated an initial capital reserve which was ploughed into land purchase. The financing of the residential development of the land was then obtained by borrowing primarily on the basis of the ownership of land and its development prospects. In such financial arrangements during this period the importance of the joint-stock banks should not be under-estimated, while solicitors, building societies, insurance companies, and private individuals were also active in the supply of finance for speculative housebuilding.

In the second part of Chapter 10 four important aspects of the land purchase policies pursued by speculative housebuilders have been considered: firstly the use of option agreements, secondly amalgamation and annexation, thirdly the reduction of the risks involved when moving into new localities, and lastly the development of land stocks.

An option agreement involved no obligation on the part of the purchaser but normally stipulated a time limit within which the option had to be taken up. The short-term option was rare prior to 1950 and between the wars agreements tended to be between one and three years, normally depending on the size of the site involved. Apart from the uptake period there appears to have been little variation in practice between the size of the site and/or housebuilder involved. Most normally option agreements were made with respect to a 'second take', or remainder, of the area being

sold, the 'first take' having been purchased by the house-builder outright. However examples of option agreements relating to up to fourteen takes have been found. From the vendors' point of view the arrangement had the advantages of convenience and the simplification of the sale of his land since he would hopefully deal with only one purchaser. While for the purchaser it represented a real form of financial assistance in that it enabled the spread of the capital burden of the purchase of the whole site; it also allowed the purchaser to judge better the risks involved in developing the site, of particular importance when it had involved moving into an untried locality.

On the basis of the evidence examined the amalgamation of sites by speculative housebuilders before the commencement of the development was probably rare prior to 1939. Much more common where a speculative housebuilder wished to accumulate a larger site, or alternatively a site with a better aspect, was the practice of extension or annexation. In general it would appear that the annexation of only one adjacent piece of land was the usual practice, although examples have been found of firms which annexed two or more areas to the initial site purchased. The reason why extension was so much more common than amalgamation probably derives from the combined effects of two features of the interwar land and housebuilding situation. That is because, on the one hand, the size of sites available appear rarely to have been so small and/or scarce to create a situation where there was an absence of suitable and sufficiently well-

located sites, even for the larger firms; and because, on the other hand, most housebuilders appear to have been relatively flexible downwards in terms of the size of site they were willing to develop, and hence were frequently willing to commence work on a small but potentially profitable site, and then look for the means of enlarging the estate if this was advantageous. Clearly the advantages of extension lay in the limitation and better judgment of risk that it facilitated, since it allowed the builder to 'try-out' a site and location before taking on any further commitment and also, where extension took place, allowed the spreading of the capital cost of land purchase.

The practice of 'trying-out' a site and location with a relatively small development before undertaking any further commitment appears often to have been an unconscious policy. Some housebuilders on the other hand do appear to have applied it in a more conscious manner particularly when moving into an untried area or where there was some feeling of uncertainty about the potential of the site and/or locality. Another approach to the minimization of risk was the practice of developing satellite estates near to a pre-existing and successful site. Apart from the fact that the locality had already been tested out, the advantages of such sites were several. For example, there were certain economies of operation with respect to site supervision and administration. There were also advantages to be gained in the organisation of house sales in terms of both the use of resources and the ability to 'pass on' prospective

purchasers. Indeed, both in constructional and sales terms, satellite estates facilitated the efficient run-down of the parent estate, with the parent and satellite estates often reversing roles. Clearly success in the initial development was an important factor in a builder's desire and eventual decision to extend his activities locally, and such factors as the absence of available adjacent sites or the idea that the first site was too large to extend was likely to have led builders to consider nearby sites. Naturally the decision to look for nearby sites was likely also to have been reinforced by the fact that builders were likely to have been more aware of land availability within the immediate locality of their current development than within areas in which they had not built. Also they were likely to have been more confident of their judgment as to its potential profitability.

The fourth and last aspect of land purchase policy which has been considered in this work is the accumulation and maintenance of land stocks. Between the wars such action tended to be undertaken as a conscious policy only by the larger firms. For most firms, the financial burden involved in tying-up capital in a non-productive resource, even over a relatively short period of time, appears to have presented fundamental difficulties, although most will almost certainly have possessed some level of stock in the form of land 'in hand'. It is probable in fact that the major part of the land stocks of all firms took this form since not only did the larger builders normally develop a number of sites con-

currently but also some of the sites took perhaps three to five or more years to complete. While for those firms for which land 'in hand' did not represent their total stock, the other element in any land bank took the form of sites awaiting development. It was investment in such sites which in particular was generally beyond the means of all but the larger firms.

The size of the land stocks of companies which appear to have made a conscious effort to develop land banks undoubtedly varied, although by the end of the 1930s most larger firms appear to have owned sufficient land to maintain their current output levels for at least two years ahead. At the other end of the scale, it is doubtful whether any firm's advance provision in this particular resource exceeded four to five years at their current output level. In general it would appear that the most important advantages of land stocks to housebuilders' operations lay in the continuity of building work and maintenance of activity levels which they could ensure (within the constraints of the housebuilders' perceptions of future market conditions, that is), and, particularly, in the locational aspects of future developments, a factor naturally related to the desire to maintain future production levels. Against such advantages of course had to be laid the costs which such stocks involved, both the purchase costs and holding costs. Such cost burdens could be substantial even where builders chose, and were able, to defer part of the initial cost impact by undertaking short-term borrowing on the basis of the land and in this way reduce the

cost to an annual holding charge. Or where such cost burdens could be to some extent offset as a result of any rise in land values, any rents from any short-term lease arrangements, and/or the use of option arrangements. In general however it would appear that the larger firms considered the advantages of holding land stocks worth the cost. It appears to have been widely accepted by such firms at least that wise advance land purchase policies played a significant role in securing the future success and good fortune of their enterprise, since without it future development sites were likely to be poorer in terms of both their development quality with its accompanying cost implications, and their sales potential.

3. Some possible directions for future research.

The exploratory nature of much of the present study was noted in the introduction to the work. Moreover it was stressed that such a work cannot hope, and is not intended, to provide all the answers to the many questions raised. Almost certainly some questions have been left unanswered, while many questions still remain to be raised. There is, therefore, much more work which remains to be undertaken in both this, and related, areas of study.

Firstly, for example, there is obviously considerable scope for a continuation of the analysis of the various aspects of the business operations and internal organisation of the interwar speculative housebuilder started in this work. As was noted in Chapter 1, it has not been possible to include in the present work an investigation and analysis of a number of the functions undertaken by speculative house-

builders between the wars, for example, the finance of land preparation and house construction; the organisation of estate layout and house design; the organisation of labour; the organisation and phasing of construction, including attitudes to innovation; the organisation and promotion of house sales, including the organisation of purchaser finance, advertising and, where desired, a sales force; and relationships with public authorities. It is true that a number of these functions have been touched on recently by Jackson,¹ however the absence of analytical depth means that there remains considerable scope for future historians interested in this subject.

A second approach to the examination of the activities of the interwar speculative housebuilder is through business history. Without doubt the detailed study of individual firms, in the context of the changing market conditions and opportunities which existed in this sector between the wars, remains an extremely important future avenue for research. For the moment however the absence of a single analytical business history remains a conspicuous gap. By means of analyses of the organisation and development of individual firms, it would be possible to examine in greater detail, and hence obtain a greater understanding of, not only the processes involved in residential development, but also the actions, the attitudes, and the responses of speculative housebuilders to both general and local market conditions. It is hoped that the present work will contribute substantially towards the background essential to any investigation which adopts a business history orientation to the study of the

1. Op. cit. pp. 99-156, 186-290 passim.

dynamics of speculative housebuilding operations.

In Chapters 2, 3 and 4 extensive use was made of the Ministry of Health records of house completions held by the Housing Statistics Division of the Department of the Environment in London. The form, uses, and limitations of these records have been considered in the various appendices to these chapters. It seems to the author that there is considerable scope for the further analysis of these records whether it is for local studies, for country-wide analyses, and/or for analyses to facilitate comparison between two or more local areas. It is also hoped that further use will be made of data processed from this source and presented in the present work, and also of its analysis.

Another potentially promising source of data tapped during this study are the building inspection records of local authority Building Surveyor's Departments. The availability of such registers will very much depend on the interwar policy and record-keeping of individual Chief Building Surveyors, as will the detail recorded on any registers maintained. Both the analysis in Chapter 5 and work by Prof. Dyos¹ has shown the value of such registers and their ability to reveal, albeit with certain limitations, the structural organisation and historical development of the residential construction industry within those particular areas. Thus, given the availability of the primary data, it is clear that an interesting and valuable exercise would be the interrogation and analysis of the records of groups of adjacent local authorities in a similar manner to that found

1. Dyos (1961), op. cit. pp. 124-6; Dyos (1968), op. cit. pp. 654, 659-60.

in the second part of Chapter 5. Such an approach would do much to reduce the limitations associated with the analyses undertaken in the present work, and would hopefully result in a far more comprehensive picture of the structure of the outer suburban housebuilding industry during the 1930s being obtained.

Registers of Building Notices, or Completions, also have uses other than that to which they were put in this present work. For the local historian studying the urban development of particular localities, for example, they can provide not only evidence which will allow him to trace in detail the timing of the residential development of those localities during the years covered by the registers, but also the names of the speculative housebuilders responsible for that development. While for the historian of building fluctuations as well as the local historian, the interrogation of such registers can provide the means by which a detailed picture of local fluctuations in housebuilding starts (where available), and completions, may be built-up. This picture would then provide a starting-point from which an analysis of the causes of housebuilding fluctuations at the lowest spatial level may be obtained.

The factors influential in determining housebuilding activity between the wars have been considered in the first part of the present chapter. It is clear from this section that there is much more work required in quantitative terms and at various spatial levels of analysis before any firm and more precise statements may be made as to either the

relative importance of the various possible variables or the nature of the interrelationships between the variables at different points in time. In such work, sources like local authority building notice or completion registers, and also, for the later 1930s, the Ministry of Health completion statistics have an important place.

In Chapter 7 the world of speculative residential development in interwar Greater London was shown to have been a theatre for a number of different actors, each with particular, although by no means set, roles. At times in fact the activities of some individuals spanned a number of the aspects of the residential development process. The conspicuous absence of any detailed study of the interwar activities, structure, and development of an individual speculative housebuilding firm has already been noted. And there can be little doubt that a similar approach to the study of other characters involved in residential development activity would also be of substantial value. For example, among the most interesting of those active in this sphere was the estate agent and surveyor. It was clear from the evidence considered that the role of certain estate agents in the residential development process was manifold, and without a doubt a detailed study of the activities of such individuals would do much to increase our present understanding of speculative housebuilding and residential development within the OSA during this period.

True as this is it is only fair to point out the probable difficulties with which a researcher in this sphere

would have to contend. The absence of primary business records of the activities of speculative housebuilding firms has already been noted in the introduction to this work. The same fundamental problem exists in relation to any analysis of the activities of particular estate agents and surveyors, and any records of direct involvement in relatively recent speculative land development and housebuilding activity on the part of estate agents and surveyors, such as P.H. Edwards, would no doubt be particularly difficult to obtain.¹

Unfortunately it is not possible to note within this short concluding section all the possible future areas of study which emerge from the various parts of the present work. For example, the interwar development of the building society system and its inter-relationship with the high level of speculative housebuilding for owner-occupation during these years;² the role of the landowner in suburban development; and the relative importance of the various factors influential in the supplanting of leasehold by freehold as the predominant tenure basis of speculative residential development are all topics which require considerable thought and

1. Although a limited number of deposits of estate agent business records have been made, it is notable that they relate primarily to rural activities, and to the activities of firms which operated purely in a professional capacity with apparently no direct involvement in speculative development ventures. Moreover it is particularly notable that in two large deposits reviewed in 1967 'there appears to be nothing of a really confidential nature.' See B.S. Smith, 'The Business Archives of Estate Agents', Journal of the Society of Archivists, 111 (1967), 298-300.

2. See e.g. Asa Briggs, 'When you could buy a house for £25 down', The Observer (Colour Supplement), 29 July 1973, p.25.

research. Moreover, in the context of local urban history studies, there is undoubtedly much to be gained from an approach which includes an examination in some depth of the activities, methods, motivations, and attitudes of speculative housebuilders and other characters interested in residential development. Not least from such an approach it is hoped that the inter-relationships which existed between these businessmen and the process of suburban development may be more fully understood.

Appendix A. Oral history: its limitations, its uses, and its value.¹

Throughout the present work evidence has been used which has been derived from interviews which have taken place between the author and persons concerned with interwar suburban housebuilding and residential development within the Greater London area. The use of evidence derived from these interviews requires some explanation. This appendix explains why such an approach to the collection of data was adopted. It also includes an evaluation of oral history as historical evidence and hence a consideration of its usefulness in historical writing.

The technique of oral history originated from the work of Professor Allan Nevins during the late 1940s, and was developed by him at Columbia University, New York. Over the past twenty or so years its popularity among American

1. i. For a statement of the approach used in the collection of the oral evidence, see below Appendix B.

ii. A useful bibliography of American work in this field has been compiled by D.J. Shippers and A.C. Tusler, A Bibliography of Oral History (Los Angeles, 1968). For American comment on the uses and abuses of oral techniques in historical research, see Saul Benison, 'Reflections on Oral History', American Archivist, XXVIII (1965), 71-7; Donald C. Swain, 'Problems for Practitioners of Oral History', American Archivist, 63-9; 'Is Oral History Really Worthwhile?' in Clifford L. Lord, ed. Ideas in Conflict: A Colloquium on Certain Problems in Historical Society Work in the United States and Canada (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, 1958), pp. 17-57. published by the American Association for State and Local History; Saul Benison, 'Oral History and Manuscript Collecting', Isis, LIII (1962), 113-7; William W. Cutler, 'Accuracy in Oral History Interviewing', Historical Methods Newsletter, III (1970), 1-7.

historians has spread and many university oral history research offices, organised more or less along the same lines as the office at Columbia, have now been established. However to date the oral technique has been used primarily in the writing of political and institutional histories¹ although some attention to social history has also been apparent. To the author's knowledge little attention has as yet been directed to the possible value of oral history in the sphere of the development, organisation, and fortunes of individual businesses and/or industries.²

The very proper caution of British historians has meant that in this country the acceptance and adoption of oral history as a research tool has been much slower, and a far more isolated occurrence. However, increasingly its value and limitations are becoming appreciated and accepted, although as yet, its use has been restricted mainly to the

1. Prof. Nevins' conviction was that the individual played an important role in history and therefore that an individual's autobiography might in future serve as a key to an understanding of contemporary historical movements. This led to the gathering of the memoirs of Americans who were significant in political, economic, and cultural affairs. Denison (1965), op. cit. p.71.

2. It must be added that this is not because the oral approach is inappropriate to such studies, as Prof. Nevins' own studies of the early development of the Ford Motor Company clearly show (A. Nevins, Ford. The Times, The Man, The Company (N.Y. 1954); A. Nevins and F. E. Hill, Ford, Expansion and Challenge, 1915-1933 (N.Y. 1957)). Elsewhere in entrepreneurial research it has been used with advantage, e.g. C. C. McLaughlin, 'The Stanley Steamer', Explorations in Entrepreneurial History, VII (1954), 37-47.

sphere of local and rural social history.¹ In the study of the private housebuilding industry and interwar suburban development, it has been possible to find only two examples of work in which an oral approach has been used. First, R.C.W.Cox in the last section of his local history study of urban development in Croydon, Surrey, concentrated his attention on a single interwar speculative estate in Shirley, Croydon, on which a number of builders were active at various times.² Dr Cox interviewed some seven individuals in an attempt as he put it to bring together a substantial body of knowledge about the way builders thought, planned and executed their work.³ However, not all the interviewees were builders. Unfortunately death and migration had removed from the district a number of the builders who had built on this particular estate, and in consequence on several occasions it was necessary for Dr Cox to approach their relatives to help him in his research. In spite of this he did successfully manage to build up an

1. E.g. Dr Paul Thompson of Essex University has been investigating life in the first decade of the 20th century by means of interviewing old people about their childhood days (see 'Memory and History', J.S.R.C. Newsletter, 6 June 1969, pp. 16-8). George Ewart Evans has extensively exploited the technique in his various books on East Anglian life, traditions, and society over the past two or three centuries (e.g. Ask the fellows who cut the Hay (1956); The Horse in the Furrow (1960); The Pattern under the Flough: aspects of the folk life of East Anglia (1960); Where beards wag all (1970). In Scandinavia the technique has also been used in research in social history, see Edvard Bull, 'Autobiographies of Industrial Workers', International Review of Social History, 1 (1956), 203-9.

2. Cox (1970), op. cit. pp. 372-94.

3. Ibid., p.7.

interesting and vivid, if rather limited, picture of the housebuilding operations of the rather motley group of individuals active on the Ham Farm Estate, Shirley, Croydon. The other example can be found in an evaluation of interwar residential suburban expansion in London by Dr J.H. Johnson.¹ Johnson spoke with two people concerned with private housebuilding during those years, and on the basis of the oral evidence derived from these conversations he proceeded to generalise in a rather broad and unsatisfactory way.² If therefore oral evidence has a role to play in historical research into the activities of the housebuilding industry - a potential plainly indicated in the work of Dr Cox - then clearly there exists great scope for the use of oral history techniques.

The experience of the author has in fact shown that such an approach is essential if historians are going to begin to discover and to understand the interwar speculative housebuilder: his practices, his actions, and perhaps even his attitudes. Any person who has attempted to carry out historical research of any description knows that it is not possible to write history without documents, and that documentation is only important or useful in so far as it can provide answers to the questions asked of it by the historian. For two major and related reasons therefore the author considered it essential to adopt the techniques of the oral

1. Johnson, op. cit. pp. 142-66.

2. Ibid. pp. 157-9.

historian. Firstly, not only was there found to be a conspicuous lack of published or written evidence on the interwar speculative housebuilder, but also secondly, the evidence which was uncovered left many important questions unanswered and would make it necessary to leave many avenues of approach unexamined. This situation led the author to approach over 200 housebuilding firms which were active in London within the interwar years. The dual intention of this action was to discover whether any of these firms had kept any records of their pre-1939 housebuilding activities, and also to interview individuals who had been active in the industry between the wars: the interview being carried out on the basis of a prepared questionnaire. With the exception of two occasions, the overtures to these firms produced no written documents or records of the sort that historical training and teaching have taught students to rely on. They merely produced replies of regret, and descriptions of the destruction or loss of records. It requires only one or two examples to illustrate the substance of these replies. For example, "the enormous volume of records are not kept for much more than six to eight years, and we have had many turnouts . . ." ¹ Also the statement in a letter from Sir Godfrey W. Mitchell of George Wimpey & Co. Ltd. which noted that "all papers from this period have been pulped long ago." ²

1. Letter dated 12.9.69. from Mr E.S.Reid & Son (Builders) Ltd. of Northwood, Middx.
2. Letter dated 20.8.69.

Indeed, it would appear that few papers or detailed records survived long after the period required by law for taxation purposes. The active speculative housebuilder of this period had no eye for posterity, and where a historian might see gold among papers and records even only ten years old the builder saw a massive volume of paper which was once essential to the running of his business but now served only to deprive him of space which could be more profitably utilised, and which, in the Greater London area at least, was becoming increasingly more valuable. In fact, it was pointed out by more than one builder that the shortage and cost of storage space had resulted in the adoption of a conscious company policy in this respect. Within these firms periodic orders were given to the various departments to search through their records and to discard those which were no longer of any commercial value.¹ The search therefore was not for the most part productive in terms of the written word. However, in many ways it was most rewarding in terms of the response of individuals in the industry during the interviews.

For the results of this oral research to be presented and utilised as historical evidence, clearly it is necessary to recognize and fully appreciate the possible pitfalls and problems that are likely to be involved in its use. Obviously the major concern will focus on the accuracy of such evidence. Over long periods of time, memory can fade and become distorted. Furthermore some people when recalling

1. Seaton, interview, 23.1.70.

the past do have a certain facility for forgetting unpleasant things, and rather embellishing and exaggerating the things that show them in a good light. Reticence, modesty and timidity are also human qualities that may be influential in the replies of individuals being interviewed by a researcher, while further dangers of inaccuracy might stem from the interviewees being in some way influenced by other people's writings or opinions on points discussed. Obviously it is possible for such inaccuracies to occur on any topic raised during an interview, but it would seem reasonable to suspect their occurrence more particularly where precise or detailed information is involved. In the context of this work this is likely to apply most to questions on prices and price changes.

Such inaccuracy is not, however, inevitable. By careful and thoughtful preparation and interviewing it is possible to minimize the extent to which inaccuracy may occur in oral evidence. During the interview it is always possible for the interviewer to insert "check-questions" where he feels exaggeration or reticence may be creeping in. Another way to help achieve a balanced view is to interview a number of individuals who had been working for the same building firm during these years and then to compare their responses. This was attempted in respect of all the firms with which interviews eventually took place, but it was rarely possible. A primary reason for this was that very few people who worked for the firms in 1969-70 were active, or more importantly, had been in any position of responsibility prior to 1939.

This was found to be the case even in respect of the larger firms. Eventually it was possible only in two cases to speak to a number of individuals from particular firms. These were the firms of John Laing & Son Ltd. and Wates Ltd.

Even where it was possible to speak to a number of individuals from particular firms (i.e. John Laing & Son Ltd. and Wates Ltd.), the departmentalized nature of the internal structure of the firms during the 1930s meant that only occasionally did the narratives of individuals overlap with those of their colleagues.¹ It was therefore necessary, where possible, to prepare thoroughly for each interview made, and to be alert at all times to the possibilities of distortion by returning later in the interview to points where it seemed that inaccuracy might have occurred. This was especially important for points of detail.²

What therefore is oral evidence really worth in the context of this particular study? It has been seen that there will always be the possibility of inaccuracy where oral evidence is used, and that a situation where it is possible to minimize this possibility is not always easy to achieve.

Ideally, of course, oral evidence should only be used where there exists other forms of documentation which can

1. It should be added that where overlapping did take place the consistence of the testimonies was remarkable.

2. Two books found to be of particular value were C.A. Moser, Survey Methods in Social Investigation (1958) and A.N. Oppenheim, Questionnaire Design and Attitude Measurement (1966).

provide checks for the responses of interviewees. However, ideal conditions seldom prevail. In the case of this study it was the very lack of alternative data which first encouraged the author to exploit oral history techniques, and there must be many examples in the history of historical writing where the available written documents, records and other data have biased the direction of research and have in consequence led to the emergence of an unbalanced view of the topic, or question, under consideration. Historical researchers are well aware of the fact that documents often disappear or are destroyed, and that not infrequently an overwhelming abundance of some types of evidence and documents exists side by side with a chronic shortage of documentation in other, often related, and from their point of view at least, often more crucial spheres.

It must be wrong for historians to bypass without any detailed consideration as important a phenomenon as the interwar speculative housebuilder solely because evidence in a form traditionally exploited and relied upon by historians does not exist in any quantity, or is not available at the present time. This is especially true where there is available such a potentially valuable research tool as oral history with which much important evidence might be uncovered: evidence which will over the next decade or so disappear completely as individuals active in the speculative housebuilding industry between the wars die.

Possibly an important reason why historians often underestimate the value and importance of the oral approach in

contemporary history lies in the common background of all historical training where the student is taught in his studies to rely on the written word but to question implicitly the accuracy and credibility of any oral evidence. Caution is very proper where accuracy is of such importance, and it should always be remembered that oral evidence is a source material which must be considered with the same care, and perhaps with a little greater care, as the more normal historical primary sources of the written word. However, as has been noted above, to ignore the potential of oral history may leave serious gaps in historical knowledge, or leave an unbalanced picture in certain respects, which might never be completed or corrected.

In this particular study in fact it is probable that many of the problems over the accuracy of the oral evidence collected are less prominent ^{than} ~~as~~ they are likely to be in the American "in depth" study approach of the Oral History Research Office at Columbia and its imitations at many other American Universities, where the central concern has been the collection of very personal autobiographical memoirs. This is probable for at least three reasons. As can be seen from the interview-questionnaire used the interviews connected with this particular study have been concerned with the actions of the individual interviewees in a rather broader, and a very much less personal sense.¹ As a result, it is certain that egotism and evasion figured much less strongly in the inter-

1. See below Appendix D.

viewees' responses than would have been the case had the interview been of the autobiographical-memoir type. Secondly, fundamentally the speculative housebuilding process in these years was very much one of repetition, and therefore, especially where the questions were directed towards the broad patterns and processes involved, it is reasonable to suppose that the degree of inaccuracy which has crept into the oral evidence used in this work will also have been relatively small. Lastly, the aim of the oral research carried out in connection with this work was to interview as many people concerned with interwar speculative housebuilding as time and money would allow. It is of course recognized that none of the resulting interviews, when taken alone, present the final and most accurate word or picture on this subject. However, it is hoped that taken together it has been possible to begin to build up a fairly balanced picture, and in this way to obviate many of the inaccuracies which may or may not have occurred within individual narratives.

Hence, in this particular study the use of oral history techniques has enabled an attempt to be made at an examination of the interwar speculative housebuilder in Greater London, and of some aspects of his organization, his activities, and even to a limited extent, of his attitudes; an examination which otherwise would not have been possible. It has also enabled the accumulation and recording of a body of evidence, albeit oral evidence, about such builders, their industry and their times, which daily is in danger of being lost forever as the people concerned become older and die.

APPENDIX B. The approach to the collection of the oral data used in the present work.¹

Since 'the interview' is a rather untraditional method of data collection for the British economic historian it is necessary to state the approach used by the author.

The first decision was to choose between using a postal questionnaire and a direct approach by means of an interview. Obviously the decision rested on the evaluation of the size and the accuracy of the response which could reasonably be expected from either of these methods. In view of the probability that only a small percentage of those firms which could answer a postal questionnaire would do so, the idea of adopting such an approach was soon dismissed. The interview involved approaching firms and persons concerned with speculative housebuilding during the interwar years, and if they were agreeable they would be visited and encouraged to talk about their interwar activities in the industry. The direction of the interview would then be guided by means of a prepared, and to some extent structured, interview schedule.²

The second step was to obtain the names of the firms and persons active in the interwar period. These were extracted from a number of different sources, such as the trade press, Kelly's Trade Directories for the suburban counties, news-

1. For a discussion of the value of oral history, and an explanation of why it was used, see above Appendix A.
2. See below Appendix D.

papers, and other media used to advertise newly-built small housing prior to 1939. The list thus obtained was then checked against current trade and telephone directories in order to discover which of the firms were still in business. Just over two hundred names were obtained in this way, the list including a number of firms of architects and land estate agents, in addition to house-builders of all sizes. This approach resulted in approximately 110 replies, and something just over 50 interviews, that is to say, a positive response of just under 25%. The interviews were carried out largely during the period between August 1969 and February 1970.

In geographical terms however the resulting sample turned out to be something less than even. Of the 49 different firms covered which built speculative housing, 17 (i.e. approx. 35%) were located in the western Middlesex suburban area, while in Kent suburbs there was only one (i.e. approx. 2%). The number from the Essex suburbs was only two higher than in Kent, while the number located within the Surrey and the north Middlesex areas was 10 and 16 respectively. Two firms had their head offices in central London. On the other hand, when looked at from the point of view of the number of firms which built within the various suburban areas (bearing in mind that a number were active in several areas), the sample turned out to be a little more balanced. 32 of the firms built within the western suburbs, 23 within the northern, 19 within the Surrey area, 12 within Essex, and 7 within the south-eastern suburban area. Of the

49 firms, 12 also built within areas outside the Greater London area.

There are other limitations to the sample. To the extent that it has been possible to contact only firms which have survived the war and the post-war years, the sample will contain only the 'successful' and/or the 'stayer' family firms. Thus it will exclude many interesting and more unorthodox speculative housebuilders who were active during this period, from the 'small-time' amateurs to the larger-scale syndicate-based estate development companies and 'finance builders'. Furthermore many of the medium- to large-sized firms which were very successful during this period prior to 1939 have for any number of reasons since disappeared. Bankruptcy, mergers, or the retirement or death of the owner who had been the firm's driving force have all been influential factors. It is to the lasting loss of all persons interested in the speculative housebuilder, and his impact on interwar suburban development, that firms such as T.F.Nash Ltd; the Unit Construction Company Ltd; Perry's (Ealing) Ltd; English Houses Ltd; Economic Housing Estates Ltd; Bunting Construction Company Ltd; Hillingdon Estates Company Ltd; Manor Park Construction Company Ltd; Clifford Sabey Ltd; H.B.Silver Ltd. (Builders); Cutler's Ltd; and many others have not survived to tell the tale of their own contributions to the pattern and landscape of the interwar outer suburbs. On the other hand, the sample did in other ways include examples of firms of all sizes. One firm interviewed produced only two pairs of semi-detached houses over the whole of the period, while another produced

probably well over three thousand houses and flats a year for many years during the 1930s.

The narratives collected from interviews naturally varied both in quality and in length. Disappointment and frustration are as well known to the oral researcher as they are to the historian using more conventional sources. However, only a few interviews spanned less than a couple of foolscap pages. The longest interview made in fact lasted well over three hours, while the majority varied between an hour and a half, and two hours and a quarter in length.

Approximately half the narratives were collected with the use of a tape recorder. From the point of view of the interviewer, this was easily the most convenient way as it enabled a far greater continuity to be achieved during the interview. It also allowed important digressions to be followed up more easily by the interviewer who did not have to divide his attention between questioning, guiding, and making written notes. However, the use of a tape recorder was not always the best approach. Some individuals are unused to tape recording and react strongly against having their conversation recorded; others may be inhibited if they know that their remarks will be preserved on tape for however short a time, and in consequence they become less candid in their answers. In such cases brief written notes may be more productive, although at times restricting, when only one interviewer is being used. The choice must largely be left in the hands of the interviewee, although there are occasions when even though no apparent objection is registered against the use of a tape

recorder, it may be thought wise by the interviewer to find some reason, such as the recorder's breaking down, so that the interview might continue with the interviewer taking down written notes. In any case, when a tape-recorder is used, it is wise to place it away from the direct view of the interviewee and, if possible, altogether out of his sight. In this way at least any latent inhibition will not be aroused.

Whatever method is eventually chosen by the oral historian to record his interviews, it is a time-consuming process of research. One American has conservatively estimated that, excluding background research, and the writing of the interview plan, but including time for pre-interview preparation, travel, transcribing, and editing, the ratio of man-hours to actual interview time is 40 to 1. This ratio is probably a little lower where a tape recorder is not used, as normally less time is required to copy up written notes, than is required to transcribe and edit a tape.¹

1. Donald C. Swain, op. cit. p.65.

APPENDIX C. List of persons interviewed.

The interviews listed below took place over a period of approximately 5 months between 25th August 1969 and 26th February 1970. I would like to thank most sincerely all those individuals and firms who gave me their time and reminiscences during my research for this thesis.

Mr A.W.Harston,	formerly of A.Harston & Co. (Enfield) Ltd.
Mr F.Tipples,	First National Housing Trust Ltd.
Mr G.W.Ellis,	General Housing Co. Ltd.
Mr C.Winstanley,	Richard Costain (Construction) Ltd.
Mr D.F.Cox,	Haymills Ltd.
Mr W.H.Richards,	W.Richards & Sons (Hendon) Ltd.
Mr L.J.Leathers,	Metropolitan Railway County Estates Ltd.
Mr H.L.Storr,	E.A.Storr & Sons Ltd.
Mr L.Edwards,	H.Almond Ltd.
Mr R.E.Kenny,	M.Sanderson (Southern) Ltd.
Mrs B.Howard,	G.Ward (Ealing) Ltd.
Mr D.Gradwell,	G.Ward (Ealing) Ltd.
Mr A.A.Willson,	A.J.Willson & Sons Ltd.
Mr G.Edser,	formerly of Edser & Brown Ltd.
Mr E.L.Saunders,	formerly of Saunders & Son Ltd.
Mr A.C.Whyte,	A.C.Whyte (Croydon) Ltd.
Mr R.C.Watson,	R.C.Watson Ltd.
Mr F.Inight,	W.J.Page & Son Ltd.
Mr B.Todd,	formerly of Newman Eyre Ltd.
Mr F.Smith,	formerly of Newby Bros. Ltd.
Mr P.Collins,	P.Collins (Builder)
Mr C.E.Dixon,	The London Housing Trust Ltd.
Mr A.J.Osbourne,	A.J.Osbourne.
Mr F.Jackson,	Francis Jackson Developments Ltd.
Mr K.Bland,	Wates Ltd.
Mr L.R.Seaton,	formerly of Wates Built Homes Ltd.
Mr S.Kelsoe,	formerly of Wates Ltd.
Mr E.Berg,	formerly of E. & A.Berg Ltd.

Mr E.Jaggers,	formerly of A.W.Jaggers & Sons Ltd.
Mr A.C.Nicholas,	A.C.Nicholas Ltd.
Mr W.Gilbert,	W.Gilbert (Builders).
Mr F.E.Gostling,	E.Gostling (Builders) Ltd.
Mr W.M.Johnson,	formerly of John Laing & Son Ltd.
Mr J.Harper,	formerly of John Laing & Son Ltd.
Mr F.Stokes,	John Laing (Construction) Ltd.
Mr K.G.Jerrard,	John Laing & Son Ltd.
Mr L.T.Swanne,	L.T.Swanne Ltd.
Mr C.A.Pilgrim,	C.A.Pilgrim Ltd.
Mr W.R.Leddington,	W.S.Try Ltd.
Mr C.H.Hefford,	formerly of New Ideal Homes Ltd.
Mr G.C.Cooper,	Cooper & Philips Ltd.
Mr G.Reed,	Geo. Reed & Sons Ltd.
Mr P.M.Healy,	M.J.Gleeson Ltd.
Mr D.W.Friest,	formerly of Priest Bros.
Mr S.E.Steadman,	Davis Estates Ltd.
Mr H.Townsend,	formerly of Townsend & Collins Ltd.
Mr H.W.Townsend,	Townsend & Collins Ltd.
Mr G.D.Lancaster,	Lancasters (Mayfair) Ltd.
Mr P.R.Jones,	G.T.Crouch Ltd.
Mr S.J.Bradley,	formerly of Bradley & Arthur Ltd.
Sir George Chaplin,	Hilbery Chaplin & Co.
Mr H.Davies,	H.Davies & Co.
Mr E.D.Daniel,	Hickman and Bishop.
Mr H.L.Fairley,	Clifford and Clifford.
Mr E.Becket,	Becket Son & Co.
Mr L.Cockle,	Woolwich Equitable Building Society.
Mortgage Manager,	Abbey National Building Society.

A number of other interviews were also undertaken. These included interviews with two builders and two Inland Revenue valuation officers. For personal and professional reasons respectively however these wished to remain completely anonymous.

APPENDIX D. The interview schedule.

The schedule found below is only a part of that used during the interviews. Only those sections of the schedule which relate to the contents of the thesis have been included. The other sections related to other aspects of speculative housebuilding operations and processes: e.g. the finance of construction; the processes and organisation of construction (including matters relating to material and labour inputs and organisation, and to innovation); the approach, and decisions relating to the type of development undertaken, and to layout and design; the organisation and finance of house sales; building quality; and relationships with local authorities.

It should be emphasised that the schedule copied out below is not, and was never intended to be used as, a questionnaire. It was designed solely to provide direction and a guide during the interviews.

The schedule.

Introduction.

1. Did your firm begin its building activities within the Greater London area?
 - (a) where did it originate?
 - (b) what date did it begin to operate in Greater London?
 - (c) what factors were most important in the decision to move to Greater London?
2. (a) At what stage in your firm's life did it enter into speculative housebuilding activity?

e.g. (i) size; (ii) capital; (iii) age.

(b) What were the major factors influential in this move?

(c) What form had your activities taken before this move?

3. How did you firm's interests divide themselves between different types of building activity? (e.g.) (i) speculative/contract; (ii) residential/non-residential; (iii) speculative residential/contract-residential; (iv) flats/houses). In (i) 1924; (ii) 1928; (iii) 1930; (iv) 1932; (v) 1935; (vi) 1937; (vii) 1939?

If possible in terms of the % of total activity in each activity category, but if roughly accurate % figures cannot be given an impressionistic picture will suffice.

4. (a) Roughly what area did your activities cover during (i) the 1920s; (ii) the 1930s?
- (b) What factors were influential in: (i) determining (or limiting) the area; (ii) causing any expansion or contraction in that area?

Please specify examples.

5. Could you list the developments you were involved in in the OSA during the 'twenties and 'thirties? Giving for each development (i) its approximate dates; (ii) its location and acreage, (iii) the number of houses, and (iv) if not purely housebuilding, the role your firm played in the development.

6. Taking the years in which your firm was building houses during the 'twenties and 'thirties, could you indicate briefly which years were good and which were poor for your firm's activities?

If no precise idea - at least an impressionistic view of

trends and fluctuations during the period.

7. (a) Approximately how long on average was the period between the conception of a housebuilding project and the commencement of the actual building operation?

(b) Briefly, what factors might be involved in determining the length of such a period?

Please give examples.

Location.

1. (a) Casting your mind back to a specific project (jog mind with previous list of developments) however large or small, can you remember which specific factors were of greatest importance in the decision to locate that development in that particular place?

(b) Repeat this with other specified examples - as many as possible.

2. (a) State the FIVE factors which you consider to have been MOST important and influential in the 1930s in estate location decisions.

(b) State the FIVE generally of LEAST importance to your mind.

3. If you had to name ONE factor, which would you consider to have been the MOST CRUCIAL? (jog mind with specific developments).

4. (a) In general in your opinion what significance did the location and character of industrial/commercial development have on: (i) the decision to consider, and then buy land? (ii) the decision of what sort of

development it was to be?

- (b) Is it possible to cite examples illustrating this influence?
5. (a) How great an influence was the availability of public services links in your decisions of where to locate your projects?
- (b) If existing public service links were a way away, did you ever have to finance, or part finance, the cost of joining the estate to the link?
- (c) Did the L.A. or public utility company ever pay for this, or share the cost with you? If so, what proportion? and did it vary according to the size of development?
- (d) What sort of % of the TOTAL development cost was the firm willing to pay?
- (e) As land got relatively scarce (i.e. less ideally located) did this situation change?
6. The significance of transport and communications? (if not dealt with earlier).
7. In the 1930s did your firm ever make a location decision, and then having purchased the land and begun development, found that it fell short for some reason? (i) Can you give me details of any examples? (ii) In each case, can you give me the reasons for the initial choice? (iii) what happened?

Economic Feasibility Study.

8. When selecting a location, did you ever carry out any study on any pieces of land under consideration to discover which

had the greatest potential for residential development?

If yes, continue. If no, go to (e).

(a) What form did the study take?

(b) At what stage in your consideration of a 'potential site' did you usually carry it out? (i) As a general rule? (ii) Can you give any examples?

(c) Which factors did you consider to be most important when working such a study? Why these factors in particular?

(d) In retrospect, did such studies prove to be on the whole (i) accurate; (ii) profitable; (iii) successful; (iv) necessary?

(Now continue to next section on land acquisition).

(e) Why did you feel a land study to be unnecessary?

(A list of factors with possible influence in locational decisions. Used as a check list and prompt.

(i) Neighbourhood.

(ii) Market demand, or the perceived popularity of an area.

(iii) Availability of public services, or public service link-ups.

(iv) Topography.

(v) Location of previous activity in and around that area.

(vi) Existence of communications, and accessibility.

(vii) Existence of community facilities, e.g. schools, local parade of shops, etc.

(viii) Land ownership patterns and the size of sites coming available.

- (ix) Financial considerations (e.g. availability of finance with site, etc.)
- (x) Location of recent development or development in progress by other builders.
- (xi) Town planning zoning: location of industry.
- (xii) Town planning housing densities.
- (xiii) Soil characteristics and types.
- (xiv) Proximity of a good agent to help sell the completed houses.
- (xv) Method of land purchase available.)

Land Acquisition.

1. (a) How did you learn about the availability of a suitable piece of land? Please specify actual examples.
 ((e.g.) (i) own staff - active search - assessment of offered; (ii) land and estate agents on retainer; (iii) agent's circular; (iv) offers from landowners).
- (b) For the decade as a whole, are you able to estimate the relative importance of each of the various means used?
2. (a) Think back to the acquisition of land for various developments and for each can you tell me:
 (i) approx. acreage; (ii) did you buy it outright, or phase it over a number of years? (iii) did you ever first take out an option on it? (iv) if yes to (iii), how long did you hold land on option before buying or rejecting it?
- (b) If unable to specify, can you speak generally on these points, with examples if possible.
3. How fixed and pre-determined were your ideas on the type

of site you would be interested in?

(a) Was it usual for you/your firm to actively search for land with a fairly specific character which would fit into a relatively firm, pre-determined idea of the sort and size of estate you/your firm wanted to build? or

(b) was it more normal for you to come across a piece of land and then, after a land study to evaluate its potential, decide whether it was a worthwhile proposition?

4. (a) To what extent did the acquisition of a site and land area suitable for your development involve you in negotiating and eventually combining a number of pieces of land, perhaps from separate landowners? (i) in the 1920s? (ii) early in the 1930s? (iii) late in the 1930s?

(b) Can you give me any actual examples?

5. (a) Did all your developments during the 1930s tend to be within a certain range of size? Or at least above a minimum size?

(b) Did the centre of this range shift at all?

What do you feel were the factors most influential in such a shift?

6. Land Companies

(a) Did you know, or hear of, the existence of any such companies?

(b) Can you give me any specific examples? And can you give me any idea of how they operated?

7. (a) Did you notice an increasing relative scarcity of suitable land for development as the period wore on? (e.g. experience increasing difficulty in finding suitable sites).
- (b) What were the manifestations of this on (i) the price of land; (ii) the extent and type of new development your firm was able to create; (iii) the locational characteristics of such development; (iv) the approach your firm used in the search for such land?
8. (If not answered earlier)
- (a) Did you look for land first and then, within certain pre-defined limits, ^{decide} what sort of development should be undertaken? or
- (b) Did you have a pre-defined idea of the sort of development you wanted to undertake and then look for a site that would fit into it?

Land development.

1. (a) Approximately what proportion of TOTAL COST PER DWELLING was: (i) the cost of land; (ii) the cost of land plus site preparation?
- (b) Did either of these proportions change substantially over the decade? Can you give percentages for (i) 1930; (ii) 1932; (iii) 1935; (iv) 1938?
2. What factors might be involved in the decisions determining the size (acreage and number of houses) of a development? Please give examples.
- (Basically a land purchase question i.e. financial, but to

what extent was it, for the larger firms, more the other way around, that is-decide the number of houses they wanted to build and then buy the appropriate acreage.)

3. At what stage in the development of one project was the decision made to begin preliminary investigations on a further development in order to achieve a smooth use of labour and other resources?
4. (a) What sort of factors were involved in the decision on the type of development (i.e. the number, price, and style of houses) undertaken on any projected estate?

(b) At what stage in the planning would such a decision be made? (e.g. before/after land search/purchase).
5. If possible from actual examples of developments undertaken, how was the eventual 'mix' of dwellings decided upon?
6. (a) In general, over the period, how were the price ranges of dwellings built evolved?

(b) What factors were influential in determining the constitution of the dwelling range available?

(c) To what extent did the dwelling range available change over the period?

Structure of the industry.

1. In 1924, 1930, and 1935 the Board of Trade undertook a Census of Production. Have any copies of any returns made by your firm survived?
2. (a) Can you give me an indication^{of} the size of your firm in, for example, (i) 1925; (ii) 1930; (iii) 1932;

(iv) 1935; (v) 1937; (vi) 1939 in terms of the numbers employed?

(categories: (i) 0-10; (ii) 11-24; (iii) 25-49;

(iv) 50-99; (v) 100-199; (vi) 200-499; (vii) 500-999;

(viii) 1000-1499; (ix) 1500 and over).

(b) What proportion of the labour force at each date would you estimate were involved in housebuilding (approx.)?

(c) What was the annual value of your output at each date (approx.)? And what proportion of this was from housebuilding?

(d) What proportion of the labour force was employed in administration?

(e) Approximately how many dwellings did your firm build in each of these years?

3. Could you give me a subjective opinion of the general structure of the housebuilding industry during the period?
e.g. (i) The approx. proportion of firms in each category?
(ii) The approx. proportion of total housebuilding activity produced by each category?

4. Did your firm convert itself into a public company before 1939? Why was it decided to make this move?

5. (a) Did your firm ever found associate or subsidiary companies before 1939 in order to organise particular developments and which were to be later liquidated on the completion of those developments?

(b) Alternatively, did your firm ever found such companies in order to undertake different aspects of the

residential development process on the estates developed before 1939?

(c) What were the advantages of such moves?/why did your firm not adopt such company structures?

6. (a) Did you ever sub-contract out any parts of your developments?

If yes, (i) To what extent in terms of total output?

(ii) What parts of a development did you tend to sub-contract?

(Run through developments undertaken)

(iii) (for each development where sub-contracting was undertaken) why did you sub-contract these particular tasks at this particular time?

(b) In general what types of firm (main characteristics) were involved in sub-contract work for you on housing estates? Did you develop relationships with any firms? What was the nature of such relationships?

(c) In your opinion, how typical was the extent of your use of sub-contractors? (i) For similar sized firms?

(ii) For the industry as a whole?

AT THE END OF THE INTERVIEW.

Do you/Does your firm still possess any records of your firm's/its activities during the 1920s and 1930s?

(First prompt for e.g. sales brochures, sales books, estate and house plans. Then tactfully broach the question of records, such as records relating to particular estate developments, estate development accounts and correspondence, correspondence relating to land search and purchase, etc.)

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY.

1. Primary Sources.

i. The search for records relating to the interwar business activity of speculative housebuilders and estate developers was unfortunately not a success. However a very limited number of items were located.

(a) R.T.Warren Ltd. Sales Books.

R.T.Warren Ltd. Land Purchase Account Ledger.

During the mid-1960s this west London speculative housebuilding firm was taken over by Malcolm Sanderson (Southern) Ltd. These records are now held at that firm's offices in Uxbridge, Middlesex.

(b) Wates Streatham (1928) Ltd. Sales Ledger.

Held by Dr J.H.Johnson, Department of Geography,
University College, London.

Building Department Memoranda to the Directors of Wates Ltd. 1936.

Worcester Park Estate Ltd. (Polo Syndicate). Minutes of Directors' Meetings.

Held at the offices of Wates Ltd. Norbury, S.W.16.

Also held at these offices are copies of Wates House News (later Wates News Sheet), 1935-39.

(c) At Companies House, London, records are held relating to three interwar housebuilding firms which became public companies prior to 1939. No file was found for a fourth firm, Davis Estates Ltd. The three firms are George Wimpey & Co. Ltd. (File No. 156617), New Ideal Homesteads

Ltd. (File No. 243565), and Richard Costain & Sons Ltd. (File No. 274453). Unfortunately there is little information held in these files and what there is is fragmentary relating primarily to their registration and incorporation.

(d) Abbey Road Building Society. Pool Deposit Files.

Held at the Head Office of the Abbey National Building Society, Baker Street, W.1. The Abbey National was the only building society, of a number approached, which had retained, or were willing to reveal to the author, records relating to their inter-war dealings with housebuilders.

ii. Local authority building inspectors' registers.

The registers of three pre-1939 local authorities were examined.

The two analysed in detail were:

- (a) Enfield U.D. Register of Building Notices (1920-30 incomplete/1931-40 complete). Held by the Building Surveyor's Department, London Borough of Enfield, Palmers Green, N.13.
- (b) Ruislip-Northwood U.D. Register of Completions (1931-40 complete). Held by the Planning Department, London Borough of Hillingdon, Northwood, Middlesex.

The register of the third local authority was:

- (c) Hayes and Harlington U.D. Register of Building Notices. (1924-40 incomplete). Held by the Planning Department, London Borough of Hillingdon, Northwood, Middlesex.

The incomplete nature of this register made its detailed

analysis for use in Chapter 5 pointless. However the register did prove valuable on a number of points, and indeed would bear analysis by any local historians interested in the development of this area.

The contents of these registers have been described in Chapter 5.

iii. Ministry of Health. Unpublished house completion statistics, 1918-40.

This provided a fundamental data source for the first section of the present work. The data, held on cards (one card for each local authority) at the Housing Statistics Division of the Department of the Environment, London, has been described and examined in some depth in the appendices to Chapters 2, 3 and 4. And in Chapter 11 it has been noted that, for all its limitations, it remains an important basic source of small area statistical information on interwar housebuilding activity.

iv. The fourth body of primary evidence used in the present work was found in the London Borough of Lewisham Public Libraries, Local History Collection. This evidence relates to the sale of, respectively, undeveloped and developed land:

(a) The Dansons Estate, Kent. Sales Particulars, 1922.

(File No. 3397).

(b) The West Chislehurst Park Estate, Nottingham, Kent.

Auction Particulars. 1926. (File No. A61/4/10).

2. Monthly and weekly journals.

i. No trade journal provides an unbiased view and this is particularly true where these journals are the official organs of specific business associations. The interwar journals on housebuilding proved no exception and it was necessary to exercise extreme caution in order to distinguish between speculation, opinion and fact. Contrary to the writer's original hopes little precise information was given in the building trade journals on individual firms and their activities, while any discussion on housebuilding and residential development was restricted to idealised advice and failed to provide any substantial picture of the activities of the industry or the practical problems which faced firms during these years. A certain amount of evidence, on the other hand, was gleaned from these journals and, for all their difficulties such publications remain an essential contemporary historical source. The journals consulted (years published between the wars first, years consulted second) were:

The Builder (1913-39)(1926-39)

The Building Industries Survey (1935-9)(1935-9), produced
by The Building Industries National Council.

The National Federation of Housebuilders Monthly Report

(1934-36)(1934-36), the official organ of the

National Federation of Housebuilders, continued as

The Housebuilder (1936-38)(1936-38) continued as

The Housebuilder and Estate Developer (1938-40)(1938-39).

The Illustrated Carpenter and Builder (1918-39)(1926-39)

The National Builder (1920-39)(1926-39), the official organ of the National Federation of Building Trades Employers.

The National Housebuilder (1936-39)(1936-39), the official organ of the Housebuilders Association of Great Britain.

Practical Building (1925-34) continued as

Practical Building Illustrated (1934-36) (1925-1936)

ii. A number of journals which advertised the availability of speculatively built houses were also consulted:

The Homefinders' Small Property Supplement (1931-34)(1931-34)

continued as

The All England Homefinder and Small Property Guide

(1934-39)(1934-39).

The Housslands Gazette and Estate News (1931-34)(1931-34)

continued as

Better Homes (1934-35)(1934-35).

iii. On the building society movement during the interwar years The Building Societies' Gazette (1918-39)(1926-39) was consulted, while on other topics certain volumes of The Estates Gazette (1918-39), The Economist (1918-39), and the Royal Institute of British Architects' Journal (1918-39) were also consulted.

3. Newspapers.

The newspapers most used have been listed below. With the

exception of The Times they were consulted largely for their sections advertising speculative estate developments.

The Times (1918-40)(certain volumes 1927-33).

The Observer (1918-40)(1928-39).

Daily Mail (1918-40)(1928-39)

Sunday Express (1918-40)(1928-39)

Enfield Weekly Herald (1921-39)(1930-39).

Palmers Green and Southgate Gazette (1918-39)(1930-39).

Harrow Observer (continued as Harrow Observer and Gazette)
(1918-1939)(1918-24, 1928-39).

4. Secondary Sources.

Only the more important secondary works have been included in this bibliography. The details of the other secondary works from which evidence has been obtained can be found footnoted in the body of the work.

i. Government publications.

Cd. 9191. Report of the Committee on Building Construction in connection with the Provision of Dwellings for the Working Classes of England and Wales, and Scotland (HMSO, 1918)(Tudor Walters Report).

Cmd.3911. Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on the Rent Restriction Acts (HMSO, 1931)(Marley Report).

Cmd.5621. Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on the Rent Restriction Acts (HMSO, 1937)(Ridley Report).

Cmd.6153. Report of the Royal Commission on the Distribution of the Industrial Population (HMSO, 1940)(Barlow Report).

Cmd. 6378. Report of the Committee on Land Utilization in
Rural Areas (HMSO, 1942)(Scott Report).

Ministry of Health, Report of the Sub-Committee of the
Central Housing Advisory Committee on Private
Enterprise Housing (HMSO, 1944).

Ministry of Health, Report of the Departmental Committee on
the Valuation for Rates 1939 (HMSO, 1944).

Board of Trade, Final Report of the Third Census of
Production 1924 (HMSO, 1932).

Final Report of the Fourth Census of Production,
1930 (HMSO, 1935).

Final Report of the Fifth Census of Production,
1935 (HMSO, 1944).

Censuses of Population for 1921, 1931 and 1951.

ii. General texts on interwar Britain.

The two texts primarily referred to were C.L.Mowat,
Britain Between the Wars (6th imp.1966)& J. Follard, The
Development of the British Economy, 1914-1950 (1962).

A more recent text is D.H.Aldcroft, The Interwar
Economy: Britain 1919-39 (1970), while a view of the economy
during the 1930s can be found in H.W.Richardson, Economic
Recovery in Britain, 1932-39 (1967).

iii. Books and articles on housebuilding, the speculative
housebuilder and the building society movement
(nineteenth and twentieth centuries to 1939).

M. Bowley, Housing and the State, 1919-1944 (1945).

S.D.Chapman, ed. The History of Working Class Housing
(Newton Abbot, 1971).

- E.J.Cleary, The Building Society Movement (1965).
- H.J.Dyos, Victorian Suburb (Leicester, 1961).
- H.J.Dyos and M.Wolff, ed. The Victorian City: Images and Realities (1973).
- A.A.Jackson, Semi-Detached London (1973).
- A.A.Nevitt, Housing, Taxation and Subsidies (1965).
- H.W.Richardson and D.H.Aldcroft, Building in the British Economy between the Wars (1968).
- H.J.Dyos, 'The Speculative Builders and Developers of Victorian London', Victorian Studies, XI (1968).
- J.H.Johnson, 'The Suburban Expansion of Housing in London, 1918-1939' in J.T.Coppock and H.C.Prince, ed. Greater London (1964).
- J.L.Marshall, 'The Pattern of Housebuilding in the Inter-War Period in England and Wales', Scottish Journal of Political Economy, XV (1968).

There is very little work, either published or unpublished, on individual interwar speculative housebuilding firms. The only published work known to the author is A.Jenkins, On Site, 1921-71 (1971), a popular history of Taylor Woodrow Ltd. published during the firm's 50th year. While the only unpublished work is a short typescript history of Wates Ltd. held at the firm's offices in Norbury, south London. In neither work are pre-1939 activities given much space.

iv. Housing and economic statistics.

- B. Weber, 'A New Index of Residential Construction, 1938-1950', Scottish Journal of Political Economy, II (1955).

- M. Bowley, Housing and the State, 1919-1944 (1945),
Appendix II, esp. Table 2, p.271.
- Ministry of Health, Housing. House Production, Slum Clearance,
etc. England and Wales (HMSO, 1934-9)
(six-monthly).
- London County Council, London Statistics, XXXIII-XLI (1929-1939)
- K. Maiwald, 'An Index of Building Costs in the United
Kingdom, 1845-1938', Economic History
Review, 2nd ser. VII (1954).
- B.R. Mitchell and P. Deane, Abstract of British Historical Statistics
(Cambridge, 1962).
- London and Cambridge Economic Service, The British Economy: Key Statistics, 1901-66
(1967).

v. Theses.

Various approaches to the examination of pre-1914 speculative housebuilding and residential development within the Greater London area can be found in H.J. Dyos, The Suburban Development of Greater London, south of the Thames, 1836-1914 (unpublished Ph. D. thesis, University of London, 1952); D.A. Reeder, Capital Investment in the Western Suburbs of Victorian London (unpublished Ph. D. thesis, University of Leicester, 1965); R.C.W. Cox, Some Aspects of the Urban Development of Croydon, 1870-1940 (unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Leicester, 1966); R.C.W. Cox, Urban Development and Redevelopment of Croydon, 1835-1940 (unpublished Ph. D. thesis, University of Leicester, 1970); and H. Jaugh, The Suburban Growth of North West Kent, 1861-1961 (unpublished Ph. D. thesis, University of London, 1968). Parts of the two theses by R.C.W. Cox and that

by Mary Waugh also relate to interwar activity, while Edward Craven in *Conflict in the Land Development Process: the role of the private residential developer* (unpublished Ph. D. thesis, University of Kent, 1970) has considered the speculative residential development process as it was found in the County of Kent during the 1950s and 1960s.

5. Ephemera.

A number of sales brochures issued by householders and estate developers were located during the research. These included E. & L. Berg Ltd. (Gladeside Estate, Shirley); J. & J.H. Boothman (1928) Ltd. (Briar Hill Estate, Northolt); Henry Boot (Garden Estates) Ltd. (Hayes Place Estate, Kent); B.Burge Ltd; G.T.Crouch Ltd. (Richmond Park Tudor Estate, Kingston); J.C.Derby Ltd. (Beckenham Manor Estate); Gower Builders (London) Ltd. (Spring Park Farm Estate, Shirley); Haymills Ltd. (Hanger Hill Estate, Ealing); J.Laing & Son Ltd. (Belmont Estate, Stanmore; Canons Park and Broadfields Estate, Edgware; Oakwood Park Estate, Southgate; Sanderstead Estate, Sanderstead); New Ideal Homesteads Ltd. (Marlborough Park and Penhill Estates, Sidcup; Falconwood Park Estate, Welling; Carlton Park Estate, Erith); George Reed & Sons Ltd. (Golf Course Estate, Mill Hill); Noel Rees Ltd. (ChorleyWood and Petts Wood Estates); Hugh F. Thoburn Ltd. (Lessness Park Estate, Abbey Wood); J.Ward & Son Ltd. (Towers Estate, Southall).

6. Oral Sources.

A major source of evidence used in the present work was 'the interview'. Between August 1969 and February 1970 the author interviewed 61 persons, both speculative house-builders and other individuals connected with speculative residential development within the interwar OSA. The reasons why such an approach to the collection of data was adopted have already been given in the first chapter and in Appendix A above. While the methodology used, a list of the persons interviewed, and the part of the interview schedule relevant to the present work can be found in Appendices B, C and D respectively. The edited interview transcripts are in the possession of the author.