



Research article

Estates: the history of an idea

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Abstract

The estate became the model for public housing development in England and Wales from the late nineteenth century as a response to poor living conditions and housing shortages. To match the scale of the problem, solutions generally involved comprehensive construction or reconstruction (in the case of slum clearance) in the form of physically distinct developments with social and community provision. While estates were often built within or on the periphery of urban areas, they were typically laid out as discrete, somewhat self-contained entities, separated from their surrounding context. Council housing estates still form a significant body of the UK housing stock and are typically managed as distinct concerns by local government or social housing providers. This research examines the history of the estate as a genealogy, drawing connections between the publicly owned municipal housing estate that emerged in the late nineteenth century and earlier models of estate ownership developed by the landed gentry. Landed estates were conceived as territorialised landscapes, and the estate map became the means to display its wealth. The study investigates how established surveying and cartographic practices involved in estate layout and management shaped the genesis of municipal

housing as a new form of estate. The work also explores how this new conception of estate drew on visions of village life to embody ideas of self-contained community. The research is informed by the work of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu on practice theory, as well as concepts of emptiness and the geo-body from the field of cartography.

Keywords public housing estate; landed estate; habitus; territory; geo-body; emptiness; estate map; adapted stereotype

Introduction

As the title suggests, this research is less about the history of the housing estate per se than a broad study of the estate as a series of manifestations of an idea. The aim has been to seek out the nature of that idea as a cultural concept driving practical mechanisms that, through their many iterations, have shaped the development of towns and cities. By way of a summary, the argument runs as follows. In the UK, land ownership was historically dominated by the aristocracy and the wealthy gentry, with their landholdings managed as productive estates by leaseholding tenant farmers. Settlements often prevented owners from selling off their landholdings so as to preserve the estate as an ongoing entity. A new generation of estates funded by industrial and colonial wealth emerged in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, carrying forward aspects of the earlier practice. In the late nineteenth century, commercial housing developments often involved purchasing and developing estates while preserving them in resemblance as signs of distinction. Although each iteration in this process involved a wholesale transformation in some respects, it also involved the enduring of underlying practices, values and ideas of the estate as superior territory and one that could be managed wholesale for the benefit of its owners and those with tenure on it. Philanthropic and local government responses to the urgent need for housing drew on these earlier practices to develop a municipal version of the estate as a solution that encompassed housing and community provision within the envelope of betterment.¹

There are many parallels in the discussion here with estates and public housing programmes in the broader European context. As Anne Power and Bullock have examined, the field is one of much international interchange of ideas and policies.² Still, the aim is to develop the arguments from the perspective of local practices to understand the enduring motives shaping both change and the resistance to change.

The study draws on the work of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, who wrote widely on a range of contemporary social issues, that for this research offers a key to understanding the relationship between the habitual practices of an individual acting with agency and the broader structural forces that shape society. In his work, importance was placed on studying social phenomena in the context of past, related practices rather than isolating the subject to what could be observed in the immediate frame of view. Bourdieu's theory of practice has been applied in a number of ways to housing, from examining it as an asset to concepts of territorial stigma associated with the 'sink estate'.³ This research, however, considers what can be revealed by examining the historical context of territorial settlement as a genealogy linking past manifestations of the estate with its current iteration as a response to housing needs. Informed by viewing the subject through this broader lens, the study examines the habitus of estate surveying practices and the changing nature of symbolic capital in the field of estate creation and management.

The first section of the study develops a genealogical history of the estate to identify, in Bourdieu's terms, the enduring practices or habitus that sustain it on an ongoing basis as a model of land development. An examination follows of one such practice, namely the mapping and representation of the estate through the estate map. These began as a way to detail the extent of legal ownership but became, over time, a fashionable means to display it as a well-managed asset of aesthetic value and status. A key feature of the estate map was the practice of only representing the estate itself, leaving the lands beyond it empty of detail. To understand the impact of this practice, the study will draw on the concept of the geo-body, developed through the geographical study of statehood and territoriality. The final section explores the impact of estate habitus on the design of municipal estates and the framing

of estate communities as idealised, insular entities. The study concludes with a reflection on how the estate has endured the challenges of urban regeneration and how it is being presented as a model for solving current housing need.

The genealogy of estate

First, let us consider housing estates, or what in the UK are typically called council estates, within a broader history of using the term. The practical difference between the landed estate and the council housing estate is now so wide and with so few obvious connections that they are almost distinct definitions, linked only by the fact that they both involve territory. This etymological shift was clearly articulated by C. S. Lewis in 1960 in his *Studies in Words*: 'When I was a boy, estate had as its dominant meaning "land belonging to a large landowner," but the meaning "land covered with small houses" is dominant now.'⁴ For C. S. Lewis, usage had changed to the extent that there were two distinct definitions, albeit with a common root relating to land or territory. Following genealogical threads, the question is whether there are deeper connections connecting these two definitions of estate. Bourdieu emphasised the importance of genealogy in ethnographic study: the need to trace practices in any field beyond their immediate milieu and into the cultural and historical layers from which they derive their particular characteristics.⁵

Drawing from the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the use of the term 'estate' can be traced from its early and now archaic meaning related to the state of a thing or person, or the state of self-hood, to its use in defining material wealth and property, prosperity or social standing and as a way of describing someone's means or ability or a person's right or claim to the ownership of land.⁶ Usage had extended by the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to include landed property, usually with a large house and impressive agricultural landscapes combining visual and financial wealth. In 1785, William Cowper wrote in his poem 'The Task': 'Estates are landscapes, gazed upon awhile, Then advertised, and auctioneered away'.⁷ Here, he alludes to the transformation of manorial and subsistence farming practices with enclosures and the modernisation of farming practices to create estates of increasing size, status and worth.⁸ Gainsborough's painting *Mr and Mrs Andrews* depicts the connection between the emerging landed gentry and the aestheticised qualities of their well-managed landscape estate (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Thomas Gainsborough, *Mr and Mrs Andrews*, 1748–50⁹



A combination of primogeniture rules and marriage settlements resulted in landed interests that Clemenson likened to Edmund Burke's reflection on society as 'a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born'.¹⁰

Thus, the estate was not only a landholding but also a marker of presence in the landscape and, through the stability of its wealth and its productivity, a signifier of fortitude.

The term 'estate' was also applied to land holdings in colonial territories.¹¹ Antonio de Ulloa's account of his voyages in South America in the 1730s described the role of the estate as a marker of status and as a place of privilege. In Cartagena, 'the families of the white Creoles compose the landed interest: some of them have large estates, and are highly respected, because their ancestors came into the country invested with honourable posts, bringing their families with them when they settled here.'¹² In Quito in Ecuador, 'when the wind blows from that quarter the weather is so sharp, that the rich families ... retire to their estates, situated in a warmer air'.¹³ For de Ulloa, the colonial estate was a place of good fortune measured not just through its scale and productivity but through its privileged physical location.

By the late nineteenth century, in developing estates for housing, layout and general design were key factors in preserving their character as a whole and justifying the carrying over of the term 'estate' as a badge for the new development. Rather than breaking up a consolidated land holding into individual plots of disparate quality, careful development would add to its monetary and aesthetic value, and, correspondingly, the new, upwardly mobile inhabitants would acquire the status of the estate's cachet rather than the other way around. By taking their place on the estate, new occupants would be bound not only by self-interest to follow covenants and other freehold or leasehold restrictions but also to police its proprieties. John Parnell's 1870 guide to property, *Land and Homes: The Investor's Guide*, gives the following advice: 'It is not by crowding houses onto an estate that the property will pay ... An estate which consists of detached dwellings invariably commands the market.'¹⁴ The legacy of the landed estate transmuted into the new landscape of commercial estate development, carrying with it connotations of exclusivity and physical distinction.

Common to estates of all forms was the need to demarcate a distinct entity with its own internal rules or practices. The estate was an endeavour to hold and maintain territorially bounded wealth, whether in the form of farmed assets or in its landscape value. In the late nineteenth century, commercial estate developments like John Parnell's sold the idea of betterment – that one's place in this idealised landscape could be acquired with money. The genealogical connection between these estate developments and those being proposed at the time by philanthropic and public bodies was this very idea, one of betterment by constructing a new and idealised territory, albeit betterment for social good through public health.

The municipalised estate

The Housing of the Working Classes Act 1890 opened the door to the adoption of the estate as a mechanism for driving public health reform.¹⁵ Part III of the Act extended powers to the London County Council (LCC) to go beyond building individual block dwellings or cottages. Rather, it gave the LCC the power to declare buildings, streets and even whole neighbourhoods unfit for habitation and to then redevelop them in their entirety.¹⁶ In addition, it gave it power to establish housing developments beyond its county boundary to rehouse people displaced by slum clearance. This gave it the opportunity to reshape existing urban territory according to the prevailing principles of improved sanitation and to establish entirely new settlements outside of the city proper. Both of these legal instruments led to the design and construction of estates.

The first scheme under this legislation was the Boundary Estate (built 1890–93), initially referred to as the Boundary Road Area or Boundary Road Improvement, borrowing from the established terminologies for working-class housing, such as improved dwellings.¹⁷ The first application of the term 'estate' for municipal housing appears to have been at Millbank, where the LCC purchased the Millbank Estate from the Crown (land formerly occupied by the Millbank Prison) and continued to use the term for its new housing estate development (built 1897–1902). With subsequent projects, especially, though not exclusively, those pushed through under Part III of the 1890 Act, the term 'estate' became ubiquitous.¹⁸ The term then spread to include all developments comprising some element of town planning and provision beyond simply housing.

At Boundary Road, the estate was planned around an entirely new road layout of wide streets radiating out from a central raised garden.¹⁹ This gave the development a central focus or heart and, because the design worked to a different scale, it gave a clear sense of distinction from the

surrounding street network. In developing its vision for the estates beyond the county boundary, the LCC embraced the utopian community ideals of the Arts and Crafts movement. The writings of William Morris, Edward Carpenter and others, as well as the town planning designs of Sir Raymond Unwin, informed its vision of the estate as a self-contained village-like settlement that aligned community spirit with built form.

Unwin's realised designs for New Earswick on the edge of York, Hampstead Garden Suburb and Letchworth Garden City followed from earlier work and thinking. For example, in his 1901 essay, 'The Art of Building a Home', Unwin argued that the development of land should follow the harmonious precedent of the village, looking inwards to a central focus and comprising a harmonious whole more than the sum of its parts:

The village was the expression of a small corporate life in which all the different units were personally in touch with each other ... Every building honestly confesses just what it is, and so falls into its place ... It is this crystallisation of the elements of the village in accordance with a definitely organized life of mutual relations, respect or service, which gives the appearance of being an organic whole, the home of a community, to what would otherwise be a mere conglomeration of buildings. This effect is greatly enhanced where the central feature around which the village has clustered, the church, castle, or manor house, is of sufficient size and architectural interest to challenge comparison with the whole village rather than with the individual houses.²⁰

He contrasted this with the typical approach of the developer:

In the modern building-estate all these elements of beauty are entirely wanting. The land is cut up into little plots all about the same size; these are sold to a chance collection of people who erect on them houses of any conceivable style, or lack of style; each deals with his own plot quite regardless of the others; and every house seems to be wishing to dissociate itself as much as possible from its neighbours.²¹

Inspired by Unwin and Parker's work at Letchworth Garden City, in 1907 Henrietta Barnett appointed them to design Hampstead Garden Suburb on the edge of North London. There, Unwin explored the advantage of developing land on a cooperative basis, allowing not just for individual houses but also shared spaces and amenities such as schools, churches or other public buildings; and, in later lectures and publications, uses the terminology of the estate in positive terms:

The houses could be grouped together and so arranged that each would obtain a sunny aspect and an open outlook; and portions of the land could be reserved forever from being built upon to secure these views.²²

In his account of co-partnership housing in the new suburb, Unwin used the term 'estate' to describe both the positive physical character of the undulating land with woodland and the completed development itself, so combining the prior natural assets of the landscape with its newly developed value as a settlement, all laid out so as to be insulated from surrounding road traffic. He recalled that:

Cutting the first sod of the estate ... was performed by Mrs. S. A. Barnett, who ... defined the purpose of those assembled to be 'the making a bit of God's earth beautiful for generations ahead'.²³

At Hampstead Garden Suburb, the estate embodied both practical values and moral principles. Unwin then brought his ideas and experience to bear in his work for the Tudor Walters Committee. The Tudor Walters Report of 1918 formalised the idea of the self-contained cottage estate as *the* template for post-First World War municipal housing across the UK.²⁴

In inner London, through the work of philanthropists such as Octavia Hill, the estate idea was also employed as a means to drive moral arguments. Hill used the terminology of estate in the sense of both an inherited estate (in relation to her personal life) and the housing estate as a place to exercise philanthropic management skills. In her diaries, she describes taking over the management of an estate of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners:

We met on Monday, October 5th (1903), to take over the estate, and collect from 500 or 600 tenants wholly unknown to us.²⁵

The whole place was to be rebuilt, and even the streets rearranged and widened; and I had promised the Commissioners I would advise them as to the future plans. These had to be prepared at the earliest date possible; the more so as the sanitary authorities were pressing, and sent 100 orders in the first few days we were there ... The Commissioners had decided to close all the public-houses on the estate.²⁶

At the pivotal point in the development of social housing from the 1880s to 1914, the term 'estate' meant a number of things: in the oldest sense, the legal status of an extensive area of land under single ownership; land acquired to develop a new and discrete territory of better quality, design and aspiration than its surroundings; and the creation of a place of distinguished moral value, as at Hampstead. Octavia Hill described the action of arriving 'on the estate' rather than, as with a town or village or street, 'in' it. This suggests separation with a boundary containing everything within, as in stepping onto a ship or onto a stage; it suggests elevation, as when we are on something we are literally higher up than the surrounding. This use of the preposition has endured.

For Unwin, Hill and the architects of Boundary Road, the term 'estate' carried a lineage of privileged domain with its own practices, qualities that could be transposed into the fields of health and social reform. Their conceptualisation of estate embodied distinction: it was managed for the betterment of its residents, it was metaphorically elevated from its surroundings and it was organised as an inward-looking place in and of itself. The visual representation of the estate in map form offered a means to communicate these ideas.

The estate map

In F. M. L. Thompson's account of the chartered surveyor, the role of the estate surveyor and the practice of map-making emerged together in the sixteenth century, with estate maps initially being produced by map-makers but then through combining with the surveyor's schedules, becoming a tool of primarily to help with the collection of rents and to prevent border encroachment.²⁷ Surveying the estate assumed the landlord's right 'to know his own', meaning, to know everything he owned.²⁸ The estate comprised not only land but also the wealth of buildings and human potential residing on it, and the practice of estate management involved the stewardship of these assets for the long-term maintenance of the value of the estate as a whole. The estate map became a visible manifestation of the estate as a physical entity, defining and clarifying the limits of estate territory by demarcating what was within and what was beyond the estate boundary and, over time, became a means of displaying the status of the landowner and the authority over the estate. The estate map was also a key document for managing estate assets, showing detailed information about farmed land, villages, farms and buildings, effectively representing the estate's productive worth.

The map's power in depicting the extent of the estate and the field boundaries in planimetric projection was supplemented with other more pictorial forms of representation. In the notable example of the survey of the Badminton Estate, commissioned by the Duke of Beaufort in 1587, the map of the manors of Crickhowell and Tretower shows houses in the form of a bird's-eye view within the overall plan projection (Figure 2).²⁹ The houses and castles of the village are drawn with individual attention to detail and variation in size and orientation, but there is a stylistic uniformity. Matching roof colour and chimney are consistent features, and the windows, drawn as pairs of casements in the form of two dashes, are depicted in the same style as the arrow slots of the castle. So, although the village has an informal layout, it has been represented as a coherent whole.

Figure 2. Survey of the manors of Crickhowell and Tretower³⁰



From the eighteenth century, the frontispieces of books on good farm husbandry practice included bird's-eye views, with the house at the centre and an abstracted depiction of the estate laid around it.³¹ Increasingly ornate and accurate estate maps developed, with elaborate cartouches and inventories celebrating the wealth of the estate. As with the Badminton Estate maps, field boundaries and trees were often described in bird's-eye view rather than planimetric form, drawing the viewer's eye to exquisite detail and reminder of the estate as an inhabited realm in contrast to the world outside of it.

The historical geographer Ian D. White described the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as a key period in the making of estate maps, driven by landscape improvement and enclosure.³² The map became the means by which valuable territory and assets could be described and displayed. In his 1835 book on the creation of gardens, Vergnaud describes Lancelot 'Capability' Brown's landscape to his French readers using a highly aestheticised version of an estate map. The bird's-eye view allows for rich visual detail and a focus on the interior elements, with the lake as the centrepiece of the estate (Figure 3). The whole ensemble is presented as an island enclosed by a tree-lined boundary; connections with external bodies are limited and noted discretely with text.

Vergnaud's plan highlights a key element in the language of the estate map: the alignment of visual wealth with estate wealth and the contrasting use of empty space or whiteness to show territory beyond the estate boundary.

Figure 3. N. Verгдаud, *L'Art de Créer les Jardins*, Paris, 1835³³

Mapping the municipalised estate

By the late nineteenth century, the estate surveying profession had expanded in response to industrial development and the sale of land for railway construction. By the end of the century, it had been called on by philanthropic housing bodies and the LCC in their efforts to eradicate slum housing. Here, the LCC's public health officers were sent in to inspect slums and declare them unfit, and the valuer to survey, map and value the land and its contents prior to its compulsory purchase. The LCC's first valuer, Andrew Young, fellow of the Surveyors Institute, was in the vanguard of its social reform efforts.³⁴ The valuer's role extended beyond the surveying of slum districts and into that of estate planning, designing street layouts to maximise the benefits of light and fresh air within the cleared plots. This included the closing of rights of way and the erasing of existing street layouts. By drawing the new layout on a site plan that included only the site boundary and the access road, the new streets and block arrangements inevitably became disconnected from their surroundings.

The valuer's department would no doubt have looked to base its designs on the best practices of the time, informed by the ideas of the Garden City movement and the model villages at Bournville in Birmingham and Port Sunlight near Liverpool. They would also have been aware of historical examples of model towns, such as those by Robert Owen in New Lanark and Titus Salt in Yorkshire, which included social provision but were run on paternalist lines.³⁵ Bournville model village was begun in 1893 by social reformer George Cadbury of the Cadbury's confectionery business to designs by Unwin. Recording the successes of the development in a 1906 publication entitled *The Model Village and Its Cottages: Bournville*, its architect, William Alexander Harvey, refers throughout to 'the Bournville Estate'.³⁶ Cadbury's son (also George) followed his father's interest in planning and the development of

Birmingham and wrote on issues of land reform and town planning. In his 1915 book *Town Planning* he outlined the importance of self-containment: 'in laying out estates it is advisable to plan the roads so that they do not form through routes for traffic. If they do, then much more traffic will use them and the landowner or town will be put to continual expense in keeping them in order' and 'such traffic too will interfere with the comfort of residents'.³⁷ So, a well-laid-out estate was a self-contained one, both financially and socially.

In London, the LCC made great efforts to use maps to publicise its work to a wider audience. Three maps discussed here from the immediate and post-Second World War period display various features drawn from estate map practices. In 1928, the Council produced the first of a series of pocket fold-out guide maps promoting its housing for rent (Figures 4 and 5).³⁸ The maps used the term 'block dwellings' for inner-city housing, where developments sat largely in the context of other buildings and streets, and 'estate' or 'cottage estates', where the development included entirely new street patterns and the provision of other facilities. The maps showed the LCC boundary, radiating lines at 5 and 10 miles from the centre, the network of main roads and some geographical features like rivers, royal parks and reservoirs. The extent of the built-up conurbation or the extent of neighbouring towns was not shown. The effect is to make the out-county cottage estates appear to be beyond the city and in the surrounding countryside. Block dwellings and cottages were shown in a pictorial style rather than in planimetric projection in the estate map tradition. For the cottage estates, dwellings were shown against a bright green sward background, emphasising the extent of the estate and its perimeter and the scale of land taken up by the estates in comparison with the city as a whole (Figure 6).

Figure 4. LCC map showing block dwellings and cottage estates, 1928³⁹

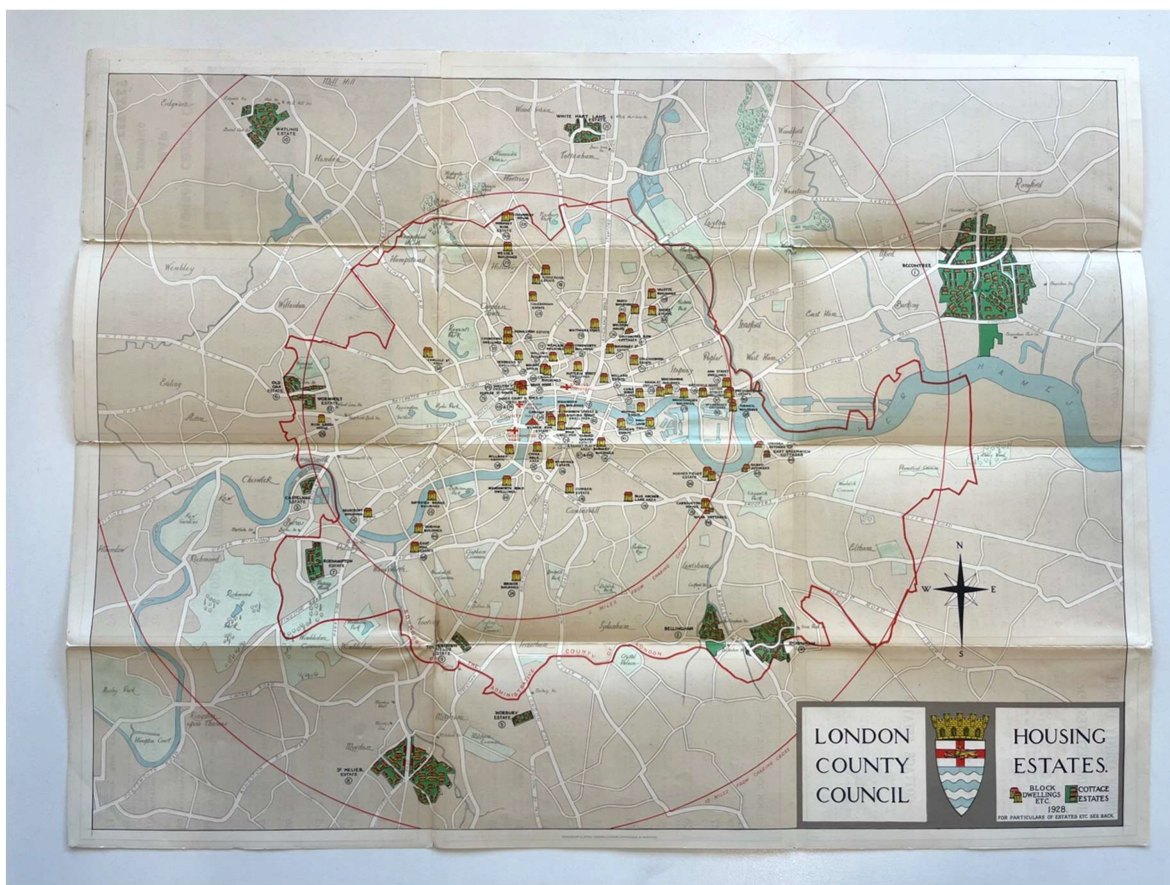
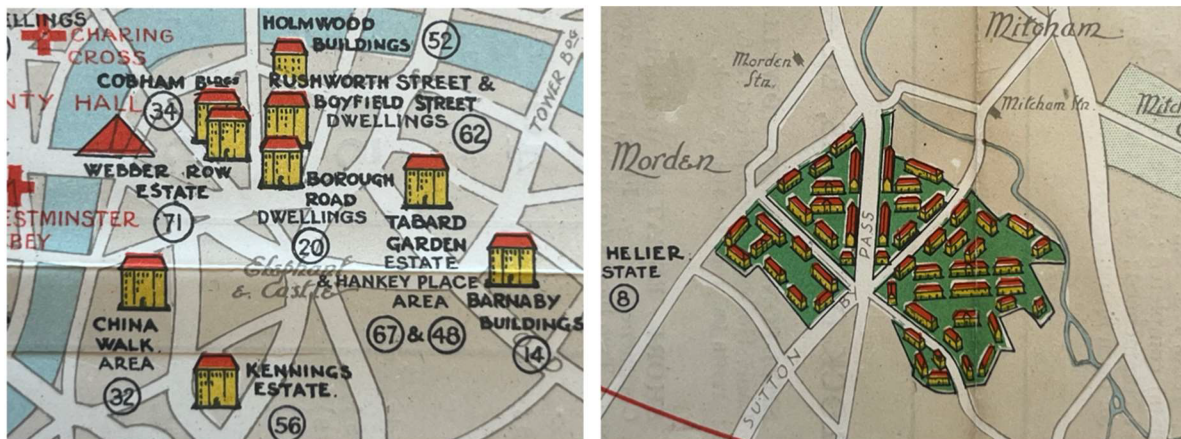


Figure 5. Front cover of LCC map, 1928



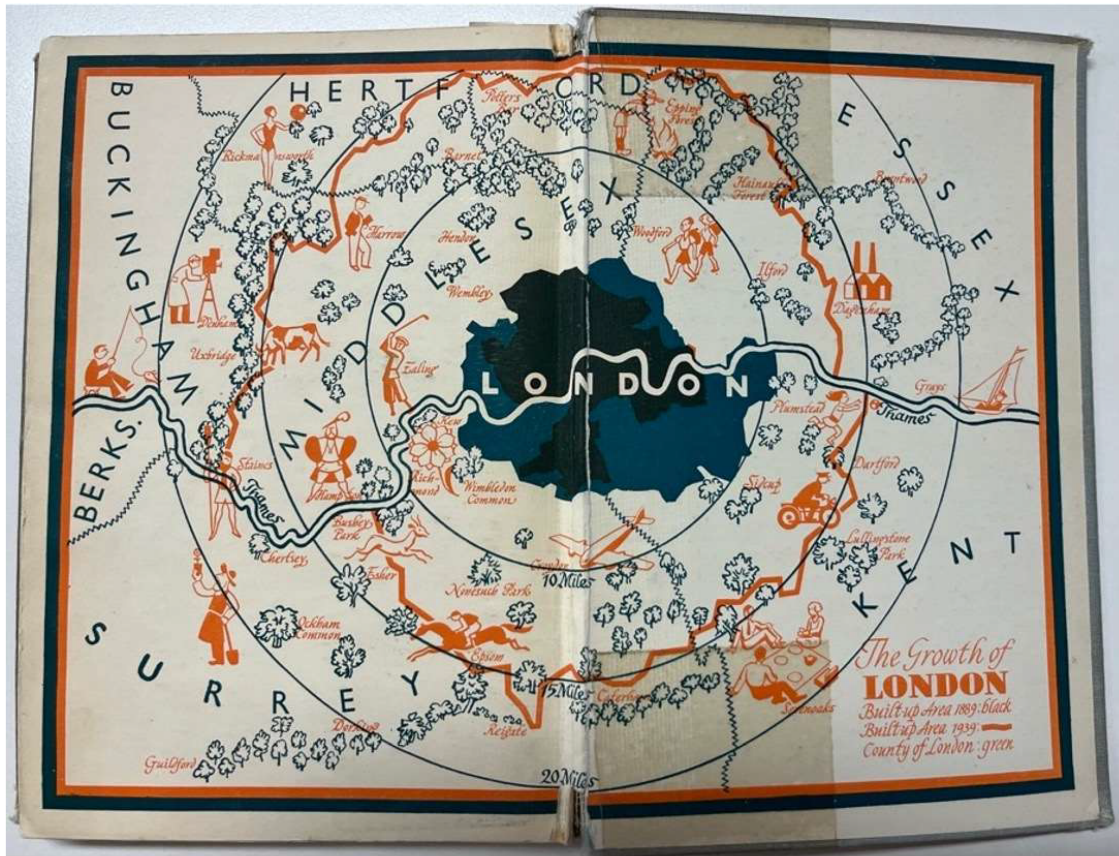
Figure 6. Details of 1928 LCC map showing block dwellings in Lambeth and Southwark and the cottage estate of St Helier in Morden, South London



The endpapers for a commemorative 1939 book *Fifty Years of the LCC*, drawn by the celebrated graphic artist Julius Kupfer-Sachs, reveal the Council's keen interest in depicting its territorial boundary (Figure 7).⁴⁰ Elaborate cartouches decorate the map's periphery, and the landscape beyond the county boundary is detailed with invitations for adventure and recreation. This was also the location of its out-county estates and subsequent satellite town developments, such as the one proposed by the LCC at Hook, Hampshire. This emptiness gives the impression of London as a distinct city, separated from

neighbouring towns, concealing the increasing reality of a regional conurbation or greater London region in which it sat.⁴¹ E. J. Carter and Ernö Goldfinger's 1945 book explaining the County of London plan of 1943 went even further, showing the county boundary as a white chalk cliff-edged island floating on a blue background.⁴²

Figure 7. Endpaper from *Fifty Years of the LCC* by S. P. B Mais, 1939⁴³

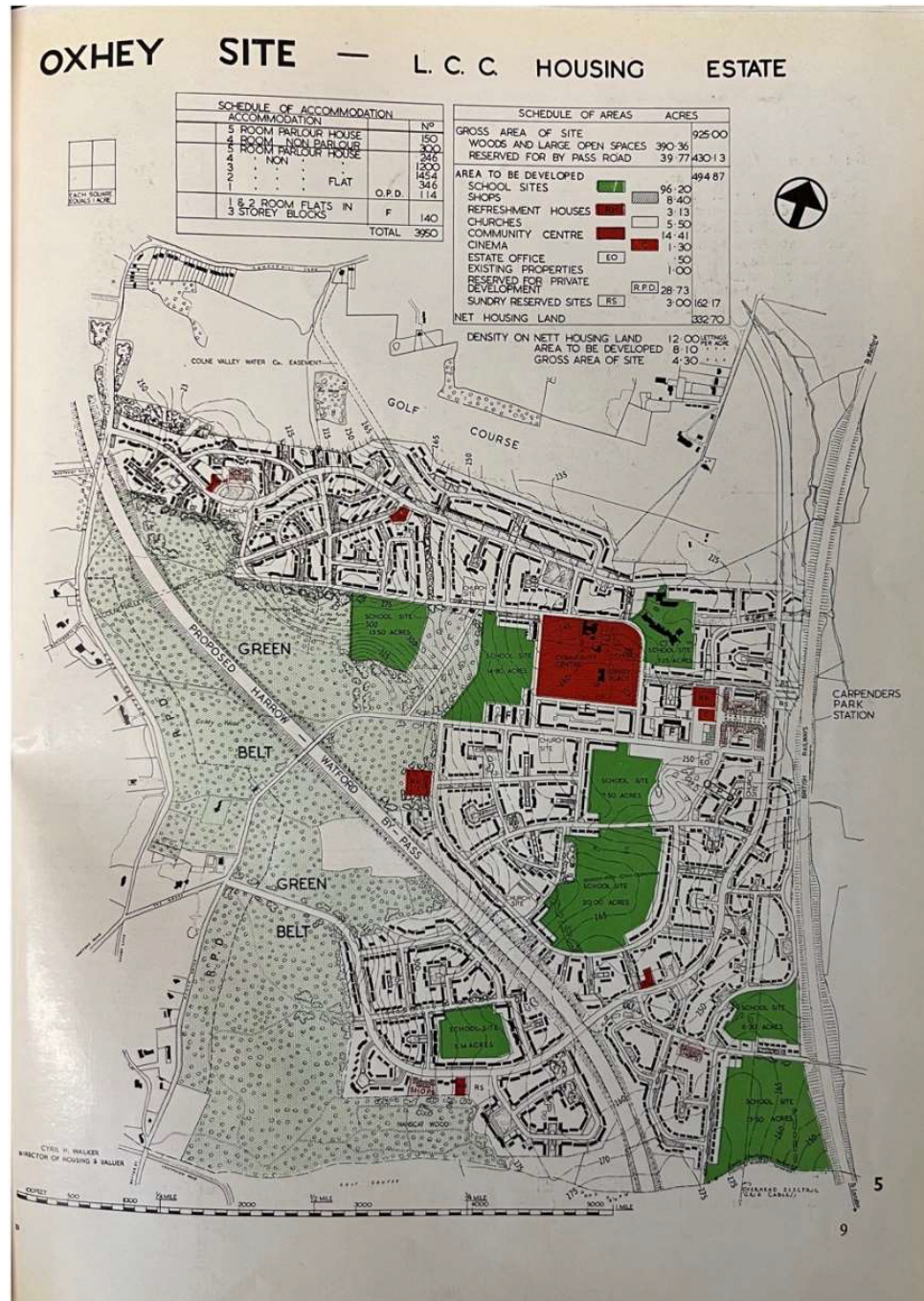


The case of the genesis of the South Oxhey Estate is particularly interesting as it involved the transformation of a landed estate into a municipal housing estate and was promoted by the LCC using an estate-style map. The Oxhey Estate lay south of Watford, just beyond the furthest extent of the London conurbation. The Estate was created out of the dissolution of the Abbey of St Albans in 1539. It had passed through several ownerships, including the W. H. Smith family (bookbinders and newsagents) in the nineteenth century, and was bought by the Blackwell family (food manufacturing) in 1877.⁴⁴ By the 1940s, it comprised the vestiges of the original grounds with houses, a chapel and other buildings. It had been included in draft plans for London's greenbelt to preserve it from development. Despite opposition, the LCC, keen to continue its pre-war programme of out-county cottage estates, bought it from the Blackwell family by compulsory purchase in 1943. After the war, they began the process of transforming it into a municipal housing estate.⁴⁵

There was widespread criticism of the LCC's feeble housing construction efforts and the lacklustre nature of its housing designs, which were still based largely on pre-war designs.⁴⁶ In 1949, most probably to counter this criticism, the Housing Division published a carefully designed book celebrating its housing work. *Housing: A Survey of the Post-War Housing Work of the London County Council 1945–1949* included flatteringly photographed housing framed by mature trees and map layouts of the new estates.⁴⁷ The work, prepared by the architect Walter Segal, included a section on Oxhey with its own estate map (Figure 8). Despite its proximity to the existing development of Carpenders Park immediately to the east and Watford to the north, the map shows a self-contained settlement rather than a suburb

or dormitory. School sites stand out in green with the street layout wrapped around them, and social facilities (pubs, community centres and a cinema) are marked out in red. The overall sense is one of a series of villages, each with its centre nestling together in an isolated countryside setting.

Figure 8. Plan of the Oxhey Estate, prepared by Walter Segal, in *Housing: A Survey of the Post War Housing Work of the London County Council 1945–1949*⁴⁸



The estate maps of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries used decorative and pictorial features to emphasise the status and wealth of the estate land and its contents, and the use of emptiness expressed unified ownership. In drawing on these stylistic elements, the LCC housing maps aligned its estates

with this longer tradition. The maps speak of their status as valued landscapes but under municipal custodianship. Kupfer-Sachs' endpaper designs replaced the hunting grounds of the seventeenth century with greenbelt leisure grounds for the working classes. Walter Segal's map of Oxhey substituted the Blackwell estate for a people's version but in the same idiom. However, where the practices of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century surveyors involved transforming the manorial estate, the creation of the municipalised estate involved starting from scratch by composing entirely new elements in the form of new road layouts and buildings informed by those former practices.

The habitus of the estate

Tracing the genealogy of the estate raises questions about how its traits are passed on. Each new iteration of the estate involves a carrying over of prior knowledge and practices, thus shaping subsequent ways of doing. Bourdieu writes:

the habitus, the product of history, produces individual and collective practice, and hence history in accordance with the schemes engendered by history. The systems of dispositions – a past which survives in the present and tends to perpetuate itself into the future by making itself present in practices structured according to its principles, an internal law relaying the continuous exercise of the law of external necessities (irreducible to immediate conjunctural constraints) – is the principle of the continuity and regularity which objectivism discerns in the social world without being able to give them rational basis.⁴⁹

Bourdieu argues that, while a habitus acts as a common sense set of dispositions, it is simultaneously a practical transposing of the deeper social structures of the cultural field in which they are played out:

If agents are possessed by their habitus more than they possess it, this is because it acts within them as the organising principle of their actions, and because this *modus operandi* informing all thought and action (including thought of action) reveals itself only in the *opus operatum*.⁵⁰

Bourdieu describes habitus as the property of social agents – individuals, groups and institutions, all with varying degrees of impact in their field. This field is a contested one: Bourdieu uses the term 'field of play' to characterise the game-like nature of the way in which individual agents negotiate for status and control and the term 'capital' to indicate the degree of power their habitus would have within the field.

Consequently, Bourdieu argues that practices, values and ethics would be held in a durable form over time, and be played out through social and cultural interactions. Habitus describes a knowing that is already within the practitioner and which allows them to successfully negotiate what Bourdieu calls the field: a conceptual space in which players struggle to accumulate different forms of capital. Bourdieu argues that habitus operates within a field of play that sanctions individual actions, and that playing takes place under an 'illusio' of believing in the game as a totality. However, play is contested within the field: there are 'rules of the game' but individuals negotiate the interpretation of these. It is a 'field of struggles' between social agents, each with their own perspective from within the field.

Applying Bourdieu's schema to this study involves considering the practices of the agent concerned with establishing and maintaining the estate – the estate surveyors, owners and so on – as forms of habitus. The agents themselves can be read as having varying degrees of capital and vying for the status of the estate as a body within the competitive field of physical territory. The actions of the defending boundaries and quantifying assets can be understood in the context of considering the estate as an agent in the contested field of land ownership and management up against other estates and forms of land tenure. Estates are built up through the incremental purchase of land; they are acquired through the exertion of power, as when lands were transferred after the dissolution of the monasteries or through colonial exploits, and, as shall be discussed here, through the compulsory purchase of land by local government.

Emptiness on the map

In 'Deconstructing the Map', J. B. Harley argues that the map is culturally constructed rather than objective and that 'maps of local estates ... were a metaphor for a social structure based on landed

property'.⁵¹ The estate map presents us with an empty wilderness *beyond the pale*, filled with decorative features, such as cartouches or a map legend. This practice of using emptiness on the map highlights that beyond the estate is not so much unknown as unvalued, presenting the appearance that everything of significance lies within the estate.⁵² The estate map thus projected the power of the estate's custodianship through the seeming impartiality of Cartesian representation, belying its nature as a social construct. The lack of content on the territory of a map speaks less of absolute emptiness; rather, it positions the undescribed land as space and its contents as without representation. Including elements beyond the boundary would raise comparisons between the value of what constitutes the estate and everything beyond. It would also raise questions about the interdependency of the two realms. Everything the estate needs appears to lie within the estate as a distinct and self-sufficient realm.

Representing the estate as an island has consequences beyond framing viewers' perceptions: in severing connections with the surrounding world, the estate is conceived of as an isolated territory with a centre, peripheries and distinct boundary edge. The geographer Robert Sack defines territoriality as 'the attempt by an individual or group to affect, influence, or control people, phenomena, and relationships by delimiting and asserting control over a geographic area'. Thus, territoriality involves a classification by area that is straightforward to enforce and use as a means of control. It is easy to communicate because it only requires one marker: the boundary. Significantly, he argues that 'territoriality provides a means of reifying power ... Territoriality makes potentials explicit and real by making them "visible"'.⁵³

In the maps of the landed estates, territoriality was visible in the landscape through marked boundaries and agricultural improvements. By contrast, territoriality had a much greater impact on municipal estates. To maintain its appearance as a privileged place, the boundary became a border to be kept clear of, ensuring separation from the surroundings. Unwin and others advised on layouts that looked inward to a central focus, thus emphasising the alignment of geographical territory with territorial domain. The advice, written in the guise of down-to-earth practicality, nevertheless reflected a habitus of historical estate mapping practices that wrapped intangible values in a physical body of territory.

The geo-body

Historian Winichakul Thongchai developed the concept of the geo-body in *Siam Mapped*, about the emergence of the nation of Siam.⁵⁴ He argued that geographical knowledge and language were instrumental in conceptualising the nation before fixed boundaries existed. His definition of the geo-body involved the embodiment of territory through cultural practices such as map-making and the subsequent geographical marking of territory. Hence, the production of place through the creation of mapped territory prefigured the physical claiming of space. The concept of the geo-body was developed with respect to nation-states. Still, there is value in examining the estate map through this lens: making an estate map embodies the practice of making an estate's geo-body.

Conceptualising geographical territory as a body allows us to consider it metaphorically as a bounded entity, with physically contained parts that belong within and a means of controlling what enters and leaves. As with the corporeal body, the geo-body has organs that regulate its existence, governing its functioning and future survival. As with the representation of the body, the heart is presumed to be at the centre, and there are the peripheral regions of lesser importance lining the boundary. If the estate map represents this geo-body, then, drawing again from Bourdieu, its habitus encompasses the many practices needed to sustain it. The habitus of the estate – its surveying and managing – transfigures the geographic imaginary into a visual, physical substantiation.

In its earliest conceptualisation of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the geo-body of the landed estate was manifested through the map and its accompanying inventories. It was simply represented through the selection of coloured fields and hedge boundaries, and, as observed with the village of Crickhowell, shown as an idealisation of settlement with the castle at its heart. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a new landed elite poured wealth from their imperial and later industrial ventures into estate habitus, creating landscapes of display from the mapped geo-body.⁵⁵ The realities of industrial and colonial systems lie greatly removed from the idealised representations of the estate map; rather, settlement is pictured in the idealised form of a comfortable village life.

Village life was synonymous with community life to the estate makers in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. While the habitus of estate fomented alienation from everything beyond the pale, there was to be harmony within the estate. Nowhere can this be seen more clearly than

in the promulgation of the estate as a vehicle for land development and, more significantly, in the municipalisation of the concept by philanthropists and local government in the design of the new cottage estates.

The cottage estate – an adapted stereotype for community making

In *Art and Illusion*, Ernst Gombrich discusses the ‘principle of the adapted stereotype’: the reliance by an artist on familiar visual elements rather than on faithful portrayal to convey the idea or concept in terms that they, and the viewers of their work, would comprehend.⁵⁶ The outcome of this adaptation is the creation of a *simile* rather than an abstraction. In Gombrich’s example, a German woodcut artist transposes their vision of a castle in describing Castel Sant’Angelo in Rome, a place they would never have visited, such that the Roman building effectively appears *like* a German castle.

This is a useful schema for considering community as an adapted stereotype, transposed from the landed estate with its village settlements of tenant farmers and labourers into the space of the cottage estate. Rather than connecting with existing communities, shops, pubs and other features of the surrounding city, the envisioned community is conceived of as drawing in on itself as an idealised and contained neighbourhood resembling visions of self-sufficiency and a social life grounded in mutual self-help kinship. Significantly, while the geo-body of the landed estate used its habitus to reshape a pre-existing landscape, the cottage estate was built from emptiness. Its planning could be entirely driven by the enduring and transposable dispositions of estate design and management that saw the estate as a body. When Unwin described how an estate should be laid out, his conception was of an assembly of elements: land, central communal features, the prudent layout of roads and so on, as being together greater than the sum of their parts. In other words, part of the value of estate lay in the good conceptualisation of the estate itself, over and above the individual elements.

Reflecting on Bourdieu’s schema, the field of play has shifted from the landed estate, where capital was the land’s productivity, to the municipal housing field, where health was the form of capital to be played for. Thus, the habitus of map-making practices intrinsic to the field of the estate impacted not only on the creation of the municipalised estate but also on the framing of concepts of community and the planning of neighbourhoods as both distinct geographical spaces and separated out social bodies. The estate and its enduring habitus became *the* means to develop capital in the field housing, particularly the cottage estate with its intrinsic reliance on landscape layout.

Robert Sack’s work on the history and theory of territory introduces the idea that it could be conceptually empty:

Territoriality in fact helps create the idea of a socially *emptiable place*. Take the parcel of vacant land in the city. It is describable as an empty lot, though it is not physically empty ... It is emptiable because it is devoid of socially or economically valuable artefacts or things that were intended to be controlled.⁵⁷

This is a different form of emptiness than that which lies beyond the estate boundary; it is an emptiness waiting to be redrawn and refilled with elements of value to the estate. The consequence of this is twofold. First, rather than embrace the messy and complex reality of a network of interconnected communities and neighbourhoods, mapping practices present the space of the new municipal estate as a separate, distinct territory. Second, the practice defines the territory as a space for new potentialities, in this case the location for an idealised and self-contained model community.

In 1919, the National Council for Social Services set up the New Estates Community Committee, a body to promote concepts of ‘village community’ in the newly constructed cottage estates around London and other UK cities.⁵⁸ Their idea of community was based on territorial notions of settlement, which could be ascribed a political dimension, as reflected in Ferdinand Toennies’s concept of community as the ‘real or organic life’.⁵⁹ The alignment of the Council’s vision of the estate community with Toennies’s concept of *Gemeinschaft* positioned it in opposition to his conception of *Gesellschaft*, embracing wider societal structures. He writes:

All intimate, private, and exclusive living together, so we discover, is understood as life in *Gemeinschaft* (community). *Gesellschaft* (society) is public life – it is the world itself. In

Gemeinschaft with one's family, one lives from birth on, bound to it in weal and woe. One goes into Gesellschaft as one goes into a strange country.⁶⁰

The estate as a kind of *Gemeinschaft* is an embodiment of an authentic vision of community and carries, on the one hand, a bulwark against the alienation of the growth of capitalism and, on the other, a romantic conservatism coddled in the folds of the English landscape. Vita Sackville-West captured this conservative ideal in her book-length poem *The Land* of 1933:⁶¹

His mind is but the map of his estate,
No broader than his acres, fenced and bound
Within the little England of his ground,
Squared neat between the hedgerows of his brain.

In Virginia Woolf's book *Orlando* of 1926, the eponymous character's estate is also a simile encompassing the enclosed wealth of the mind, the territory of the landed estate and that of England itself.⁶² In aligning the estate with the state of England, Sackville-West alludes to the prudent management of the estate as an onerous but worthy task. Like the island of which England forms part, the estate stands resolutely surrounded by emptiness.

The future of the estate

In 2018, 17 per cent of the UK population lived in social rented housing, with most of these, particularly in urban areas, comprising housing estates.⁶³ The proportion was as high as 40 per cent in the London Borough of Islington. Many housing estates continue to be owned and managed municipally, but housing associations and other non-profit social housing providers have now taken over a significant number.⁶⁴ The local authority may have retained the freehold or this may have been transferred to the alternative social housing provider. Where estate regeneration projects involve partnerships with developers, the whole estate freehold might be retained, sold off in its entirety or partially sold off.⁶⁵ The range of scenarios is complex but, invariably, the freehold of the entire estate will remain with a single landowner. In other words, the estate as such remains intact. Adding to these are new mixed developments of commercially owned freehold land with a significant proportion of housing provision for leasehold sale or social rent (often managed separately by a social housing provider). As an intact entity, the estate still represents a significant body of capital, and estate habitus plays out to keep it that way.

In these most recent turns, following Bourdieu's schema, the field of play has also shifted or perhaps returned to earlier territories: from the arena of public health back to the field of wealth generation. All the while, the habitus that has had such a significant impact on shaping past urban and suburban housing will likely continue to shape future developments. A potential game-changer would be a ban on new leasehold developments in favour of share of commonhold, leading to a new kind of estate management approach.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, in addressing the pressing housing supply issue, there will be pressure to develop large-scale solutions in marginal locations, most likely in the form of estates. Estate habitus will likely shape the design of these new places. The surveyor's phrase from the seventeenth century, 'to know one's own', suggests knowledge and ownership of territory to be fundamental practices in shaping the development of land. The question arises regarding with whom this habitus will be held and how they will use it to shape these new estates.

Notes

¹ Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture*; Hanley, *Estates*.

² Power, *Hovels to High Rise*; Power, *Estates on the Edge*; Bullock, *Movement for Housing Reform*.

³ Slater, 'Invention of the "sink estate"'.

⁴ Lewis, *Studies in Words*, 13.

⁵ Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 82.

⁶ Oxford English Dictionary, 'Estate, n'.

- ⁷ Cowper, *Task*.
- ⁸ Clemenson, *English Country Houses*, 12.
- ⁹ Thomas Gainsborough, *Mr and Mrs Andrews*, 1748–50. Thomas Gainsborough, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons. Accessed 30 May 2025. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Thomas_Gainsborough_-_Mr_and_Mrs_Andrews.jpg.
- ¹⁰ Clemenson, *English Country Houses*, 15.
- ¹¹ Craton, 'Historical roots'.
- ¹² Ulloa, *Voyage to South-America*.
- ¹³ Ulloa, *Voyage to South-America*, 31.
- ¹⁴ Parnell, *Land and Houses*.
- ¹⁵ The Housing of the Working Classes Act 1890 (53 & 54 Vict. c. 70).
- ¹⁶ The Housing of the Working Classes Act 1900 extended the powers of the Housing of the Working Classes Act 1890 to enable the local authorities to compulsorily purchase land for rehousing beyond the territory over which they had jurisdiction. The term 'out-county estates' refers to the cottage estates built by the LCC in neighbouring counties.
- ¹⁷ [54 & 55] London (Boundary Street, Bethnal Green) Provisional Order Confirmation Act 1891.
- ¹⁸ *Housing of the Working Classes in London*.
- ¹⁹ Beattie, *Revolution in London Housing*; see also Pennybacker, *Vision for London*.
- ²⁰ Parker and Unwin, *Art of Building a Home*, 97.
- ²¹ Parker and Unwin, *Art of Building a Home*, 97.
- ²² Parker and Unwin, *Art of Building a Home*, 92–3.
- ²³ Unwin, *Co-Partnership in Housing*, 9.
- ²⁴ Tudor Walters, *Report of the Committee*.
- ²⁵ Hill, *Life of Octavia Hill*, 557.
- ²⁶ Hill, *Life of Octavia Hill*, 557–8.
- ²⁷ Thompson, *Chartered Surveyors*, 16.
- ²⁸ McRae, 'To Know One's Own', 341; Harvey, 'Estate surveyors'.
- ²⁹ Johnson, *This Noble Survey*.
- ³⁰ Survey of the Manors of Crickhowell and Tretower 68v. and 69r. Map, <http://hdl.handle.net/10107/1446088>. Copied with permission from The National Library of Wales.
- ³¹ Fisher, *Enclosure of Knowledge*.
- ³² Whyte, *Landscape and History*.
- ³³ N. Vergnaud, *L'Art de Créer les Jardins*, Paris, 1835. CC0 1.0 Universal Public Domain Dedication. Accessed 30 May 2025. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:A_new_and_accurate_plan_of_Blenheim_Palace_-_L%27Art_de_Cr%C3%A9er_les_Jardins_\(1835\),_pl._1_-_BL.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:A_new_and_accurate_plan_of_Blenheim_Palace_-_L%27Art_de_Cr%C3%A9er_les_Jardins_(1835),_pl._1_-_BL.jpg).
- ³⁴ Bryant, *Andrew Young*. Andrew Young, fellow of the Surveyors Institute, was the LCC's first valuer, holding the post from 1889 to 1914. He is commemorated in a plaque on Bush House with the epitaph 'HE LABOURED TO BEAUTIFY THE LONDON HE LOVED'.
- ³⁵ Watkin, *History of Western Architecture*, 532.
- ³⁶ Harvey, *Model Village and Its Cottages*.
- ³⁷ Cadbury, *Town Planning*.
- ³⁸ London County Council, *London County Council Map Showing Housing Estates 1928*. The London Archives (City of London Corporation), LCC/HSG/GEN/03/007 from the London County Council Collection.
- ³⁹ LCC map showing block dwellings and cottage estates 1928. The London Archives (City of London Corporation), LCC/HSG/GEN/03/007 from the London County Council Collection. Reproduced under licence from the London Archives (City of London Corporation).
- ⁴⁰ Julius Kupfer-Sachs was a successful commercial artist in the film industry in the 1920s and 1930s. His work included posters for Dziga Vertov's *Man with the Movie Camera* (1929) and Alexander Korda's *Things to Come* (1936). Mais, *Fifty Years of the L.C.C.*
- ⁴¹ Young and Garside, *Metropolitan London*, 273.
- ⁴² Carter and Goldfinger, *County of London Plan Explained*.
- ⁴³ Endpaper from Mais, *Fifty Years of the L.C.C.* Now in the public domain.
- ⁴⁴ Reidy, *Poor but Proud*; see also Goldfinger, *Planning Your Neighbourhood*.
- ⁴⁵ Saint, *Politics and the People of London*, 231.

- ⁴⁶ Bullock, 'Ideals, priorities and harsh realities'.
- ⁴⁷ *Housing. A Survey*.
- ⁴⁸ Plan of the Oxhey Estate, prepared by Walter Segal, in *Housing. A Survey*. Now in the public domain.
- ⁴⁹ Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 18.
- ⁵⁰ Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 18.
- ⁵¹ Harley, 'Deconstructing the map'.
- ⁵² Campbell, Giovine and Keating, *Empty Spaces*.
- ⁵³ Sack, *Human Territoriality*, 19, 32.
- ⁵⁴ Winichakul, *Siam Mapped*.
- ⁵⁵ Barczewski, *Country Houses*.
- ⁵⁶ Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*, 61.
- ⁵⁷ Sack, *Human Territoriality*, 33.
- ⁵⁸ Olechnowicz, *Working-Class Housing*, 138.
- ⁵⁹ Toennies, *Community & Society*, 33–4.
- ⁶⁰ Toennies, *Community & Society*, 33–4.
- ⁶¹ Sackville-West, *The Land*.
- ⁶² Woolf, *Orlando*; Whyte, *Landscape and History*, 79. Whyte discusses the analogy between the running of rural estates and that of the kingdom as a whole.
- ⁶³ 'Housing, England and Wales'. Pawson, Mullins and Gilmour, *After Council Housing*; 'Registered providers of social housing'. Accessed 17 March 2025. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/registered-providers-of-social-housing>.
- ⁶⁴ Pawson, Mullins and Gilmour, *After Council Housing*; 'Registered providers of Social Housing'. Accessed 17 March 2025. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/registered-providers-of-social-housing>.
- ⁶⁵ 'Estate Regeneration Sourcebook'. Accessed 17 March 2025. <https://www.urbandesignlearning.com/resources/publications/details?recordId=rec3Th9CCutZO9mx6>; 'Better homes for local people'. Accessed 17 March 2025. <https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/better-homes-for-local-people-the-mayors-good-practice-guide-to-estate-regeneration.pdf>; Watt, *Estate Regeneration*; Boughton, *Municipal Dreams*.
- ⁶⁶ 'Centuries-old leasehold system to be abolished in England and Wales'. Accessed 17 March 2025. <https://www.theguardian.com/money/2025/mar/03/centuries-old-leasehold-system-to-be-abolished-in-england-and-wales>.

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