

Homes Fit For Heroines

The influence of the Women's Housing Sub-committee
on domestic architecture in the UK after WW1

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Abstract

This thesis explores the influence of the Women's Housing Sub-Committee (WHSC) on domestic architecture in the UK after the First World War. Formed in 1918 as part of the Ministry of Reconstruction, the WHSC aimed to adapt housing to better reflect the changing roles of women, especially working-class women, after the war. The committee focused on practical improvements in housing design, such as functional layouts, modern amenities, and better hygiene, to reduce the physical burden of household work.

By analysing reports, policy documents, and design recommendations, this thesis shows how the WHSC helped shift housing policy to include women's perspectives. It argues that the committee played a key role in redefining the home as a space not only for domestic work, but also for citizenship and public life. Their work laid the foundation for more inclusive housing policy in the decades that followed.

Key words:

AR2A011, Women's Housing Sub-Committee, post-war housing, domestic architecture, gender and housing, British reconstruction, working women, feminist housing reform

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01

Introduction

01

Introduction

The end of World War I marked a turning point in British history, bringing social change, economic reconstruction, and cultural transformation. One of the most significant shifts was in the role of women, who gained greater influence in politics, labour, and domestic life. This influence became particularly visible in housing and domestic architecture. In response to the urgent housing crisis and changing gender roles, the government established the Women's Housing Sub-Committee (WHSC) under the Ministry of Reconstruction in 1917. Its mission was to improve living conditions, and adapt housing to better suit the evolving needs of working women (Cowman, 2015).

Prime Minister David Lloyd George famously promised to “make Britain a fit country for heroes to live in” (“Our Story – A Land Fit for Heroes,” n.d.), but as Rowan (1982) notes, this vision also extended to women, resulting in calls for “homes fit for heroines.” The WHSC played a key role in turning this vision into reality. Made up largely of female architects, planners, and social reformers, the committee championed housing designs that focused on functionality, hygiene, and affordability, especially for working-class families. For many of these women, it was a rare opportunity to shape domestic architecture—an area typically led by men.

This thesis explores the influence of the WHSC on domestic architecture in the UK after WWI. It focuses on how the committee addressed women's changing roles and how it worked to adapt housing accordingly. By analysing the WHSC's contributions, this study aims to highlight how domestic architecture was reshaped to meet the everyday needs of working women.

The central research question is: What was the influence of the Women's Housing Sub-Committee on domestic architecture after WWI in the UK? To answer this, a number of sub-questions will be explored. Drawing on primary sources such as government reports, housing plans, and archival materials, this study will assess the committee's impact on both policy and design.

The thesis is divided into five chapters. First, the housing context in the UK before WWI will be outlined. Next, the formation and guiding principles of the WHSC will be discussed. This is followed by an analysis of their influence on post-war housing designs, using specific examples. The fourth chapter will explore their long-term legacy. Finally, a conclusion will be drawn.

By placing the WHSC within the broader context of gender and architectural history, this thesis brings attention to an often-overlooked part of Britain's post-war reconstruction. It aims to contribute to ongoing discussions around the role of women in shaping the built environment, and how housing policies intersected with gender and social change.

02

Historical context

Prior to World War 1, the United Kingdom experienced some significant transformations in housing conditions and societal roles, particularly with the women's positions within domestic spaces. The war further accelerated these changes, leading to a needed evaluation of British housing needs and working-women's roles in society.

This chapter will take a deeper look into the historical context of the housing conditions prior to WW1 and after, in combination with the changing roles of women in domestic spaces. With this chapter, the next question can be asked to conclude: What were the main housing challenges for women before and after WW1 in the UK and what started the change in women's housing needs?

2.1 Housing conditions before WW1 in the UK

2.1.1 Housing shortage and poor living conditions

In the period leading up to WW1, A severe housing shortage came into being, triggered by a rapid industrialization and urbanization, especially for the working class (Dyos, 1967). This also came with poor living conditions, such as deficient sanitation, overcrowding and other substandard living conditions, especially in big industrial cities such as London (Wohl, 1977). Slum-like housing developments came into being, caused by the lack of regulation on private landlords, causing families to live in single-room dwellings with shared facilities (Kemp, 1988). With the poor hygiene and lack of access to clean water, a lot of diseases were prevalent such as cholera, Tuberculosis and typhoid (Dyos, 1967). The governments interventions were minimal, introducing acts such as the Public Health acts and the Housing and Town Planning Act of 1909, which had not made a significant impact yet (Powell, 1996). Subsequently, the war caused the housing conditions to even deteriorate more, highlighting the influence of the Rent and Mortgage Interest Act in 1915, where the rents got restricted at the time of rising prices, causing the government to break the market (White, 2018). In the period of 1911 till 1921, the housing stock only increased with an amount under 300.000 houses, whereas the number of households increased with an amount of 1.100.000, causing a great housing shortage (Holmans, 2021).

2.1.2 Traditional roles of women in domestic spaces

Before WW1, women were primarily assigned to a domestic role, where they had to maintain domestic order, care for their children and support their husband, who provided the family with money (Beeton, 1861). Middle- and upper-class women managed larger households and supervised servants, while working-class women often had to combine domestic responsibilities with low-paid work (Daunton, 1990). This amplifies the idea of "The Angel in the House", a Victorian concept described in a British poem by Coventry Patmore, where he describes his wife to be the ideal Victorian wife (Hoffman, 2007). However, the rigid separation of gender roles caused housing to be primarily designed for households led by men, with little consideration for the needs of working women. Domestic spaces and kitchens were often inefficient, lacking modern utilities, what made household labor time-consuming and physically demanding (Furniss & Phillips, 1919).

2.2 Impact of WW1 on housing and society in the UK

2.2.1 the demand for new housing due to population changes

WW1 resulted in widespread demographic shifts. Many men left for military services, leaving the women at home to become the head of the household (Calow, 1991). In Addition to that, the war, destruction, internal migration and the return of soldiers created an urgent need for housing (Rosenfeld, Allen & Okoro, 2016). As Prime Minister David Lloyd George famously promised: "make Britain a fit country for heroes

to live in” (“Our Story – A Land Fit for Heroes,” n.d.). The war caused Britain to face a significant housing crisis, with a housing stock too small to accommodate both the returning veterans and the families who had been left behind (Dyos, 1967). In response to the housing crisis, the government introduced in 1919 the Housing and Town Planning Act, known as the ‘Addison act’, which promised a massive programme of housing construction to provide affordable, high-quality housing for working-class families (White, 2018). This marked a shift in the government’s involvement with housing, addressing the long-standing problems of overcrowding and poor living conditions (Wohl, 1977).

2.2.2 the changing Position of women in society during and after WW1 in the UK

With the start of WW1, it was necessary for women to take over the roles traditionally done by men, as men were depleted due to conscription (Grayzel, 2002). Women took over various jobs, including factory work, transportation, and clerical jobs, challenging pre-existing gender norms (Marwick, 1967). This shift not only showed women’s capabilities in different working fields but also started the changing perceptions of gender roles in society (Braybon & Summerfield, 1987).

The war also led to legislative changes that began to redefine women’s roles in society. The Representation of the People Act in 1918 granted voting rights to women over 30 who met minimum property qualifications (Smith, 2014). This was a big step towards gender equality in the UK and also started a broader recognition of women’s role in the workforce (Pugh, 2000).

In the domestic space, housing design and functionality were influenced by the changing roles of women. With more women working in paid employment, there was a growing need for homes that accommodated their working lives (Rosenfeld, Allen & Okoro, 2016). This period meant the establishment of the Women’s Housing Sub-Committee, which advocated for housing designs that take into account the needs of working women, including efficient layouts and modern amenities to reduce the burden of household chores (Cowman, 2015).

In summary, the era before the WW1 in the UK was characterized by deficient housing and rigid gender roles, confining women to domestic tasks. WW1 started a change, leading to an increased demand for housing and a revaluation of women’s roles in the workforce and at within domestic spaces. These changes formed the basis for important social changes in the post-war period, affecting housing policy and the evolution of gender roles in British society (Pugh, 2000).

2.3 Conclusion

Before WWI, housing in the UK was deficient, particularly for working-class families, and women were expected to manage domestic responsibilities without proper materials. The war started changes in population dynamics and gender roles, leading to a revaluation of housing needs. The beginning of women’s participation in the workforce started discussions on how domestic spaces should provide for these women. The state’s increasing involvement in housing policies, together with support for groups such as the Women’s Housing Sub-Committee, made way for improved living conditions and more inclusive housing designs. This chapter highlighted how WW1 acted as a turning point, forcing both government and society to recognize the need for housing that supported the changing roles of women in post-war Britain.

03

Women's housing sub-committee

Women's Housing Sub-Committee

In the aftermath of World War 1, Britain not only faced a housing shortage, but also a broader assessment of how domestic life was structured inside the traditional family housing, particularly for women. As the rebuilding of the houses after WW1 began, it became clear that traditional housing models no longer met the changing needs of families, especially those of working-class and working women. This moment marked the start of the Women's Housing Sub-committee (WHSC), a part of the Ministry of Reconstruction in 1917. The group was formed to ensure women's perspectives were included in post-war housing policies and designs.

This chapter will take a broader look into the establishment and the mission of the WHSC, asking the following questions: What was the motivation for the founding of the Women's Housing Sub-committee, and what were its primary goals? Who were the key members of the Women's Housing Sub-committee, and what were their backgrounds and what expertise did they have? How did the Women's Housing Sub-committee influence post-war housing policies in the UK? Through these questions, this chapter tries to uncover the methods and missions of the committee.

3.1 Establishment and objectives

3.1.1 the founding and mission of the Women's Housing Sub-committee

In the aftermath of WWI, the United Kingdom faced a severe housing shortage, aggravated by the return of servicemen and the significant social shifts brought about by the war, especially the changing role of women while most men had military service. In response, the government established the Ministry of Reconstruction in 1917 to address the many challenges of rebuilding. Within it, several sub-committees were formed, including the Women's Housing Sub-Committee (WHSC), created in 1918. Its purpose was to ensure that women's experiences were reflected in housing policies and design, particularly given their expanded roles during the war (Cowman, 2015).

As many men were called up for military service, women stepped into traditionally male roles, as seen in figure 1, prompting a re-evaluation of their place in society. Housing, in turn, needed to reflect this shift. As Sanderson Furniss and Phillips stated: "Let her first effort of citizenship be to improve this home" (Sanderson Furniss & Phillips, 1919). The WHSC responded by promoting housing designs that supported women's domestic work while also acknowledging their growing presence in public and working life (Cowman, 2015; Giles, 1993).

The committee was made up of well-known women active in social reform, including Lady Gertrude Emmott, Maud Pember Reeves, and Dr. Marion Phillips. Pember Reeves and Phillips were already known for *Round About a Pound a Week*, a study that exposed the everyday struggles of working-class women (Municipal Dreams, 2020). Their insights brought valuable knowledge about women's living and working conditions into the committee's work. As Giles

(1993) explains, the post-war period marked a time when women began shaping domestic space not just as residents, but as political voices advocating for meaningful change.

The WHSC aimed to create housing that acknowledged the realities of women's lives. Their recommendations included modern features such as indoor plumbing, gas stoves, and better ventilation to improve hygiene and reduce physical effort. The committee also highlighted the need for housing estates to be



Figure 1, Munitionettes: 950,000 female workers were employed in British factories, including this worker, pictured making shell cases in a Vickers factory in January 1915. Source: Styles, 2013.

located near schools, shops, and public transport—helping women to manage domestic tasks alongside work and public responsibilities (Cowman, 2015; Sanderson Furniss & Phillips, 1919).

Besides the WHSC, other voluntary women's organisations played an important role in campaigning for better housing. As Beaumont (2012) notes, groups such as The Mothers' Union, the Catholic Women's League, the National Federation of Women's Institutes, and the National Council of Women were active in pushing the government to consider the needs of working women. They viewed decent housing as a basic right and a key part of full citizenship, not a luxury.

By bringing women's voices into housing debates, the WHSC helped to reshape how homes were viewed. Domestic space was no longer seen as purely private, but as a political concern central to post-war reconstruction. It became clear that housing and everyday domestic life were closely tied to wider social and economic developments in post-war Britain.

3.1.2 Key members and their backgrounds

The WHSC was established with a small but powerful group of women who were already well-known for their work in social reform and housing activism. These members brought diverse backgrounds into the committee with an already deep understanding of the daily struggles of working-class women and a clear political mission to improve their living conditions. Through a combination of research, advocacy and personal experience, they shaped the work of the committee in a way that made it practical and politically correct.

One of the most important member of the WHSC was **Marion Phillips**, serving as the committee's secretary. With a strong background in both politics and social research, she was already committed to improving living conditions for working-class women. Before her involvement in the WHSC, she played a central role in The Women's Labour League and, and mentioned earlier, together with Maud Pember Reeves she wrote the book 'Round About a Pound a Week' where they studied the everyday struggles of working-class women. Her political experience combined with her previous experiences made her an essential member of the WHSC (Rowan, 1982; Cowman, 2015).

Another leading member of the WHSC, and a co-author of the book 'Round About a Pound a Week' is **Maud Pember Reeves**. As a member of the Fabian Society, Pember Reeves had been active for a while in debates about social inequality and women's rights. Her research focused on how economic pressures shaped the lives of working-class women, especially with managing a household with an extremely limited income. She showed how housing of poor quality and a lack of basic services, like indoor plumbing or proper ventilation made even basic domestic work a real struggle. Her contributions to the WHSC ensured that these realities stayed central to the committee's housing recommendations (Cowman, 2015).

Lady Gertrude Emmott brought a different, but also important perspective in the WHSC. With a background in the upper classes of society and with strong connections to local and national politics, provided the committee with valuable connections and a way for the committee to influence the housing policies at higher governmental levels. Her connections helped push the committee's ideas into political debates. While Phillips and Reeves focused more on the community-based research and activism, Emmott's strength was mostly in networking and the visibility of the committee and to make sure the voices of women were heard in political discussions about post-war housing (Cowman, 2015).

Together, these three women reflected the broad collections of strengths, that made up the WHSC. Each woman with a slightly different background, but they all shared a common goal: to improve the lives of women through better housing. The combination of practical knowledge, political strategies and personal commitment made the WHSC a powerful committee during the reconstruction period.



Figure 2, Portrait of Marion Phillips. Source: Lafayette, 1929.



Figure 3, Portrait of Maud Pember Reeves. Source: Simkin, 1997.



Figure 4, Portrait of Gertrude Emmott. Source: Municipal Dreams, 2020.

3.2 Principles and recommendations

The principles and recommendations of the committee were shaped by a strong awareness of the struggles many women endured during the day in running a household. Their aim was to push for housing that was not only practical and easy to manage with less unnecessary movements to minimize the time-consuming part of household labour, but also hygienic, affordable and better suited to do household tasks. As Beaumont (2012) explains, good housing was not about giving shelter to families, it was about supporting the physical and emotional well-being, especially for women who had to carry the burden of domestic care.

Functionality was a key part of their vision. The WHSC recommended that the layout of a house should minimize unnecessary movements and therefore minimize the time-consuming part of household labour. For instance, they proposed the strategic placement of the kitchen next to the dining and living areas. This would allow women to move more easily between cooking, serving and caring for their children. They also proposed that kitchens should be compact but well-equipped, with everything in reach to reduce unnecessary movement and thus waste of time. This also included the kitchen counters being at a suitable height and clear pathways between the kitchen, scullery and pantry. In many older houses, these areas were poorly connected or far apart, leading to extra unnecessary walking (Giles, 1993). According to Sanderson Furniss and Phillips (1919), housing designs must consider “the working woman’s point of view”, not just how the house looked from the outside.

Another recommendation the WHSC made, was the use of built-in features. Rather than having large and expensive furniture, they argued for built-in cupboards, shelves and storage spaces. These additions would help women to keep their living spaces tidy without taking extra space. According to Cowman (2015), these features would contribute to a sense of order in the house.

Simplicity was just as important as the functionality. The WHSC believed that home spaces should be simple and easy to clean and maintain. They advocated for the use of materials that would require less time and effort to maintain. For instance, a smooth flooring that could easily be cleaned or windows that could easily be opened and cleaned.

The WHSC also proposed to downsize gardens in working-class housing. While outdoor space was seen as important for fresh air and a place for children to play, the committee saw that a large garden could be another source of labour for women to maintain. They suggested to downsize the gardens to make them more manageable, still with the benefits of the outdoor space (Sanderson Furniss & Phillips, 1919).

Hygiene was also a big concern for the WHSC. Their ideas to improve hygiene were closely tied to the upcoming public recognition of the importance of good hygiene for the health of people, which recognised the role that housing played in spreading or preventing diseases. They advocated for the inclusion of basic sanitation like indoor toilets, bathrooms and a proper drainage system to promote cleanliness and reduce the health risks. Next to plumbing, they also paid attention to the materials used inside the house. For example, floors and surfaces could be made of durable and easy-to-clean materials so that keeping hygiene could be maintained without much effort (Sanderson Furniss & Phillips, 1919).

Also lighting and ventilation became an important aspect. Well-lit and airy rooms were not just pleasant, but healthier too. Natural light and proper ventilation helped reduce dampness and mold and improved the air quality, both important in preventing illness (Cowman, 2015)

Affordability was another key priority. The committee was fully aware that many working families couldn’t afford decent housing and that the costs of housing was a major barrier to improve living standards. According to them, housing shouldn’t be a privilege, but a basic right. One way they hoped to reduce the costs, was through standardizing room sizes and shapes. With this, they aimed to simplify the construction process and to reduce the number of materials needed to reduce the amount of labour with building a house. This would make homes quicker and easier to build, without having a negative effect on the quality and to make mass housing, that was thoughtfully designed, easier (Cowman, 2015).

Their ideas to improve affordability of housing went beyond design. They also supported changes to how

housing was funded. The WHSC advocated for government support in the form of subsidies and supported the idea of housing cooperatives, where people could share resources and share the ownership costs (Beaumont, 2012). These proposals showed that the committee did not just want to change the way homes were built, but also to change the system that decided who could afford housing.

The WHSC also advocated for designers to think beyond the individual house and consider the design of the whole neighbourhood. They supported including shared facilities like laundries and childcare centres within neighbourhoods, features that could make a difference for women struggling to combine domestic work with outside tasks (Cowman, 2015). These spaces would not only provide practical help, but also a sense of community and mutual support.

3.3 Influence on housing policies

The Women's Housing Sub-Committee (WHSC) played a key role in shaping post-WWI housing design, going beyond advice to influence actual policy. One major example was the 1918 Tudor Walters Report, which echoed many of the WHSC's recommendations, like low-density suburban housing, homes with three bedrooms, private gardens, and improved sanitation to make daily life more practical and hygienic (Tudor Walters Report, 1918; Ravetz, 2001).

While the WHSC wasn't directly credited, historians have noted its strong influence. The report's focus on kitchen placement, ventilation, and easing domestic labor aligned closely with WHSC suggestions aimed at improving women's day-to-day experience at home (Furniss & Phillips, 1919; Gullace, 2002).

The WHSC also helped frame housing as a social issue deeply tied to women's lives. As Cowman (2015) points out, their work ensured that women's voices shaped post-war housing debates. Their ideas also informed the 1919 Addison Act, the first time the state took formal responsibility for working-class housing. Though the WHSC didn't write the act, their emphasis on hygiene, functionality, and access to services helped shape what was built (Cowman, 2015).

Women's groups like the Women's Co-operative Guild and the National Council of Women continued this work, ensuring that housing remained a political and gendered issue (Beaumont, 2012). Thanks to their efforts, the home came to be seen not just as a private space, but as central to health, citizenship, and social progress.

Although the WHSC stopped meeting in the early 1920s, their legacy endured. Later policies, like the 1944 Dudley Report and the 1960s Parker Morris Standards, continued their focus on wellbeing and everyday practicality (Giles, 1995; Ravetz, 2001).

In short, the WHSC helped shift how people thought about housing in Britain. To connect women's lived experiences to planning and policy, they helped build a more inclusive and thoughtful approach to housing that would shape British homes for many more years to come.

3.4 Conclusion

The Women's Housing Sub-Committee (WHSC) played a crucial but often overlooked role in shaping post-WWI housing policy in Britain. Formed in 1918 under the Ministry of Reconstruction, the WHSC represented a groundbreaking effort to centre women's lived experiences—particularly working-class women—within housing policy at a time of major social change (Cowman, 2015).

Led by key figures such as Marion Phillips, Maud Pember Reeves, and Lady Gertrude Emmott, the WHSC combined grassroots input, political strategy, and policy expertise to challenge traditional ideas of the home. For them, the house was not just a shelter but a vital space where citizenship, health, and gender roles intersected (Giles, 1993). Their activism built on earlier work like *Round About a Pound a Week*, which exposed the realities of domestic life for working women (Municipal Dreams, 2020).

The WHSC promoted homes that were functional, affordable, and hygienic—drawing on surveys, community research, and publications such as *The Working Woman's House* (Cowman, 2015). Their recommendations, from built-in kitchen features to manageable gardens and communal laundries, reflected an understanding of women's daily routines. Crucially, they also extended this vision beyond the house itself, advocating for access to schools, shops, and transport (Sanderson Furniss & Phillips, 1919).

Though the WHSC was short-lived, its legacy was significant. Its ideas influenced major reforms like the 1918 Tudor Walters Report and the 1919 Addison Act, embedding women's concerns into national housing policy (Beaumont, 2012).

In redefining the home as a space of social reform and public concern, the WHSC helped reshape British housing through a gendered lens—marking a key moment in the history of domestic architecture and feminist policy-making.

04

Influence on domestic architecture



The Women's Housing Sub-committee recognised that traditional housing no longer supported the everyday needs of a modern family life at home, and they proposed a range of design changes aimed at especially improving women's lives at home. The design of homes after WW1 was guided by a need for practicality, speeds and affordability. The WHSC helped shape the design with their recommendations, leading to the inclusion of features that were intended to address the changing roles of women in the home. Key changes were standardized layouts, modern facilities and flexible living spaces that better suited the needs of contemporary families.

This chapter explores how their recommendations shaped domestic architecture after the war. It will investigate examples and how their recommendations were implemented in housing design and the following question will be asked: What specific recommendations or proposals were made by the Women's Housing Sub-committee to address women's changed needs in housing?

4.1 Characteristics of post-war architectural designs

4.1.1 *Standardization of housing layouts*

The housing shortage in Britain after WW1 required a quick and practical response, and one of the main responses was the mass production of standardized houses. The Addison Act of 1919 supported this process, which facilitated the construction of large numbers of state-funded homes that could be produced efficiently and at a low cost. These houses were generally based on the principles of the Tudor Walters Report (1918), which aimed to provide affordable, healthy housing for the working-class families. These homes were typically simple and modest, but well-ventilated, separate kitchens, living areas and bathrooms.

However, while the inclusion of standardized layouts helped solve the housing crisis, it often ignored the needs of the women who would be managing these homes. The layouts and spatial arrangements reflected older ideas about gender roles, where for instance the kitchen remained a small, hidden and impractical space at the back of the house. As Cowman (2015) argues, although these housing designs were made to be functional, they did not always consider the everyday experiences of women. The WHSC recognized this and advocated for better, more thoughtful designs, that would ease domestic labour and include modern amenities.

4.1.2 *The incorporation of modern facilities like running water, kitchens and bathrooms*

One of the most important changes in post-war domestic architecture, was the widespread inclusion of modern amenities such as indoor plumbing, running water and separate bathrooms. These features were not only practical improvements, but they also reflected the wider awareness that women's domestic work needed to be made easier and more efficient.

Before the war, many working-class houses lacked the basic amenities. Tasks like collecting and heating water or cooking in tight, badly ventilated kitchens made daily life physically demanding. The inclusion of the modern features helped ease that burden, saving time and improving hygiene and thus health. As Braybon and Summerfield (1987) argue, these changes were as much a feminist issue as a public health one. The WHSC saw that improving the home was a way to improve women's lives, both inside and outside the house. These improvements were a part of a broader shift in how society viewed women's roles, not only as homemakers but as workers and citizen too (Dreams, 2020).

4.2 Changing role of women in housing design

4.2.1 *The shift from traditional to functional living spaces*

Before WW1, domestic spaces were mostly defined by strict gender roles: Men worked outside the house and women were expected to do household duties inside the house. However, as women became more involved in public life, the traditional model of domesticity needed change too. The WHSC argued for a redesign of homes, to better reflect women's new roles as workers, citizens and mothers.

This shift was reflected in housing designs that moved away from rigid, separate rooms and instead created more open and flexible spaces, that could be adapted to a variety of purposes. These changes were practical, making homes easier to manage, but they also had a deeper meaning. They were a symbol of the shift in how women were seen. Not just as housewives, but as active participants in both public and private spheres (Hoffman, 2007).

4.2.2 *The Kitchen: from isolation to engine of the home*

The kitchen was one of the most significant areas that needed to be redesigned after the war. Traditionally the kitchen was a dark, isolated space located at the back of the house, cut off from the rest of the living spaces and often poorly ventilated. The kitchens were designed with very little considerations for the women who spent hours working there each day. The WHSC proposed that the kitchen would be treated as a proper, functional and efficient workspace and thoughtfully designed to make everyday tasks easier.

In *The Working Woman's House*, Sanderson Furniss and Phillips (1919) laid out a vision for a kitchen as a well-organized, functional room with everything in its place to not waste time or effort. The new vision of the kitchen made way for the post-war kitchens with focus on efficiency and ease of movement, like the "Galley kitchen" for instance. As Giles (1993) points out. The redesign of the kitchen was not only for practical reasons, but they also represented a statement where women's domestic work was seen as real labour (Dreams, 2020).

4.2.3 *The Parlour: from formal to functional*

Before the First World War, the parlour was a formal, rarely used space, meant for guests and special occasions rather than daily life. It was maintained by women, reinforcing ideals of domestic respectability rather than function (Giles, 1995). After the war, the WHSC questioned the value of such a space and encouraged its transformation into a practical and lively room (Cowman, 2015). In post-war designs, the parlour became more open and flexible, often merging with dining or family spaces to suit modern life (Ravetz, 2001). Designers like Marion Phillips prioritised comfort and everyday usability over formality or status (Sanderson Furniss & Phillips, 1919).

4.2.4 *The bedroom: from communal to private space*

In the years after WW1, the bedroom began to shift from a purely functional, often shared space to one of privacy and personal autonomy—especially for women. As homes started to reflect the needs of working women, bedrooms became more than just places to sleep. They offered room for reading, writing, or simply resting away from shared family spaces (Crow & Allan, 1994). This subtle change mirrored broader shifts in gender roles and domestic life. Giving women their own space challenged traditional views of domesticity (Highmore, 2010). As Langhamer (2005) argues, the bedroom became a place where private desires could exist besides the demands of a family.

4.2.5 *The Bathroom: from Utility to Hygiene and privacy*

After the WW1, indoor bathrooms became normalized, and this marked a significant shift in domestic architecture. Before WW1, shared or outdoor facilities were common, which were unhygienic. In response to a growing public health concern, particularly after the flu pandemic in 1918, housing reformers advocated for private bathrooms inside the homes, as necessary for health and dignity (Svenarton, 1981). The bathroom evolved from a functional space to a symbol of modernity, privacy and female respectability, aligning with net hygiene standards (Wohl, 1983). This change in bathrooms reduces domestic labour and reflected a broader societal investment in sanitation and welfare.

4.2.6 The Hallway and Entrance: from formal to functional

The hallway or entrance area played secretly an important role in post-war housing design. Traditionally, entranceways were imagined reflecting the priorities of order, control and privacy, particularly for women who were managing both practical and social aspects of the home. A well-designed hallway would minimize disruption by separating private spaces from visitors and delivery services, giving women more control over household interactions (Attfield, 1999). The hallway marked a boundary between public and private spaces, reinforcing the idea of the home as a controlled, respectable space.

4.2.7 The Utility room: from separate service to streamlined space

In the modernization of post-war housing, there was a shift in the design of the utility room. While kitchens became more the centre of daily life, utility rooms were designed to handle the dirty and hard work like ironing and washing (Attfield, 1999). This was especially important for women who still had to do the hard domestic tasks, despite the growing workforce participation. By separating these messy tasks from family life, utility rooms improved hygiene and organization. Inspired by WHSC ideals, these spaces reflected the view of the home as a “working system” (Swenarton, 1981), recognizing and supporting women’s labour.

4.3 Recommendations on Housing design

4.3.1 ‘The Working Woman’s House’

According to Averil Sanderson Furniss and Marion Phillips, the end of the war and the beginning of the housing reconstruction provided a crucial opportunity to redesign homes from the working woman’s point of view. According to them, a home is a woman’s place, therefore they must also change the home to their desires. “She wants her house to be fit for a hero to live in, but she wants also to free herself from that continuous toil which is the result of the bad housing conditions of the past, and has prevented her from taking her full share of work as a citizen, wife and mother (Sanderson Furniss & Phillips, 1919).

In the book ‘The Working Woman’s House’, Sanderson Furniss and Marion Phillips, members of the Women’s Labour League, describe how a four-page leaflet was prepared with a set of 18 questions asked to women in the United Kingdom. They state: “On page 14 a few questions are asked, but these are only a few of the points which will occur to every woman. What we ask of you who read this is that you should answer the questions and add further comments. Please send you answers to Mrs. Sanderson Furniss, secretary of the Women’s Housing Sub-Committee” (Sanderson Furniss & Phillips, 1919). These questions were asked by women of the Women’s Labour League to further influence the work of the WHSC (Municipal Dreams, 2020). It concerns the next questions:

1. What are the chief defects of your house?
2. Which do you think is the most convenient place for the bath – upstairs or down, in the kitchen or separate room?
3. Do you want hot water laid on?
4. Do you want a bath even if hot water is not laid on?
5. Do you like a house with –
 - a. One living room and a scullery kitchen?
 - b. A small kitchen and scullery separate from it?
6. Do you like the parlour and living room about the same size ; or a large living room and a small parlour?
7. Do you think it best to have most of the cooking done in the scullery with the use of gas or electricity, or do you prefer it to be done in the living room?

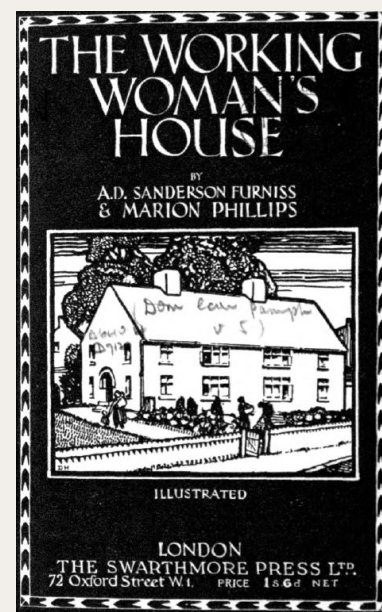


Figure 5, *The Working Woman’s House*. Source: Sanderson Furniss & Phillips, 1919.

8. What kind of flooring do you like in your scullery – tiles or other material?
9. Do you like to have fittings for cooking by gas, electricity or coal?
10. Where do you think the larder should be?
11. Do you like –
 - a. A well-fitted wash-house, with all appliances, for several houses?
 - b. A copper of your own in the scullery?
 - c. A copper in an open shed outside?
12. What rooms do you want cupboards in, and what kind of cupboards?
13. What fittings or labour-saving appliances would you like to have?
14. Do you like sash or casement windows?
15. Do you want an outside shed for bicycles, prams, &c.?
16. Do you prefer –
 - a. A cottage
 - b. Cottage flats (one upstairs and one downstairs)?
 - c. Tenement flats?
17. Would you like a garden to yourself, or a big garden attached to several houses?
18. Do you like a garden in front of the house? (Sanderson Furniss & Phillips, 1919)

The interest of the questionnaire was increased by the inclusion of two floorplans of a decent dwelling as seen in figure 6 and 7 as an example of the possibilities. This dwelling showed already modern recommendations, the committee wanted to include like cupboards and sinks, labour-saving devices, a lot of windows and privatized bedrooms.

The outcomes of these questions formed the basis of the recommendations made by the WHSC to include the wishes of working women in housing design.

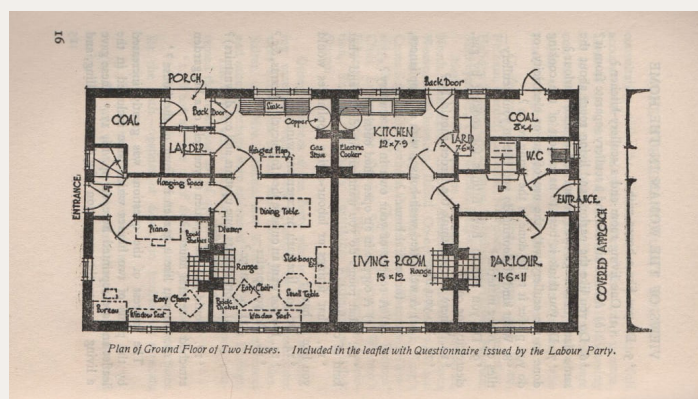


Figure 6, Plan of ground floor of two houses, included in the leaflet with questionnaire issued by the Labor Party. Source: Sanderson Furniss & Phillips, 1919, P. 16.

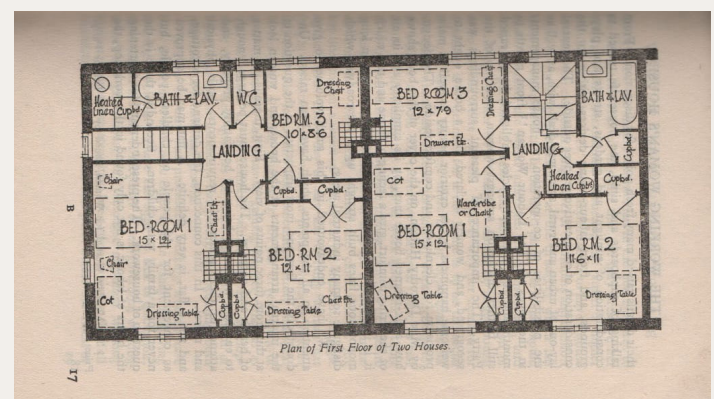


Figure 7, Plan of first floor of two houses. Source: Sanderson Furniss & Phillips, 1919, P. 17.

4.3.2 Final report – The outcome of the questionnaire

The answers collected through the Questionnaire sent by the Women's Labour League form the basis for the Women's Housing sub-committee's final report (1919) and the interim report (1918), which were presented to the Parliament. The report offered a series of detailed and practical recommendations for improving domestic housing conditions for the working women. The main point of these recommendations was the idea that homes should be designed to reduce the physical workload of domestic work and to improve the health and inclusion of all household members (WHSC, 1919)

In part 1 of the final report, the committee addresses significant aspects of housing that should be considered by designing housing. This concerns the following aspects under which multiple recommendations were made:

1. Heating, hot water supply, cooking, Washing and drying
2. Ventilation and lighting
3. Walls and Floors
4. Fittings
5. Fuel stores and tool sheds
6. Gardens and playgrounds
7. Communal arrangements
8. Conversion of existing houses into working-class flats
9. Managements

In the report, the committee itself made a list with the recommendations they see as the most significant recommendations, and they which they would be content with and which they regarded as most important (WHSC, 1919, p. 20). Figure 8 and 9 show the summary of these recommendations drawn from the Interim report and the final report.

First, they advocate for housing to become larger to have **more superficial area** to have more space for furniture and storage. Second, they demand housing to be build of **quality materials and workmanship**. Then, they consider a **wide frontage** house as more preferred for more air, light and sunshine to be able to come in and to allow for a more convenient planning. Also, the **planning** of a house should be carefully considered for example, the position of the living room and the utility room. Zoomed out, the **neighbourhood planning** is also seen as important with attention to community spaces, gardens, playgrounds and social centres for social and intellectual development. Looking back at the house, the inclusion of a **parlour** is desired in addition to the living room, not detracting from the size of the living room. Also, the addition of a proper **bath** in a separate bathroom is demanded as an essential amenity of the house. In addition to that, the provision of a hot and cold-water supply is seen as important. Then, they consider good **ventilation** as an important addition with the inclusion of heating from radiators. Also, they advocate for a cheap supply of domestic **electricity** with the least possible delay. Next, the **registration of landlords** must be made mandatory, ensuring accountability. Then, a **sanitary certification** must be made by a medical officer of health to certify that the home is sanitary. Also, the water supply should be improved. Lastly, they advocate for a limit on housing density in areas without a proper drainage system (WHSC, 1919).

Recommendations.	
117. (1) That the superficial area of the house should be increased beyond that usual in the past.	Par. 4. Interim Report. Par. 3. Final Report.
(2) That a high standard of material and workmanship should be an essential condition in the new housing schemes.	Par. 26. Final Report and <i>passim</i> .
(3) That the wide frontage type of house should be adopted whenever possible as giving more air, light and sunshine, and allowing more convenient planning than the narrow frontage type.	Par. 5. Interim Report.
(4) That in planning a house the most careful consideration should be given to aspect—in particular to the aspect of living room and larder.	Par. 5. Interim Report.
(5) That the planning of the neighbourhood in which the house is situated should be considered equally with the planning of the house itself; that such planning should include provision not only for private gardens but also for playgrounds and social centres; and that full attention should be given to the organisation of the resources available for social and intellectual development.	Pars. 56–65. Final Report.
(6) That a parlour should be provided in almost all cases in addition to the living room, but that its provision should not detract from the size of the living room.	Par. 10. Interim Report. Pars. 1 & 96. Final Report.
(7) That the provision of a bath in a separate bath room is an essential in every house and flat.	Par. 12. Interim Report. Par. 18 & 98. Final Report.
(8) That an adequate but simple system of hot and cold water supply should in all cases be provided and connected with the bath and sink.	Par. 13. Interim Report. Pars. 9 & 10. Final Report.

Figure 8, Summary or recommendations from the Final Report of the WHSC. Source: Women's Housing Sub-committee, 1919, P. 20.

21	
(9) That increased attention should be paid by architects and builders to the principles of ventilation as applied to houses, and that in view of the possibility of central heating coming into more general use the question of ventilation in rooms heated from radiators should be specially investigated.	Pars. 6, 32 & 33. Final Report.
(10) That a cheap supply of electricity for domestic purposes should be made available with the least possible delay.	Pars. 3, 35 & 87. Final Report.
(11) That the published registration of landlords should be compulsory.	Par. 82. Final Report.
(12) That some system of sanitary certification by the Medical Officer of Health should be made compulsory before a house which is designed for one family is allowed to be occupied by more than one.	Par. 82. Final Report.
(13) That an improvement in the water supply of country districts should receive prompt attention from the Government as a matter of national urgency; that pending such reform all new cottages should be provided with an internal water supply even if this has to be obtained by means of a pump.	Par. 89. Final Report.
(14) That where there is no drainage system, the number of cottages to the acre should be limited to four.	Par. 91. Final Report.

Figure 9, Summary or recommendations from the Final Report of the WHSC. Source: Women's Housing Sub-committee, 1919, P. 21.

In short, the committee advocated for multiple different changes in housing in multiple different aspects of housing. In Short, the final recommendations made by the WHSC reflect a clear and practical vision for housing improvements that take in consideration the women's experiences and addressed the burdens of domestic life through design. These outcomes are based directly on the data gathered from women who filled in the questionnaire, demonstrating the committee's commitment to incorporating rooted insight into policy and design.

05

Conclusion

5. Conclusion

In the years after the First World War, Britain had to rethink not only its housing policies, but also the deeper relationship between domestic life and the social change. This thesis has shown how the housing shortage after WW1 showed existing problems in domestic architecture and also made space for new voices to be heard, like women. The changing role of women in WW1 in the working force and the society, showed how the traditional styles of homes no longer supported the daily needs of modern families, especially for working-class women.

A major turning point in this process, was the formation of the Women's Housing Sub-Committee (WHSC) in 1918, under the ministry of Reconstruction. It was the first time where a government committee places the everyday experiences of women at the centre of housing design. As chapter three explains, The WHSC, existing out of women like Marion Phillips, Maud Pember Reeves and Lady Gertrude Emmott, worked to make sure that the national housing discussions included the perspectives of women. Through their research, reports, and political engagement, they highlighted the urgent need for homes that were functional, hygienic, and affordable.

The committee's recommendations showed an understanding of the domestic workload many women had to carry. Their recommendations included things like compact kitchens, built-in storage, indoor plumbing and shared community facilities. As chapter 4 explores, besides these ideas being theoretical, they influenced real housing policies and reshaped domestic architecture in the years after the war. From Standardized housing layouts to the redesign of the kitchen, parlour and bathroom, the WHSC's recommendations helped with redesigning homes so they could function correctly. These spaces were becoming a larger part of a discussion about gender, citizenship and daily life.

Looking at the whole picture, the influence of the WHSC extended further than just the period after the war. While the committee itself was not there for long, the ideas they brought into the game lived on for longer in housing reforms and standards. Their work marked the beginning of a shift in how the home was seen. Not just as a background for domestic life, but as a space that could support equality, autonomy and dignity.

06

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