At the end of the nineteenth century Wigan and St Helens had the highest rates of overcrowding of all the large Lancastrian towns and, particularly in Wigan's case, some of the country's worst housing conditions. Already in both towns, houses built early in the century were being forcibly demolished. How had such housing conditions developed? Who originally built and owned the houses; for whom were they built; how effective were local bye-laws in controlling house standards; and, how did changes in demand and supply for housing affect the towns' social development? Wigan and St Helens had widely contrasting economic and social histories: both were coal mining centres but while Wigan was an ancient borough town with strong cotton-manufacturing interests, St Helens was a product of the Industrial Revolution, known for its glass and chemicals. Such contrasts may well produce differing answers to the questions asked, which, if related to the findings from other case studies, may well be of more than local interest.

BUILDING PRACTICES AT THE END OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

By 1801 Wigan had emerged from a period of economic stagnation to become a bustling cotton and linen manufacturing town of 11,000 people. Approximately 60 per cent of all family heads were involved in textile manufacture, 40 per cent as handloom weavers. Only 7 per cent were now occupied in traditional metal-working trades with a further 7 per cent in coal mining, an industry soon to expand. This economic resurgence produced a house building boom in which burgage plots—particularly in Scholes and along Standishgate—were built over (Figure 1). The Land Tax returns (1796, 1806, 1807 and 1819) and the rate book of 1812 for Wigan, together with title deeds of property compulsorily purchased by the corporation, give an outline picture of
FIGURE I  WIGAN AND ST HELENS, 1850
housing development at the turn of the century. Title deeds indicate an active land market in the 1780s and 1790s, with land often bought and sold several times over just prior to building. No single landowner dominated in this process, there being 353 property owners listed in the 1796 Returns with only 36 having property taxed at over £1 (the total tax for Wigan was £160). The two most important land and property-owning families, the Baldwins and the Hodsons, each paid only about 5 per cent of the total assessment, and much of their land was in the outer parts of the borough, away from the built-up area. Many property developers were in fact small-scale manufacturers and shopkeepers who concentrated their house building on the burgage plots behind their own houses and workplaces. This is indicated in the land tax returns where, after listing an owner’s name, occupants are often declared as ‘himself’ or ‘himself and others’: 144 of the 353 owners fall into this category. Few of these landowners built more than eight houses at a time—one, two or three being most common—and there were comparatively few, as compared with the mid-nineteenth century situation in Wigan, who owned houses away from their immediate neighbourhood. In 1811 at least 24 (probably 30 plus) out of the 55 people who owned property in Scholes also lived there. 5

The situation in St Helens was quite different. With the opening in 1759 of the Sankey Brook Navigation to its terminus near the Chapel of St Hellen, the coalfield beyond Prescot was at last effectively opened up to the Liverpool market. Mines were sunk but labour had to be attracted and so cottages were erected:

(The) master for the convenience of his people has now built, and is still building a considerable number of comfortable houses, at the higher end of the collieries. 6

Similarly with the arrival of the British Plate Glass Company at Ravenhead in 1774 small brick cottages were built for the glassworkers. In the 1790s the copper companies (the Parys Company at Ravenhead, the Stanley Company at Black Brook three kilometres to the east of St Helens) followed suit, providing alehouses as well. 7 The names Welsh Row (Parys Company) and Scotch Row (Eccleston Crown Glassworks) indicate the far-flung origins of many of these factory workers. Thus by 1801 there was a scattering of industrial and mining sites around the small town of St Helens (2,000 persons at most) many with adjoining rows of tied cottages, a pattern to continue until mid-century.
HOUSING SUPPLY CHANGES IN WIGAN

The local and small-scale development of housing in Wigan was fast being overtaken. The rate book of 1812 clearly distinguishes court (burgage plot) houses which were now commonly listed in runs of ten and more. The longest runs of such identically-rated houses were usually owned by cotton or linen manufacturers: in Scholes there was Greenough's Row, 37 houses owned by Peter Greenough, a cotton and linen manufacturer of Standishgate; in Hallgate there was Birch's Croft, 20 houses belonging to Thomas Birch, a bleacher, of Gidlow House, and Johnson's Croft, another 20 houses owned by William Johnson, a cotton manufacturer of Wigan Lane. These were cottages specifically designed for handloom weavers and often built as back-to-backs with a short flight of outside stairs leading to a living-room which measured approximately $11' \times 11'$, above which there was the sleeping area and below which, in a half-basement, a loom shop. On Princess and Queen Streets, off Wallgate, larger through cottages were built but the same room design was used. Close by was the small Princess Street spinning mill. This close juxtaposition of loom shop and spinning mill had become a common sight in Wigan.

The King, Queen and Princess Streets development of the early 1790s was the first major break with the process of the piecemeal infilling of burgage plots. Of these streets, laid out parallel to each other between Wallgate and Chapel Lane, King Street was for high-class commercial and residential development only, the others for artisan housing. The Queen-Princess Street area (then known as Markland and Further Markland fields), about three acres in extent, was acquired in 1789 by James Ditchfield, a local ironmonger, on life lease on payment of a £50 annual rent. This was to be paid in turn by people to whom Ditchfield sold individual plots. But in September 1794 only £15 of the total rent had been discharged\(^9\) and by 1800, if not before, James Ditchfield was declared bankrupt. The remainder of the land was auctioned off in rectangular plots of approximately 250 square yards each. Most of those buying lots from Ditchfield in the 1790s were small masters from a wide variety of trades—currier, maltster, butcher, watchmaker, and so on—who lived and owned small amounts of property in other parts of Wigan.\(^{10}\) James Caterall of Millgate, variously described as ropemaker, shoemaker and yeoman perhaps developed his property interests most successfully. In 1795 he bought 566 square yards of land in Princess Street on which he built seven houses. By 1806 he had also built runs of five and twelve court houses in Scholes and by
the time of his death in 1817 he owned over 40 houses mainly in Scholes. Men like Caterall often raised their capital through local manufacturers such as Roger Anderton of Scholefield Lane or local attorneys such as Robert Morris, but by 1800 building clubs became an alternative means of financing buildings.

EARLY BUILDING SOCIETIES

The Land Tax assessments for Wigan in 1806 are very suggestive on the activities of building clubs: a number of like-valued properties are listed consecutively but are owned singularly, in pairs or sometimes in multiples of four. Several are occupied by their owners of whom there is often no mention in other records such as burgess lists and early directories. In one such listing, 50 houses, each valued at 1s. 4d. (house valuations varied from about 9d. to 6s.) and built before 1796, can be located on the High Street off Wigan Lane, behind Penson's cotton mill; 24 houses in a second listing and built between 1799 and 1806 were each valued at 1s. and were located close to Leigh's Flint Mill, probably in the Pottery. Unfortunately no related title deeds survive but the assessments and title deeds provide direct evidence of the activity of the Scholes Building Society founded probably in or before 1802 when eight cottages known as Club Row were built on the western side of Vauxhall Road. Between 1802 and 1810 another 60 cottages were built for the 20 or so subscribers to the club each of whom bought three shares for which he was allocated three adjacent cottages on the casting of lots. On the termination of the society in 1810 the land and the three cottages were conveyed to each subscriber subject to a yearly ground rent which could be paid off in a lump sum if desired. The cottages, valued at 1s. 4d., were specifically built to rent to handloom weavers: according to the 1811 census enumerators' schedules only five cottages were not so occupied. The rate book of the following year also indicates that in many cases the land behind these cottages was built over with groups of four to eight back-to-back cottages. The owners were neither artisans nor small masters but manufacturers and farmers who saw the building club purely as an alternative means of investment. Indeed, of the three house owners identified on the High Street one was Robert Morris, the second Charles Kerfoot who later owned a run of 37 cottages (Kerfoot's Row) adjacent to Greenough's Row, the third, John Stopforth, a prominent local builder. Not surprisingly, capitalists such as those prominent in building some of the worst housing in Wigan over the next 20 years (Photograph 1) again often used building clubs as a major source of funding.
For example, in 1826 the land between Greenough’s Row and Vauxhall Road was sold off in long narrow lots to Richard Bradshaw, corn dealer, Archibald Stuart, linen merchant and John Atkinson, joiner and builder, the first two being associated with the Scholes Building Club. In Archibald Stuart’s case, land immediately behind his property on Club Row was acquired and using £500 advanced by the Wigan Building Society (founded 1822) he built 30 cottages, again primarily for handloom weavers. Bradshaw built 21 cottages, Atkinson another 20 or so, in all likelihood using the same source of funding. All these houses were compulsorily demolished by 1896 (see page 138).

A similar story surrounds the First and Second St Helens Building Society. The trustees of the First Society founded in 1824 were largely local manufacturers; Peter Greenall, brewer, William Pilkington, wine merchant and later glass manufacturer, Enoch Bromilow, colliery owner; and builders, James Latham, George Harris and John Penketh. Further, some of St Helens’ worst housing in Greenbank was funded by these societies. However, in St Helens there is more evidence of small subscribers who bought only one or two shares and who owned one or perhaps two houses. Of the 40 shareholders taking shares in the second society between 1836 and 1838, only six took more than six shares, 24 taking only one or two. Of the 28 of these traced in St Helens’ first rate book of 1845, 11 owned one or two houses and only seven had more than six houses.

Housing provision by industrialists in St Helens

The 1845 rate books, however, did not cover the outlying industrial areas of St Helens, most notably Sutton township with its copper and glassworks and the eastern part of Parr township with its coal mines. In these areas the parallel provision of housing by industrialists continued. Three examples will be briefly described. The best documented are the houses provided by the British Plate Glass Company at Ravenhead. The first houses were probably those on Factory Row (Photograph 2) and by 1851 the company owned 106 houses contiguous to works, many built in the previous few years. According to the works’ manager, potatoes and cereals were grown and cows were kept on company land to provide for the workforce, a medical officer was employed on a part-time basis and four schools, one for adults, were reputed to have been provided. He did not describe the open sewers and the stagnant cesspits. Less is known about colliers’ houses in St Helens but colliery owners such as Thomas Haddock (Sutton) and John Speakman (Gerard’s Bridge) and Joseph Greenough.
(Parr) were known to own upwards of 40 houses each. These were small, insanitary, one-storey cottages: in the case of Joseph Greenough's property at Moss Bank in Parr, these were built—perhaps significantly—just outside the Improvement Commission boundary. Built between 1843 and 1846 these 50 cottages were demolished in 1902, a life span of less than 60 years (Photograph 3). The third example, the 47 cottages that made up Pilkingtons' Row opposite the Crown Glassworks, like the other examples was described as being of 'faulty construction' and in 'a filthy condition' but, more interestingly, in 1851 they were no longer solely occupied by glassworkers. In 1845 it was claimed that at least two-thirds of Pilkingtons' crown glass workforce lived in these cottages but in 1851, of the 700 people employed at Pilkingtons', only about 150 lived on the Row, the others being 'dispersed all over town'. It was no longer Pilkingtons' policy to build housing for their growing workforce but to provide an annual living out allowance of £10 for skilled workers. Indeed few houses were then being built anywhere in Sutton while new leasehold estates were opened up in Eccleston and Windle townships to which many glassmakers along with other skilled workers moved.

MID-CENTURY SANITARY REFORM AND HOUSING STANDARDS

Despite its inherently well-drained site, Wigan was, in mid-century, considered to be one of the unhealthiest towns in the country and certainly far worse than most other towns of comparable size in Lancashire: the death rate in 1851 of 36 per 1,000 compared badly with 27 per 1,000 in the North West generally. However, because of successful lobbying of both local ratepayers and Westminster by the Wigan Working Man's Association, a group supported by the local clergy, a somewhat reluctant borough council found itself having to operate the Public Health Act of 1848. The main effects were very limited: the death rate between 1866 and 1870 averaged 32.7 per 1,000. Bye-laws relating to privy construction were generally disregarded; the water supply and sewerage systems were only very slowly improved and cellar dwellings, supposedly banned, often remained. Attempts in the 1860 bye-laws to increase the thickness of house walls were effectively blocked by local building interests. All that was required was that estate plans showing road lines and sewer depths and building plans showing drainage levels should be submitted. Even these were sometimes not complied with.

St Helens' mid-century sanitary history mirrors to some extent that of Wigan: a death rate in 1851 of 30 per 1,000; in 1871,
28.8 per 1,000; the half-hearted enforcement of the local Improvement Act brought into being by a local M.P. and industrialist, Peter Greenall, but limited in areal extent to exclude Sutton township, the main factory area, because of pressure from other industrialists, a desultory improvement in water supply and sewage disposal. The 1845 Act also had certain clauses relating to house construction including the submission of building and estate plans. Did housing standards improve? The short answer for St Helens is ‘yes’, but not because of the limited building regulations for jerry building but was still widespread:

all that is required is yard space, and brick length party walls: then we can build over premises with sticks or matches: we have no check as to strength or quality, and can build as we like: no timber specified: no competent person to inspect. It is well known that most contractors, after the contract is signed, study to evade the conditions, and to economise labour particularly staircases...

Though estate plans did tend to encourage better estate layout, the large, new leasehold estates (Figure 1) by their very size facilitated regular development. Unlike Greenbank where houses were built at different levels because of piecemeal freehold development it was now possible to co-ordinate street and drainage levels and for lessors to specify minimum conditions of leasing. Noxious industries and trades and ale houses were usually banned and, increasingly after about 1850, minimum rental values were stipulated, a feature reflected in house values. Terrace houses built between 1851 and 1871 ranged in selling price from £55 to about £160, the bulk being around £80. Earlier housing in areas such as Greenbank rarely commanded prices over £40. This difference is re-emphasised when the rateable value of post-1851 housing is compared with pre-1851 (Figure 2). Though depreciation would explain some of this difference it is argued that the higher values (and standards) of post-1851 houses were mainly due to changes in the housing market (reflected in leasing conditions) which in turn were related to changes in social structures occurring at a time of generally uninterrupted economic progress.

As noted, in St Helens industrialists had previously provided fairly basic accommodation close to a wide scatter of places of work for their often itinerant, male-dominated labour force. This physical separation of occupational groups was reinforced by the already strongly-developed insular natures of the glassmaker and collier. However by the 1820s small-property speculators were building equally poor houses in the cramped conditions of Greenbank close to the factories of Ravenhead for people in a variety of occupations: glassmakers, potters, copper smelters,
Figure 2: Rateable Values of Pre-1851 and 1851–1871 Houses

The diagrams show the distribution of rateable values for houses in St Helens and Wigan. The x-axis represents the average rateable value for houses per street, while the y-axis represents the number of streets. Streets with both pre-1851 and 1851–1871 houses are not included. For St Helens, 105 streets were sampled; for Wigan, 67.

Note: Streets with both pre-1851 and 1851–1871 houses are not included. For St Helens, 105 streets were sampled; for Wigan, 67.
ropemakers were all prominent in the 1841 census returns for Greenbank. But within this mass of workers there were emerging gradations of earning power and occupational status made more noticeable by the general prosperity of local industry from about 1843 to 1873. In 1851 skilled crown and sheet glassmakers, who enjoyed secure employment through contract, could expect to earn £2 and more a week, a bricklayer in the usually buoyant building industry, about 28s. but less in winter, a ropemaker about 22s. Increasingly important as well in St Helens' mid-Victorian society was an individual's position as it related to 'respectable society', a symbol of which was the sort of house he lived in:

a £6 house... is in many instances inhabited by a very respectable class of person, but when you come below the £6 house, you get a very inferior class..."35

Figure 2 shows that worst pre-1851 houses were valued below £6. These factors, together with influx of low-status Irish into areas like Greenbank, led many to seek better accommodation in the newly-emerging residential areas away from industry and the town centre. This has been confirmed by intra-urban mobility studies which indicated definite directional movement by many skilled glassworkers, metalworkers, clerks and others towards the new residential areas contrasting with circular movement patterns of most Irish chemical workers and colliers within the old industrial areas.36

House builders increasingly catered for this demand to the detriment of the newer factory areas around St Helens where there was a considerable housing shortage. Many builders had been subscribers and trustees of the earlier temporary building societies and now had close financial links with the many permanent societies operating in St Helens. William Barton is a good example. In 1837 he was secretary to the second St Helens Building Society (temporary); between 1864 and 1878 he had securities worth £16,000 held by the St Helens and Rainford Building Society (permanent), the most successful mid-century society. Like other builders who were erecting over 25 houses a year, Barton leased land himself, in his case mainly from the Lowe House Estate, and concentrated on building short rows of intermediate-value houses, mainly for sale but some as a personal investment. By 1871 he owned 71 houses making him one of the largest owners of house property in St Helens.

Only three men had more houses even allowing for the industrialist-owned housing on the outer fringe of the County Borough. Of the 799 house owners in St Helens, 220 (28 per cent)
Built in the cotton factory boom of the late 1830s, the houses were soon occupied by Irish immigrants, two families per house being common. Note the bulging and water-stained walls, the wooden lintels and the two lamps for the whole street.
Factory Row was built in 1774 at the same time as the plate glassworks. The present houses have been heavily altered.
Demolition notices are on the doors and the demolition gang waits to start. Though substantially built in stone, sanitary and drainage arrangements were primitive.
PHOTOGRAPH 4. LOCATION UNCERTAIN, BUT PROBABLY SCHOLES.
In this second Wigan example wall construction is better but roof drainage is still primitive and rising damp would be a problem. Typically, backyards are shared and pettices grouped.
owned one house, another 154 (19 per cent), two houses; only 40 (5 per cent) owned over 20 houses. For Wigan's 662 house property owners, the respective figures were 76 (11 per cent), 65 (10 per cent) and 88 (15 per cent). It was quite apparent that the tradition of making a relatively small investment in house property through a building society continued in St Helens. Indeed of the 5,087 houses in the built-up area, 290 (5.7 per cent) were owner occupied, a very high figure for 1871.42

Amongst these recently-built houses there was a noticeable gradation of house types in St Helens in which five types have been identified from an analysis of building plans submitted for approval between 1855 and 1871 (Figure 3).43 At the top end of the scale and accounting for only 3 per cent of the total number of such houses within the built-up area (1804) were the large detached houses built on Cowley and Croppers' Hill. Next, with 18 per cent, were the large terraced houses with three full bedrooms, a separate scullery and pantry, and a half cellar. The third type (23 per cent) was a smaller version of house type two, while type four, the most common house form (43 per cent), had no back bedroom and a much reduced groundfloor plan, front access being directly into the parlour. The poorest type was even smaller with a house frontage usually of only 12 to 13 feet, privies often being shared and with back access through a common yard. This last type (14 per cent) was usually found close to the factory areas north and east of the town centre while the intermediate types were to some degree sorted according to their distance north-west of the town centre: the superior terrace furthest away at the foot of Cowley Hill on the Society of Friends Estate. Within these new residential areas there were corresponding gradations in rent and occupational status. The superior terrace house reting from 53. to 8s. per week was generally occupied by a high-grade clerical or skilled manual worker; the other grades, renting at approximately 4s. 6d., 3s. 6d. and 2s. 6d., mainly by skilled and some semi-skilled manual workers.

In Wigan between 1851 and 1871 there was a less noticeable improvement in housing standards if rateable value is a criterion (Figure 3). Following a short-lived building boom in the early fifties, house building fell dramatically not to recover until the mid-seventies, a decline not so noticeable in St Helens but mirrored in Manchester, the centre of the cotton industry.44 Between 1851 and 1861, for the first time in the century, outmigration from Wigan balanced immigration and in the following decade there was a net outflow of about 5,500 (15 per cent of the 1861 population, 37,658). Structural economic problems can be traced back to the early 1830s with the painful decline of the handloom
Note: These are specific examples of the house types. There can be considerable plan variation, especially in house types 1 and 2.

Figure 3  St. Helens' House Types 1855-71
weaving industry but the 1860s crisis was directly attributable to the cotton famine caused by the American Civil War which had a drastic effect on Wigan’s mills because of their complete dependence on short-fibre American cottons: in November 1862, the ratio of full and part-time to stopped employment in the Lancashire mills was one-to-one, in Wigan one-to-ten. Inevitably saving levels were affected and there was relatively little building society activity: in the 1860s there were only three known building societies with ‘Wigan’ as part of their title while there were 11 with ‘St. Helens’. All classes of building construction—working- and middle-class housing, industrial and institutional buildings—were equally affected. In comparison with St Helens, houses that were built in Wigan, though generally no longer smaller in ground floor plan, were decidedly inferior in facilities such as back access, private yard space, privy accommodation, pantry and scullery space. The ratio of the better to poorer house type also differed: while only 14 per cent of the houses built in St Helens (1855–71) were classified in the poorest group (House Type 5) and 20 per cent in the best two groups, 26 per cent and 10 per cent of Wigan’s houses (1851–71) fell respectively into these categories. As such there were few residential areas built to meet the limited demand of better-paid skilled manual and clerical workers: Dicconson Street, off Standishgate and Caroline Street, off Wallgate were the only two such developments. Most of the new lower-quality housing was sited either on the edge of the old industrial quarter of Scholes (Photograph 4) or in the expanding mining area in Whelley and so tended to reinforce existing social area structures: that is the occupational areas of either cotton workers or colliers.

The only major modification in the housing and related social area pattern was the building of a new factory suburb at Poolstock in 1850 around James and Nathaniel Eckersleys’ mills. This was a conscious attempt to break away from the ‘polluting’ influence of Wigan to create a new community: houses reflected each social gradation of mid-Victorian society from the villas of the factory managers to the minimal-sized back-street houses of unskilled factory workers; church and schools were bequeathed, even allotments were provided. Of course such Victorian philanthropy was underpinned by good business sense and an eye to public recognition: Nathaniel Eckersley was mayor of Wigan seven times between 1851 and 1873. However it is ironic that as private interests had taken over from industrialists in providing new housing in St Helens, so in Wigan a reverse situation had occurred, reflecting the growing inability of private house builders to provide sufficient decent housing for working people.
THE CLOSING DECADES

This is not to say that adequate housing was being provided to all working people in St Helens: the ill-drained, insanitary courts of Greenbank, Gerard’s Bridge and Parr street still remained. Many houses classified as House Type 5 not only shared a common yard but, according to plan evidence, shared common pettles (e.g. Back Albert Street, Gerard’s Bridge). Outside the main built-up area in developing districts such as Thatto Heath no sewers were provided and even on Cropper’s Hill in the mid-1880s many of the villa residences still drained into a gutter at the rear. Indeed after the limited improvement in overall housing standards in the mid-Victorian period it seems probable that progress came to a standstill after about 1871. House building rates in St Helens closely followed the trend in Wigan and the Manchester region but the rate of population growth in St Helens was much greater, averaging about 25 per cent per decade between 1861 and 1891. Thus after a sharp decline in overcrowding rates between 1861 and 1871 from 7.1 persons per house to 5.3, the rate rose again in 1891 to over 5.6. ‘Jerry building’ had not declined and, if anything had increased. The building bye-laws of 1870, brought in after the creation of St Helens as a County Borough, lacked specificity; coupled with a general lack of adequate house inspection particularly after the house plan had been approved, builders were almost encouraged to build to the lowest possible standard:

Now as to the structural condition of this newer property, St. Helens has evidently suffered, even more than most towns, from the operations of the speculative builder... As a result... a general state of dilapidation is a feature common to whole districts.

The continued widespread prevalence of fevers such as typhoid was directly related to current building standards and by 1891 the crude death rate was almost 27 per 1,000, higher than the 1861 figure and for the first time in the century it equalled Wigan’s.

However in 1877 St Helens Corporation did adopt national housing legislation while Wigan Corporation, despite the lower standard of much of its housing stock, did not act until 1889 and then in a muddled fashion. Then an Insanitary Houses Committee was formed. Acting under the provisions of the Housing of the Working Classes Act of 1890, the Committee resolved that large numbers of houses, particularly in Scholes, were ‘unfit for human habitation’ and at the same time proposed Wigan’s first re-housing scheme, appropriately enough, for the Vauxhall Road (Club Row) area. House demolition occurred between 1893 and
1896 and after long delays and heavy financial losses, 210 new dwellings were built by the Corporation, the last being completed in 1902 or 1903.\(^{56}\) Despite these inauspicious beginnings the Corporation was to become increasingly involved with house building and reconstruction and was finally to recognise failures which had their origins over one hundred years before: 'it is thus evident that private enterprise in building is not keeping pace with the requirements of the population.'\(^{57}\)

CONCLUSIONS

Chapman in his preface to *The History of Working-Class Housing* writes:

> In the earlier (Industrial Revolution) period the most recurrent theme is the response of the artisan elite to new economic opportunities and higher earnings. Individually, or in co-operative enterprise, the skilled beneficiaries of industrial change can be seen striving to reach superior standards of accommodation and domestic comforts.\(^{58}\)

In Wigan there is some evidence that during the ‘golden age’ of handloom weaving, weavers clubbed together to build their own houses\(^ {59}\) but efforts in this direction were short-lived as the building club principle was quickly adopted by larger capitalist interests responsible for some of Wigan’s worst housing. The demise of handloom weaving, the absence of other skilled but better-paid workers and the influx of large numbers of casual Irish labourers in the 1830s and 1840s further ensured a deterioration of housing conditions during the first half of the century.\(^ {60}\) Chapman’s comments are more applicable to St Helens but only during the middle decades of the century. Like other new factory towns of the nineteenth century most of St Helens’ early housing was provided by industrialists:\(^ {61}\) standards seem to have been variable with the glass workers at Ravenhead being best provided for, the colliers in Parr being the worst. However by mid-century private enterprise had started to provide most of the new housing. The building societies of St Helens which played a central role in this process, though patronised by some of the big industrialists and exploited by building interests, were mainly supported by small investors several of whom were skilled glass workers, engineers, etc., employed in St Helens’ rapidly-growing factories.\(^ {62}\) Housing standards generally rose and housing areas for the better-paid, respectable working-man were built. This process has been noted in other towns and cities\(^ {63}\) and what is particularly interesting in St Helens is the fine gradations between the housing types, each one designed to fit the particular economic and social niche of their occupants.
Chapman also notes the endless difficulties which held back the improvement of working-class housing in the second half of the nineteenth century. Research here has not been as thorough but there is no evidence to contradict this general conclusion in Wigan and St Helens. What is curious though is the apparent failure in St Helens to maintain the limited mid-century improvement in overall housing standards. Though it is true that bye-law controls failed to stop 'jerry building', this was also the case in the mid-century period. It can only be suggested that with the continued influx of large numbers of semi-skilled workers who had some degree of security of employment in St Helens' factories that larger-scale builders (100 houses and over per year) increasingly tended to cater for this lower segment of the market. Perhaps the time when skilled artisans and other small investors were able to employ a builder to build a short row of houses for their own occupation and their renters was over, and the division between the landlord and tenant classes had become more marked, than had been the situation in Wigan since the beginning of the century.

Indeed the final note on nineteenth-century housing in Wigan must be a pessimistic one. One that sounds the general failure of early building clubs and local authorities alike in providing any marked improvement in working-class housing standards. For St Helens, a town that developed later and on a sounder economic footing, such a blanket condemnation is not appropriate but given its opportunities for housing progress the fact that by 1936 St Helens had one of the highest percentages of working-class families living in overcrowded conditions in England and Wales, higher than even in Wigan, suggests that opportunities were lost.

NOTES

1 Census of England and Wales, 1911, Volume 8, pp. 526, 530.
3 Barrow, op. cit. p. 86.
4 Occupation of fathers are given in the Birth Registers of the Parish of Wigan. The figures given here are drawn from the 1799 to 1802 registers.
5 From a cross-reference of the 1812 Wigan Rate Book with the census enumerators’ schedules of 1811 for Scholes. Unfortunately only one of the two volumes of census enumerators’ schedules of 1811 for Wigan survive.
6 *Gore’s General Advertiser*, 25 May 1771.
7 Barker and Harris, *op. cit.* 82, 170.
8 In other parts of Lancashire loom shops were often in the upper-most storey but for Wigan map (the O.S. Five-Foot Town Plan shows basement lights to many cottages) and literary evidence (Folkard et al., *op. cit.* p. 13) suggest basement loom shops were normal.
9 Title deeds to 5, 7, 9 and 11 Princess Street, Wigan, 1794.
10 Title deeds to 59 and 61 Queen Street, Wigan, 1795.
11 Will of James Caterall in title deeds to his property at 18–26 Princess Street, Wigan.
12 Title deeds to 54–60 Vauxhall Road, Wigan, 1810.
13 Title deeds to 32 Vauxhall Road, Wigan, 1810.
14 Abstract of title of Edward Glassbrook, 1810, in title deeds to his property in Vauxhall Road.
15 Title deeds to 4–8, 12–28 Stuart Street, Wigan, 1826.
16 Unfortunately little evidence of the earlier St Helens Tontine survives. The Tontine (a sort of mutual insurance club common in the eighteenth century) was responsible for laying out Tontine Street and building an adjacent row of cottages (12 if photographic evidence is relied upon) in 1797. Whether they were owner occupied or not is unknown. See Barker and Harris, *op. cit.* p. 169.
17 Title deeds to 41 Liverpool Street, St Helens, 1827.
18 Minutes of the Second St Helens Building Society, 1836–42.
19 Evidence of E. Wilson to the House of Commons Committee examining the St Helens Improvement Bill, 2 June 1851 (a modification of the original 1845 Bill).
22 Evidence of J. Blundell to the House of Commons Committee examining the St Helens Improvement Bill, 23 May 1845. Evidence of R. Whytte to the House of Commons Committee examining the St Helens Improvement Bill, 2 June 1851.
24 Evidence of R. Rawlinson to the House of Commons Committee examining the St Helens Improvement Bill, 2 June 1851.
29 Minutes of the Public Health Committee, Town Council, Borough of Wigan, 1860.
30 Barker and Harris, *op. cit.*, Chapter 20.
31 *The St. Helens Intelligencer*, 20 November 1858.
32 As given in title deeds.
33 Barker and Harris, *op. cit.* pp. 320-4, 412.
34 Pilkington Wage Sheets, 12 and 19 May 1849, in Barker, *op. cit.*, Appendix 2. Returns of Wages published between 1830 and 1886, Parliamentary Papers, 1887, LXXXIX.
37 Barker and Harris, *op. cit.* p. 415.
38 Register of Securities, St Helens and Rainford Building Society.
39 From an analysis of the St Helens' Building Register, 1855-62 there were six builders building over 25 houses per year but none over 45 houses.
40 Title deeds, Lowe and Barton Street, St Helens.
41 Rate Book for the Borough of St Helens, 1871. His obituary is in *The St. Helens News*, 3 August 1878.
42 In 1896 it was estimated that 115,000 mortgages had been granted, one for about every 70 families in Great Britain. This implies the average house ownership rate was below 5 per cent. P. H. J. H. Gosden, *Self-Help. Voluntary Associations in the Nineteenth Century*, London, 1973, p. 179.
43 Jackson, *op. cit.*, Chapter 6.
45 *The Wigan Observer*, 22 November 1862.
46 The annual reports of The Wigan Savings Bank published in the local press in December of each year show a decline in savers in the late 1850s and 1860s particularly those in the ‘below £1’ and ‘£1-5’ classes.
47 Jackson, *op. cit.*, Chapter 6.
48 It is difficult to make a direct comparison of the numbers of houses built between 1851 and 1871 because of the exclusion of new houses in the St Helens area built beyond the Improvement Commission Boundary. In the Wigan area too, many new houses were built just across the Borough boundary in Ince-in-Makerfield.
49 *Memoirs of the late Nathaniel Eckersley*, Wigan, 1892.
51 Ibid. pp. 11, 12.
52 *The St. Helens News*, 26 June 1877; 20 October 1877; 24 August 1878.
54 Robert McNicoll, the Medical Officer, called on council to adopt *The Artizans' Dwelling Act*, 1875 so that delapidated dwellings could be forcibly repaired or demolished. Several such properties were so

55 Minutes of the Insanitary Houses Committee, Town Council, Borough of Wigan, 28 June 1893 and 3 May 1894.


57 Minutes of the Insanitary House Committee, Town Council, Borough of Wigan, 8 December 1913.


62 Based on cross-referencing the 1871 rate book which listed both occupiers and owners of house property with the town directories (1869–1872) of St Helens. This indicated that many house owners were in skilled manual occupations: glassmaker, cabinet maker, fitter, etc.


64 Chapman, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

65 Barker and Harris’ mid-nineteenth century conclusions about the comparatively good urban conditions in St Helens are not in dispute: Barker and Harris, *op. cit.* p. 323.
