



Image credit: St Matthias House, St Judes, which was erected in 1938 to rehouse families displaced after the compulsory purchase of Great Anne Street, St Judes (ref.40307/1/28).

Bristol Archives

Sources relating to housing reform and policy in Bristol



Online catalogue archives.bristol.gov.uk
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Scope of this guide

This guide is for those interested in researching housing development and policy in Bristol from around 1850. It contains a list of our sources which highlight Bristol's response to housing need and how the local authority responded to changes in legislation. It may also interest those researching individual houses or areas, particularly areas of council housing.

For research into the history of individual houses or buildings, please see our source guide for [Building and house history](#).

Pre municipal housing

Before municipal housing was introduced, most people would have lived in houses rented from private landlords or tied to employment.

For an insight into housing conditions pre-1900, read the 1884 *Report of the Committee to inquire into the condition of the Bristol poor, presented to the Bishop of the Diocese* (ref. [11929](#)) which includes a chapter on the dwellings of the poor. Also relevant is the accompanying text *The Homes of the Bristol Poor* ([also available online](#)) which is taken from a series of articles published in the Bristol Mercury in 1884.

A comprehensive source of information and comment on the evolution of housing in Bristol can be found in *Housing the People in Victorian Bristol* by Peter Malpass. (ref. [Bk/2728](#)).

Another secondary source is Madge Dresser's essay *People's Housing in Bristol 1870-1939* contained in *Bristol's Other History* (ref. [Bk/151](#)).

The Bristol Municipal Charities collection (ref. [33041](#)) gives an insight into housing pre-1900 and in the early 20th century. The collection includes records of almshouses which came under their control, and a photographic survey of their city properties in 1906 (ref. [33041/BMC/12](#)). Many of the survey photographs are reproduced in *Charity on Camera in Edwardian Bristol* (ref. [Bk/2210](#)) and many have also been digitised and are available to view on our online catalogue via the link above or on the Bristol Municipal Charities layer on the [Know Your Place](#) website. Other almshouse records can be found within the Records of the Society of Merchant Venturers (ref. [SMV/4](#)) - the society owned a great deal of land, and the collection also includes deeds relating to their property (ref. [SMV/6](#)).

Legislation to improve housing

Copies of various acts and more recent housing legislation can be found at legislation.gov.uk. Relevant legislation for Bristol includes:

Public Health Act 1848

This enabled the creation of local boards of health, although this was not compulsory. Aims included the improvement of sewage systems to ensure clean drinking water. In Bristol, builders had to submit plans to show how a house was connected to the sewers (see the 'maps and plans' section for details).

Housing, Town Planning &c Act 1919 (also known as the Addison Act)

Greatly influenced by the Tudor Walters Report into the provision of housing, this led to the first large municipal housing estates. Under this Act, building began in Hillfields (Fishponds), Sea Mills and Knowle Park. Temporary housing consisting of huts at the former WW1 Remount Depot at Shirehampton was also provided under this Act.

Housing Act 1923

This reduced the amount of subsidy available to local authorities. Houses continued to be built in Sea Mills and Hillfields, as well as new areas including St Annes and Knowle Park.

Housing Act 1924 (also known as the Wheatley Act)

Housing built under this Act includes dwellings at Horfield, Knowle, Sea Mills, Hillfields, St Annes, Speedwell and Bedminster Down.

Housing Act 1930 (also known as the Greenwood Act)

This concentrated on slum clearance. The houses built were not as high quality as previously, and include dwellings at Filwood Park, Southmead and Bedminster.

Housing (Temporary Accommodation) Act 1944

This provided for the construction of prefabricated dwellings. These were built at multiple sites across Bristol.

Housing Act 1946

This was introduced to meet the housing shortage after WW2. Housing built under this Act includes dwellings at Lockleaze, Southmead, Henbury and Avonmouth. These homes included permanent prefabricated homes such as the British Iron and Steel Federation (BISF) houses at Avonmouth.

Housing Act 1949

This enabled local authorities to acquire property for improvement with the help of grants from the Exchequer. It also removed the requirement that council housing was for the working class. Homes were built at Hartcliffe and Withywood after this Act.

Housing Subsidy Act 1956

This enabled government funding for tower blocks, including those at Barton Hill and Easton.

Housing Acts of 1980

Local Authorities had been able to sell houses to tenants since the Housing Act of 1936. The 1980 act gave all council tenants in England and Wales with a length of tenancy of over 3 years, the legal right to buy their homes. It also granted a discount of at least 33%.

Employee housing in the late 19th – 20th century

Occasionally large employers would build housing for their workers, and examples can be found in our building plan collection:

[Building plan/Volume 35/73a](#) and [Building plan/Volume 35/73h](#) show houses built for Bayer and Co in 1898-1899 in Easton, presumably for workers in their corset factory.

[Building plan/Volume 76/5b](#), [Building plan/Volume 77/12b](#), [Building plan/Volume 72/16a](#) and [Building plan/Volume 72/16b](#) all show houses built in the 1920s for the Great Western Railway in Knowle.

Records of JS Fry & Sons (ref. [38538](#))

JS Fry and sons were chocolate manufacturers in Bristol and Keynsham. They built housing for their workers at Somerdale, Keynsham, just outside Bristol. This collection includes documents relating to housing (ref. [38538/Mgt//St/6](#)), including the annual report and accounts of the Somerdale Village Housing Society Ltd. (ref. [38538/Mgt/St/6/2](#)).

Records of Sir George White and various companies (ref. [35810](#))

Sir George White (1858-1965) was a major figure in the development of transport in Bristol and beyond. His papers relate to his business interests and those of associated companies including the Western Wagon & Property Co Ltd (ref. [35810/WWP](#)) who built housing at Filton in the early part of the 20th century. The collection includes details of their own property - the Filton Park estate - and pamphlets relating to new building styles on other British estates.

Council Housing

Before the First World War, very few council houses were built. These included 72 tenements in Bristol, built to replace homes demolished in road improvement schemes. A few of these remain in Mina Road, St Werburgh's. Plans for these early houses are in our aperture card collection (ref. [42054/4](#) items 15849-15854) and others can be found via our catalogue.

After the introduction of the Housing, Town Planning & c Act 1919, large scale municipal housing started to be built. The first four estates were built at Hillfields (Fishponds), Sea Mills, Shirehampton and Knowle. *The Regional Historian* (ref. [NL/RHC/NS2](#)) includes an article on the origins of Bristol's council housing under the 1919 act, and *100 Years of Council Housing* (ref. [43103](#)) is a useful guide to municipal housing in the area up until 2005.

There are also layers identifying inter-war and post-war housing available on the [Know Your Place](#) website.

Minute books of Bristol City Council and its predecessors

A lot of rich material can be found in the Council minute books for the relevant periods. Many of these are indexed but not exhaustively, so exploring the volumes by date can also be productive. Sanitary and Health committee minutes are also worth exploring - as the health benefits associated with good housing became better understood, housing and health policy became closely linked.

Housing Committee, 1918-2000

In 1917, Bristol City Council resolved "that a special committee be appointed to carry out the work in connection with the proposed housing extensions and town planning scheme, to be called the Housing Extension and Town Planning committee."

For Housing and Town Planning Committee minutes 1918-1924 see ref. [M/BCC/HTP](#). This also includes the Housing of the Working Classes sub-committee. For Housing Committee minutes 1925-2000 see ref. [M/BCC/HOU](#).

Improvement Committee, 1840-1973 (ref. [M/BCC/IMP](#))

Although the Council ordered the amalgamation of the Improvement committee with the Sanitary committee in 1901 under the title of the Sanitary and Improvement committee, they retained separate functions and separate minute books.

Sanitary Committee, 1851-1933 (ref. [M/BCC/SAN](#))

The Sanitary Committee was appointed as a committee to the Bristol Local Board of Health in 1851. In 1872 it became formally known as the Sanitary Committee. Although the Council ordered the amalgamation of the Improvement committee with

the Sanitary committee in 1901 under the title of the Sanitary and Improvement committee, they retained separate functions and separate minute books. This collection also includes the minutes of the Local Board of Health. In 1933 the committee became the Planning and Public Works Committee (ref. [M/BCC/PPW](#)).

Artizans Dwellings Committee, 1887-1889 (ref. [M/BCC/ADW/1-2](#))

Minute book of the committee appointed to report on the Artizans Dwelling Acts affecting the dwellings of the working classes (one small volume with no index).

Health Committee, 1897-1974 (ref. [M/BCC/HEA](#))

In 1897 the Council appointed a Health committee "to exercise and perform all the powers, rights and duties of the Corporation as an Urban Sanitary Authority and as a Port Sanitary Authority".

In 1896, the Sanitary committee had appointed a Housing of the Working Classes sub-committee which was transferred to the Health committee on its formation. In 1917 its functions were transferred to the Housing committee (see [M/BCC/HOU/4](#)). Under the National Health Act 1946, many of the duties of the Health committee were transferred to the Ministry of Health.

For later minutes see [M/BCC/HPP](#) (1986-1991) and [M/BCC/HES](#) (1991-1999).

Town Planning Committee, 1923-1933 (ref. [M/BCC/TPL](#))

Appointed in 1923 to act in pursuance of Section 46 of the Housing (Additional Powers) Act 1919, by which the Council was 'required to prepare and submit to the Ministry of Health a town planning scheme in respect of undeveloped land within the city'. In 1933 the committee was discharged and its powers were transferred to the Planning and Public Works Committee ([M/BCC/PPW/1](#)).

Private and Informal Meeting of the Council regarding Housing, 1928 (ref. [M/BCC/BC/5](#))

Planning and Public Works Committee, 1933 - 1968 (ref. [M/BCC/PPW](#))

In 1933 the Sanitary and Improvement Committee became known as the Planning and Public Works Committee. From 1942 its functions were divided between the Planning and Reconstruction Committee ([M/BCC/PREC](#)) and the Public Works Maintenance Committee ([M/BCC/PWM](#)), until 1952 when the single committee was restored ([M/BCC/PPW/3](#)). It was discharged in 1968 and succeeded by the Planning and Traffic Committee ([M/BCC/PTR](#)) and the Public Works committee ([M/BCC/PUW](#)).

Filwood Park Residents Association, 1938 (ref. [M/BCC/FIL/1](#))

Housing Association Liaison Group 1986-1992 (Ref: [M/BCC/HOAL](#))

West of England Partnership - Planning, Housing and Communities Board, 2009-2017 (Ref: [M/BCC/WOE/11](#))

Bristol Homes and Communities Board 2017 - (Ref: [M/BCC/BHCB](#))

Known as the Bristol Homes Board until 2020. A cross-sector advisory group seeking to influence housing outcomes in the city.

Other Bristol Corporation and Council related papers

Papers of Alderman Frank Sheppard (ref. [11172](#))

Alderman Sheppard was a member of Bristol City Council, except for a short interval, from 1893 until his death in 1956. He was leader of the Labour Party and in 1917 became the City's first Labour Lord Mayor. He had a particular interest in housing and its relationship with health. His papers include the 1907 report *Bristolhovels: Report of the Bristol Housing Reform Committee* ([11172/3](#)).

Housing Building Agreements, 1922-1966 (ref. [HBA](#))

Agreements between the Corporation of Bristol / Bristol City Council and private developers for the use of land for the building of houses, schools, and public houses.

Housing committee papers, 1928-1990s (ref. [35510/Com/16](#))

Non-minutes material, including reports, leaflets and posters.

Papers relating to the St Pauls neighbourhood and housing, 1979-1994 (ref. [42714/H](#))

Various reports and strategy documents

Records of the Bristol Racial Equality Council relating to Housing, 1989-2004 (ref. [43129/Lib/H](#))

Material relating to housing issues, rights and strategies.

Maps and plans

For further details please also consult our maps and plans source guide, which is available [online](#).

Building Plan collection, 1851-1948 (ref. [Building Plan](#))

These plans vary vastly in detail as their primary purpose was to show connections to drainage as part of a scheme to improve the city's sanitation. They generally include a ground floor plan showing drainage but sometimes include more detail, including the upper floors. Plans were submitted both for new buildings, and amendments to existing buildings.

Highway Adoption Notices, 1874-1970 (ref. [40287](#))

These show the housing layout of streets adopted by Bristol City Council.

Red Label Plan collection, 1920s–1960s (ref. [Red Label Plans](#))

A great many plans exist showing the layout and housing types of Bristol's municipal housing. These are arranged by area and occasionally by housing type. Most of the interwar housing is included within [Red Label Plans/22_1 to 7](#). This collection also includes some other facilities built on housing estates such as shops (see [Red Label Plans/10_1 to 2](#)). These plans are listed on the catalogue by roll, but there are many plans within each roll and they are not all individually listed on the catalogue. These can also include proposed layouts and buildings that were proposed but not built.

Yellow and Green Label Plan collections, 1940s-1960s (refs. [Yellow Label Plans](#) & [Green Label Plans](#))

The Yellow Label plans relate to municipal buildings, including some on housing estates. The Green Label Plans relate to local authority schools, some of which were provided for areas of new housing. Like the Red Label Plans, these are listed by roll and there are many plans within each roll which are not individually listed on the catalogue.

Aperture Cards (ref. [42054](#))

This is a collection of plans available as transparencies which can be viewed on the microfiche readers in our search room. We may also be able to provide PDFs with advance notice. They include very few housing plans, but cards 42054/4/15796 - 15854 do include the very first council housing to be built at Braggs Lane and other locations in the city.

Bristol Know Your Place website

This Bristol City Council website features historic maps of Bristol, which can be overlaid with modern maps of the city. It marks the inter-war and post-war estates and includes plans of many of the inter-war housing types and photographs of the areas. It also maps the post war pre-fab sites. Find it at maps.bristol.gov.uk/kyp, there is also information about using Know Your Place at <http://www.kypwest.org.uk/explore-the-map/>

Housing terriers and surveys

Survey of the City of Bristol, 1823 (ref. [04248](#))

List of properties by parish and street. This includes the type of property along with the name of the owner and head of household, and the rateable value.

Survey of the Borough of Bristol, 1837 (ref. [04249](#))

List of properties by parish and street. This includes the type of property along with the name of the owner and head of household, and the rateable value.

Survey of the Old City and Borough, 1851 (ref. [04250](#)) and 1862 (ref. [04251](#))

List of properties by parish and street. This includes the type of property along with the name of the owner and head of household, and the rateable value.

Survey of the Old City and Borough, 1871 (ref. [04252](#))

List of properties by parish and street. This includes the type of property along with the name of the owner and head of household, and the rateable value

Housing estates terriers, 1919-1925 (ref. [42098](#))

Four volumes containing particulars of post-First World War housing developments by Bristol City Council in accordance with the provisions of the Housing Acts 1919, 1923, 1924 and 1925. The terriers list council houses built throughout Bristol during this period as a result of the Acts, giving addresses and brief descriptions of the various properties, together with details of cost, date of occupation, and terms and particulars of sale and lease where applicable. There is one volume for each housing Act. Please note that these volumes do not record the names of the tenants.

Housing terriers, 1947-1985 (ref. [44183](#))

Six volumes recording post-war housing, flats, and other properties in accordance with the Housing Act 1946. Information recorded includes house numbers, types of dwelling (traditional brick or prefabricated), names of building contractors, dates of first lettings, and dates of sale to tenants or occupiers. With index of estates and revised schedules of numbers of Corporation properties built or acquired pre- and post-war (up to 31 March 1954), including pre-war housing belonging to Long Ashton Rural District Council and transferred to Bristol City Council as the result of the parliamentary boundary extension in 1951. Please note these volumes do not give the names of the tenants, only the dates of occupation.

Deeds of individual properties

Deeds show the history of ownership of land and can give an indication of what it was used for. The following are collections of deeds and documents relating to the transfer of land and premises under the ownership or management of Bristol City Council. Please note that some deeds may remain with the Modern Records Unit as they are still 'live' documents, and some previously held deeds will have been passed on to subsequent purchasers.

Property records of Bristol City Council, 19th-20th century (ref. [46664](#))

This catalogue entry lists the many collections relating to deeds and leases of council-owned properties, mostly grouped by department or committee (airport, baths, sanitary etc.) There are also more general groups such as Estate Title Deeds (ref. [ETD](#)), Housing Deeds (ref. [HOD](#)), and Housing Leases (ref. [HOL](#)).

For privately owned housing, the deeds tend to be retained by the owner, mortgage provider or solicitor, with only a small number making their way to our holdings. When we do hold deeds, it is usually because they have been donated by an individual owner, a family, or a firm of solicitors. You can search on our online catalogue, however due to the size of many of the solicitor collections there are a lot of deeds which are not yet catalogued.

Photographs

Photographs of houses can often be found on our catalogue by searching for the street name. There are also the following collections which are particularly focused on council housing, and many of these images have been digitised and are available to view via our online catalogue. Some are also on the Know Your Place website.

Photographs of Bristol City Council housing developments, 1920s-1970s (ref. [40307](#))

Public Relations Office photographs, 1940s–1960s (ref. [40826/HSG](#))

Collection of photographs taken of council housing in the 1950s and 1960s.

The Vaughan postcard collection, 20th Century (ref. [43207](#))

Postcards of Bristol including many residential areas.

Secondary source material held at Bristol Archives

Some of these have been mentioned in previous sections, but they are all listed here for convenience.

How lucky I was, a book of Sea Mills memories (ref. [Bk/2717](#))

Sea Mills 100, 2021

Homes for Heroes: One hundred years of council housing in Bristol (ref. [Pamphlet/2137](#))

Tony Forbes and Eugene Byrne, 2019

Hillfields: Homes for Heroes (ref. [Pamphlet/2154](#))

Myers-Insole Local Learning, 2019

100 years of Council Housing (ref. [43103](#))

Peter Malpass and Jennie Walmsley, UWE, c 2019

Br1stol - The Facts (ref. [Pamphlet/2160](#))

Avon County Council, 1983. Includes a description of housing in Bristol.

The Regional Historian, Annual Journal of the Regional History Centre, UWE (ref. [NL/RHC/NS2](#))

Includes an article by Peter Malpass on the 1919 Housing Act and the origins of council housing in Bristol, 2019

Housing the People in Victorian Bristol (ref. [Bk/2728](#))

Peter Malpass, 2021

Charity on camera in Edwardian Bristol: a photographic survey of the city properties of the Bristol Municipal Charities in 1906 (ref. [Bk/2210](#))

Kieran Costello and Richard Burley, 1997

Bristol's other history (ref. [Bk/151](#))

Including the 1983 Madge Dresser essay *People's Housing in Bristol 1870–1939*.

Material held at Bristol Reference Library

There are many resources at Bristol Reference Library which are of use for this topic, particularly in the local studies section. These include:

Bristol Garden Suburb, Shirehampton (ref. B20757)

Including brochure, reports and accounts

Committee for Promoting the Better Housing for the Poor (ref. 4055)

A report for 1894.

Bristol Corporation (later Bristol City Council) reports on housing, health etc

Find these by consulting Bristol Bibliography (ref. B32394), the card catalogue (look under 'Housing', 'Corporation' and 'City Council of Bristol') and the [online library catalogue](#). The Arts catalogue card index may include relevant entries under 'Architecture'.

Some of these resources have restricted access, so it is advisable to contact the library in advance. If you wish to see particular resources email bristol.library.service@bristol.gov.uk or telephone 0117 9037202.

Useful websites

[British Newspaper Archive](#) - available online at Bristol Archives and Bristol Libraries.

[UK legislation](#) - Copies of current and historic legislation.

[Municipal Dreams](#) - Website on the history of council housing.

Story maps on Bristol municipal housing [Bristol Homes for Heroes](#) (post WW1), [Post war new homes for all](#) (post WW2). These are also available via the Bristol Know Your Place website

[Open Data Bristol](#) - includes data about current housing stock.

[Vision of Britain](#) - Maps and statistical information including a section on [Bristol housing](#) statistics extracted from 1911–2011 census returns.

[Prefab Museum](#) - celebrating Britain's post-war prefabs and their residents

[Tower Block](#) - project on the social and architectural importance of tower blocks, with searchable database.

[The Right to Buy](#): Past, present and future - House of Lords Library.