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Generations

Bulletin of the
British Society of Gerontology

Issue No. 1

Summer 1985

GENERATIONS

BULLETIN OF THE BRITISH SOCIETY OF GERONTOLOGY

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25-31 IRONMONGER ROW
LONDON EC4V 3QP
Telephone 01 253 1787

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Editor : Chris Phillipson, Keele University.
Production : Patricia Strang, Keele University.
Printing & Distribution : Margaret Willett, Age Concern Devon.

EDITORIAL

Generations is a new venture for the British Society of Gerontology; it replaces Ageing Times, the bulletin edited with skill and enthusiasm by Yvonne Neville. During the period of Yvonne's editorship, the BSG expanded in membership, drawing people from a range of academic and non-academic backgrounds. It is now possible to identify a substantial group researching and working with older people. The purpose of Generations is to provide a platform for the views and activities of this group.

There is a considerable need for the kind of forum which it is hoped this bulletin will provide. People involved in research and caring activities face many pressures: isolation, expenditure cuts, ineffective training and the impact of stereotypes about older people. In response to these pressures Generations will try to identify innovations in gerontological theory and practice; it will also provide a platform for the views and comments of members of the society.

Generations will include short articles, research reports, book reviews and reports from conferences and study-trips. The next issue will appear early in December 1985; copy deadline is October 15th. Articles must be brief (maximum length 1000 words). Contributions and suggestions for future issues will be very welcome. Material should be sent to:

CHRIS PHILLIPSON,
Generations ,
Department of Adult Education,
University of Keele,
Keele,
Staffordshire,
ST5 5BG.

PETER LASLETT: GROWING OLD IN CHINA

Peter Laslett, the present Chairman of the British Society of Gerontology, paid a visit to Beijing in December along with another member of the Rank Xerox Unit in Ageing at the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure. The object was to consult with the members of the demography institute at one of China's most important universities, the University of Peking at Beijing, the Chinese capital. We were there for about ten days discussing with the Chinese the ageing consequences of their present very drastic fertility reduction programme. This, the so-called one-child policy, is now beginning to be effective, and will of course alter the age constitution of Chinese society very rapidly after some years. In the early part of the next century the Chinese may have a quarter or even more of their population over the age of 65, and a very small set of kin relations capable of supporting this huge segment of their people. It was with kinship that our discussions with the Chinese were primarily connected.

We found that our opposite numbers in the Peking Institute were well aware of the inevitable ageing of the population which would result from their fertility programme, but were exceedingly optimistic about China being able to meet the problems which that would create. The University is small, at least on American standards; it is reasonably well equipped considering the disastrous history which university faculties, particularly demography, experienced during the Cultural Revolution; and its members were exceedingly anxious to collaborate with the people like ourselves from Western countries. There is no department of gerontology in the university as far as we could tell, nor were we told of any specialist institution located in Beijing or in other Chinese centres. This is understandable because the proportion of older people is at present so very small in China, and well within the capacity of the Chinese economy to maintain at the level of the rest of the population before reduced fertility begins to bite. Although the policy of the Chinese government is for the families of older people to look after them, and to provide their financial resources in very many cases, old age homes do exist in China, many of them run by the local Communes. We were taken to visit such a Commune and walked round the home for

the elderly. People without children or relatives who can take them into their homes, people who need constant medical care, and those unable to get about by themselves live in institutions. The one we visited was situated in a particularly prosperous Commune not far from the capital, and had fairly recently been built.

Like nearly all the other structures in the Commune, however, it gave the impression of having been put up by the local people rather than by architects and builders, and to Western eyes on a bitterly cold December day it seemed pretty comfortless. The furniture was not upholstered that I can remember: the floor was not in wood but in concrete: the walls were of bare brick and what was most conspicuous was the complete lack of personal possessions. Even in that weather at that time of year the rooms occupied by the residents had opened doors and rather little privacy. The communal room where they ate was similar: sparsely furnished and hard in appearance, decorated mainly with slogans.

It would be easy to give a wrong impression of Chinese attitudes to the elderly, however, by a description of this kind because even the houses of the more important members of this community gave a similar bleak and rather bare impression. It has always to be remembered that China is still an exceedingly poor country on world standards and that in spite of the harshness of their domestic surroundings to our eyes, and even the somewhat primitive state of the plumbing in that vast city of eight million people, their health record and expectation of life is outstandingly good. It is better in fact than that of any other so-called undeveloped country.

There is a university of old age in China, corresponding in some ways to the University of the Third Age now established in Britain and common elsewhere. It is however confined to the highly educated administrative class, the Cadres as the kind Chinese call them, and unfortunately we were unable to attend any event at this institution in Beijing because of a confusion of dates. The professor who was responsible for our visit explained this by the forgetfulness of the old people who had arranged things. In spite of the fact that the family group, and the network of kin, is still deemed so important to the Chinese elderly, all the talk in respect of the coming "problem" of the aged was in terms of institutions, of morale, of the modernisation

programme and of national politics. The relative indifference to what we should think of as family values which can be seen in the considerable number of young Chinese couples having to live apart came out in the few remarks which we heard made about the residential position of the elderly.

These are only impressions of a highly superficial acquaintanceship with the Chinese in respect of the old. We came away after our very brief experience there convinced above all by one thing. That is that we were not well enough informed nor sufficiently sympathetic to understand quite what it was which motivated the Chinese in their attitudes to their old people, and to the possibility of their rapidly becoming the oldest society in existence, as well as the largest.

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* BSG AT KEELE *

27-29 SEPTEMBER 1985

UNDERSTANDING DEPENDENCY IN OLD AGE:
THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND
POLICY ALTERNATIVES

Carroll Estes
Bernice Neugarten
Maggie Kuhn

Details From : Frank Glendenning
Papers To : Chris Phillipson
Both at
Department of Adult Education
University of Keele
Keele
Staffordshire
ST5 5BG

GUIDE TO THE RESEARCH UNITS

No.1.: THE CENTRE FOR ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL STUDIES IN AGEING POLYTECHNIC OF NORTH LONDON

Since 1977 researchers within the Department of Applied Social Studies at the Polytechnic of North London have been engaged in work concerning the lives of old people and the implications of an ageing population for social policy. In particular research has explored the quality of life of elderly people within Local Authority homes, with special attention being given to trying to ascertain the views of the consumer. Such work highlighted not only the heterogeneity of older people, but also the importance of a diversity of response to their needs and expectations. It was also essential that this information should be widely disseminated both to practitioners, policy-makers, lay people and not least to older people themselves. Consequently, whilst much of this research was undertaken within the Department's Survey Research Unit, in 1982, the researchers in the field of social gerontology felt that their aims and objectives would be more effectively realised by the formation of a separate research group. This idea culminated in the setting up of the Centre for Environmental and Social Studies in Ageing (CESSA) in November 1983. The centre is constituted within the Faculty of Social Science and has the following broad objectives:

- * to find out more about the lifestyles of old people and how their circumstances are shaped by the social and physical worlds in which they live. Acknowledging the heterogeneity of the older population.
- * to monitor structural and legislative changes in society that may affect the lives of older people.
- * to evaluate - from appropriate social and environmental perspectives - initiatives which offer recreation, support or care to old people both within the community and in institutional settings.
- * to recommend changes in policy, planning and design that will increase the well-being of old people and enhance their status in society.

Such objectives reflect the multi-disciplinary background and interests

of CESSA's members, with particular emphasis being given to both social and environmental perspectives. Founder members include Leonie Kellaher (social anthropologist), Sheila Peace (social geographer) and Dianne Willcocks (sociologist). Over the past year they have been joined by Tim Weaver, David Phillips, and Sue Mullen, who have brought to the centre additional skills in psychology, social policy and computing.

The current programme of work is still firmly rooted in residential provision for older people and research now spans both the public and private sectors. Three main projects are ongoing:

- (a) A model of residential life: secondary analysis of data from the National Consumer Study in 100 Old People's Homes (funded by ILEA and ESRC).
- (b) A local consumer study of private homes for old people in Norfolk (funded by ILEA with additional support from Norfolk County Council and the Norfolk Rest Homes Association).
- (c) Private residential care as a public concern: an evaluation of the changing role of the state and the local authorities (funded by the Joseph Rowntree Memorial Trust).

Whilst these main contracts form the basis of CESSA's work, the research group is also involved in a wide range of initiatives both as consultants and unpaid advisors to voluntary agencies and local authorities e.g. London Borough of Hackney - Woodberry Down Neighbourhood Care Project, and survey of the ethnic elderly; Guinness Trust - Evaluation of the Lord Gage Centre, Plaistow; King's Fund Centre working party - Development of services for the elderly who are mentally ill (see CESSA Annual Report). Members of the centre also serve on the executive of both the British Association of Service to the Elderly and the British Society of Gerontology.

Apart from their research work the staff of CESSA also contribute to the teaching programme at the Polytechnic, with input on the Diploma in Social Work, the B.A. in Applied Social Studies, the Fieldwork Teachers course for Health Visitors and District Nurses and the Evening Degree in Sociology. They were also responsible for the short course 'Perspectives on Ageing', which was run in 1983/84.

As part of their commitment to the dissemination of research findings

the centre has also offered a wide range of study days; lectures and training sessions concerning its research in residential care. At a broader level the centre also hopes to respond to the different information requirements of such varied groups as the providers and the deliverers of services for the elderly, together with the consumers themselves. Two new examples of such dissemination include the forthcoming training pack for care staff in residential homes 'Images of Residential Life' and 'Living in Homes: A Consumer Guide to Residential Homes' written for older people and their relatives and to be jointly published by BASE and CESSA in a few months time.

Finally it should be added that all the staff of CESSA are untenured contract researchers. Maintaining the centre is therefore a constant battle to keep a small core of staff employed, further the aims and objectives of the group and at the same time respond to local needs.

Further details concerning the work of the centre, particular projects and publications can be obtained from Sheila M. Peace Ph.D., CESSA, Department of Applied Social Studies, Polytechnic of North London, Ladbroke House, Highbury Grove, London N5 2AD. Tel: 01-607-2789 ext. 5082.

Selected Publications

A Balanced Life? A Consumer Study of Residential Life in 100 Local Authority Homes. S.M. Peace, L.A. Kellaher, D.M. Willcocks, 1982.
(a popular version of a detailed research study written for practitioners).

The Business of Care: A Study of Private Residential Homes for Old People. T. Weaver, D.M. Willcocks, L.A. Kellaher. 1985 forthcoming May.

Living in Homes: A Consumer Guide to Residential Homes. L.A. Kellaher, S.M. Peace, D.M. Willcocks. 1985 forthcoming.

The Residential Life of Old People: A Study in 100 Local Authority Homes. D.M. Willcocks, S.M. Peace, L.A. Kellaher with J.A. Ring. Vol.1.
Research Report No.12, Survey Research Unit, Polytechnic of North London.

The Residential Life of Old People: A Study of 100 Local Authority Homes. D.M. Willcocks, J.A. Ring, L.A. Kellaher, S.M. Peace. Vol.II.
Research Report No.13, Survey Research Unit, Polytechnic of North London.

The Essence of Home. L.A. Kellaher, S.M. Peace, D.M. Willcocks. Report of a seminar held at the Centre on Environment for the Handicapped, 1982.

NEW RESEARCH

No.1.: SURVEY OF TENANTS IN ANCHOR SHELTERED HOUSING GRAHAM FENNELL, UNIVERSITY OF EAST ANGLIA

There are different schools of thought about how to do social research and because of this it is doubtful if one can describe a new project without showing one's prejudices. I'll table three of mine at once. I have a prejudice in favour of 'hard' data - or data as hard as we can get it (it would be nice to think we *really* know what we claim to know) - collected by methods which are as 'soft' as the subject matter requires (with elderly people a 'soft' approach to data collection may be especially appropriate). Secondly, I believe social researchers should use their eyes and ears as much and as directly as possible in their research: they should get up close to the real world they are studying. Thirdly, I have a prejudice, where studies in the social policy area are concerned, in favour of paying attention to the elderly consumers, recipients, beneficiaries, users, victims, clients (or however we designate them) of the service or policy we are examining. Old-fashioned prejudices, you may think.

In the case of sheltered housing for old people, despite sporadic forays into the field, we know curiously little about the tenants and their social world. In the absence of published information we can only guess at how comparable these settings are to those described by American social gerontologists such as Jennie-Keith Ross and Arlie Hochschild. We need more basic data to help us profile the tenants and analyse the ageing process in the grouped setting. Beyond this there are some fascinating sociological questions to explore in sheltered housing.

Tenants are drawn together in old age from a potentially wide social and geographical catchment area: how do they relate to one another? What is it which causes a common room in one scheme to be a hive of activity where in another it is scarcely used from dawn to dusk? Does the size of a scheme affect the tenant's perception of it (as one feels it must - surely a large scheme is likely to feel more institutional?) or are other variables of overriding importance?

The data hitherto is quite ambiguous. Is friendship formation inversely related to privacy as Townsend suggested, with such tantalising plausibility, in The Last Refuge?

Against this background of a generalised curiosity you will understand my pleasure in being allowed to collaborate in a survey of sheltered housing tenants in a large housing association over 1984-85. The survey has been sponsored by the Anchor Housing Association and contracted to the University of East Anglia and Social and Community Planning Research.

The fieldwork for the survey has now been completed. 100 schemes were selected from the 461 developments which Anchor have built all over the country and 863 interviews were achieved, a response rate of 91%. As well as requiring basic data and a review of variables particularly relating to the organisation's interest in the design of new schemes and the management, letting and refurbishment policy of existing ones, we were also willing for the survey to make a contribution to the wider academic literature about sheltered housing.

The main field survey was undertaken by SCPR in November and December 1984. Interviews of 1½ hours' length allowed data to be collected on 700 tenant variables as well as a variety of scheme variables. Translating Anchor's topic headings into an interview schedule, along with fieldwork and data preparation has been carried out under Julia Field's supervision at SCPR.

My role has been to undertake the prepiloting exploratory enquiries, to participate in design and piloting of the interview schedule and generally to act as a consultant in relation to the main survey, the bulk of which could certainly be left to the safe hands of SCPR (but for my prejudice in favour of researchers participating at all stages of the research project). As well as analysing the results I have been given the opportunity to visit a great number of schemes in the survey and make my own on-the-ground assessment of the scheme variables, as well as talk to wardens and others involved on the management side. Were it not for the fact that some researchers seldom stir from their place of work, it would seem unnecessary to say how informative such field trips are. There is such a vast range of local housing types and environments - from

the most genteel and environmentally pure locations of the South West to some of our most beaten-up and menacing estates in and around the conurbations - that to appreciate their physical impact I am convinced one has to experience them in the flesh.

As I write we are at the data-checking stage of the tenant survey: it should be possible to report results to the next BSG Conference, but the database is extensive and of such high quality that it should keep me as happy as the proverbial sandboy for some time to come beyond that and hopefully prove a fruitful field for secondary analysis in years to come.

ROBIN MEANS: A HAPPIER OLD AGE?

This contribution to Generations is really a plug for my new book (Robin Means and Randall Smith, The Development of Welfare Services for Elderly People, Croom Helm, London - a giveaway at a modest (?) £17.95). However, it is also an attempt to reflect on the shifting terrain of assumptions about social policies for elderly people in the period from the genesis of the book to its completion.

In 1979, I left Birmingham Social Services Department for a complex mix of reasons. One of these was my frustration at not being able to develop my interest in social work with elderly people as a qualified social worker in what was a child care orientated department. I felt that one contribution to the destruction of such attitudes would be a book that offered students from the 'caring' professions a detailed account of the development of the personal social services for elderly people in a way that others had written about services for children 'at risk'. After a two year SSRC (now ESRC) funded research project, the end result has been the recently published book which traces service development from the outbreak of the second world war until the re-organisation of the personal social services in 1971.

Its publication has led me to realise the frightening speed at which the nature of the debate about service provision for sick and frail elderly people has changed since I left social work. I had attended a seminar organised by my co-author Randall Smith on 'Policies for the Elderly' which focused on the DHSS discussion document A Happier Old Age. In retrospect, this document can be seen as the point when my anxiety about overall levels of state expenditure met growing concern about future demographic trends. For example, the discussion document made it clear that the incremented growth of residential and domiciliary services for elderly people could no longer be guaranteed. Most of the participants at the seminar were reluctant to accept the 'inevitability' of the economic imperative and were content to list those areas where services needed to be expanded and developed. There was a strong emphasis upon the rights of elderly people to services, and it was felt that these rights would be actively pursued by the consumers because elderly people in the future would

not be so constrained by their personal histories of deference.

Such naivety! I suspect social services departments do now perceive sick and frail elderly people as a priority and that qualified social workers are now more able to argue for a counselling role with this group. However, this has occurred against a background of a restructuring of assumptions about service availability. Residential and domiciliary services (unless privately provided) are bad for elderly people because they undermine independence. The 'burden' of the 75+ age group requires the maximum input of help from the 'family', friends and neighbours. It can be argued that the primary role of the 'caring' professions, including social work, is becoming the uncritical justification of this 'reality' to clients and their families.

Such a gloomy scenario does not lead me to abandon my previous belief in the potential beneficial role of social work staff with elderly clients. However, it does make it even more essential that they are able to assess their present day role from an historical perspective that illustrates the complex history of argument since the second world war about the appropriate role of the state in service provision for sick and frail elderly people. Where should the boundaries be drawn between hospital care and local authority residential care? Should the voluntary sector be left to provide the bulk of domiciliary services? Do domiciliary services undermine 'family' care? The development of this debate is the central theme of our book which attempts to show there is nothing inevitable about the present orthodoxy.

At the same time, the present orthodoxy does draw upon a long tradition of warnings about the 'administrative nightmare' that would emerge from any slackening of the moral fibre of the 'family'. The 1950 Annual Report of the National Corporation for the Care of Old People stated:

"Beyond doubt, there is an increasing tendency to regard this provision of help and care as a burden and to throw it, with so many other burdens, upon the state. Family life and family responsibilities have, in the past, been among the finest features of our national heritage."

Now where have I heard this somewhere before,.....?

TRAINING AND EDUCATION

WITH A VIEW TO RETIREMENT

VERA IVERS, BETH JOHNSON FOUNDATION

The age at which people should start to prepare for retirement is a matter for continuing debate.

Whatever the ideal, it is probably the case that a few plan carefully and positively their new life style some years ahead, and a few make no plans at all but drift into a state of apathetic non-involvement with the world around them. Many more start to think seriously about it just before or just after the date of retirement, often with some anxiety.

The notion that retired people can take a positive hold on their life, should decide and influence their own immediate environment and that around them and choose how their later years are to be spent, is introduced through the medium of a video film of the trigger type in this pack.

The film shows a man whose background is obviously manual work, a woman who is totally family orientated and then a series of activities in which retired people are taking part. The pack also contains tutors' notes and three sets of questions for consideration by small groups, designed to stimulate discussion around the whole area of decision making and responsibility, and about the choice of a particular life style in retirement and what effect that choice might have on mental, physical and emotional well-being.

The pack would be suitable for use on pre-retirement courses and with groups of retired people. It could also be helpful to professionals working with elderly people.

The pack is presented in a plastic wallet containing a video which lasts 5 minutes, tutors' notes and three sets of group discussion material. The exercise can be completed in one hour, but a longer time may sometimes help in developing the discussion.

Trials of the pack have been encouraging. Amongst pre-retirement groups from the shop floor and from professional and administrative jobs, the discussion was lively and enthusiastic, and the need to find an opportunity to articulate and speculate upon the years ahead

was very apparent.

Groups of retired people have also taken part in the exercise and the discussion was no less lively. Although, of course, the fact that they were already part of a group may very well indicate their willingness to take such steps as the film covertly suggests.

'With a View to Retirement' is produced as a co-operative effort by: The Beth Johnson Foundation

 The North Staffordshire Health Authority

 The North Staffordshire Polytechnic

Video packs of 'With a View to Retirement' can be obtained from:

 The Beth Johnson Foundation,

 Parkfield House,

 64 Princes Road,

 Hartshill,

 Stoke-on-Trent,

 ST4 7JL.

at £12.95 per pack. Please state Betamax or VHS.

NEW PUBLICATIONS

✓ Ann McGoldrick, Equal Treatment in Occupational Pension Schemes.
Man: EOC, 1984.

This study investigates both policy and practice in occupational pension schemes regarding differential treatment of men and women. A sample of 100 schemes was selected for detailed examination, using members' handbooks, rulebooks and trust deeds. A similar examination was made in respect of a sample in the 50 organisations with the largest pension funds. Thirty schemes were investigated in greater depth, through interviews with pension scheme managers and trade unions.

✓ Doris Francis, Will You Still Need Me, Will You Still Feed Me, When I'm 84? Indiana University Press, 1984.

An anthropological study of how two groups of elderly Jews - one in Cleveland, Ohio, and the other in Leeds, England - have adapted to, and coped with growing old.

✓ Gillian Parker, With Due Care and Attention: Review of Research on Informal Care. Family Policy Studies Centre, 1985.

A review of the evidence about who in practice provides care for the elderly and other social groups; the cost of care; and the range of service provision.

✓ Robin Means and Randall Smith, The Development of Welfare Services for Elderly People. Croom Helm, 1985.

A major review of the emergence of welfare services in post-war Britain. The study explores the possibilities of a policy that combines respect for elderly people with avoidance of exploitation for relatives.

✓ Joanna Bornat, Chris Phillipson and Sue Ward, A Manifesto for Old Age. Pluto Books, 1985.

A radical programme for old age, including: financial support, preventive health, residential care, education, transport and housing.

Jim Traynor and Ian Crosby, In Our Care. Help The Aged Education Department, 1985.

A handbook of training exercises designed by two senior social workers. In Our Care is arranged in four sessions covering themes which include attitudes to ageing and to older people, assessment and resources within the community, the problems faced by carers and communication skills.

Martin Knapp, The Economics of Social Care. Macmillan, 1985. Describes and applies techniques of economic analysis crucial to identifying the costs and benefits of health and social care policies.

The price of Home Life: A Code of Practice for Residential Care was increased on 18th February to £3.00 per copy (plus 10% postage and packing, up to a maximum of £4.00). The Code of Practice is now in its third printing, and the price increase has been necessitated by increased production costs. Orders should be sent, with payment, to: Bailey Bros. & Swinfen Ltd., Warner House, Folkestone, Kent, CT19 6PH. The Centre for Policy on Ageing, publishers of the Code of Practice, said they were overwhelmed with the response to the code, of which 32,000 copies are already in circulation.

Alison Norman, Triple Jeopardy: Growing Old in a Second Homeland. Centre for Policy on Ageing, 1985.

Detailed review of the issues involved in service provision by both statutory and voluntary agencies and suggests practical action which can be taken immediately to improve matters.

ANGUS STUART: OWNER OCCUPATION - A DREAM COME TRUE OR A NIGHTMARE REALITY?

For an elderly individual today their life is the latest stage in an ever changing process made up of past experiences and actions interacting with and conditioned by wider influences such as societal values, government policy, economic and the occurrence of war. In a similar way the life of the elderly in the near future is a function of the life they lead today. The present pre-retirement population embodies within it the forthcoming generation of elderly people. Those aged 70 to 80 in the year 2000 are presently aged 55 to 65 and are either approaching retirement or have recently retired.

Whilst it is well-established that as this century draws to a close and we enter the next people over 75 will form a larger part of the pensionable population, relatively little is known about their prospective housing circumstances. On the basis of present and past generations of over 75s such a change in age structure can be expected to result in a higher proportion of frailer, poorer elderly people living alone with associated problems in housing, health and mobility. To what extent such extrapolation is valid depends on how closely the present up and coming generation of pensioners follow the pattern of their predecessors.

There is much evidence from previous studies to suggest that older people have lived in their current homes for many years. Rose in his 1982 study of elderly people and their housing in Hall Green, Birmingham found that over 80 per cent of his sample had either resided in their present homes for more than ten years or had 'always lived there'. A recent DoE report supports this in its finding that most elderly people prefer to remain in their own homes than move (Tinker, 1984). If this is representative of a general and continuing trend it would not be unreasonable to conclude that many people presently approaching retirement or who have just retired will be in the same dwellings at the turn of the century.

Until recently many elderly people lived in private rented accommodation which tended to date from before the First World War. These houses are associated with inadequate amenities, poor heating

and a generally low state of repair. However, younger generations, more and more likely to be owner-occupiers, have been reaching retirement and will continue to do so. Their housing is not so old but is beginning to show signs of disrepair (Rose, 1982; Greater London House Condition Survey, 1981; Larkin, Magee and Hawley, 1983). Rose's Hall Green study, for example, showed that in this ward made up largely of inter-war housing, elderly homeowners were only beginning to encounter problems.

For many who are now aged 55 to 65 owner-occupation represented an ideal and was seen very much as a symbol of prosperity and security. Many may have purchased inter-war family dwellings during the fifties - a period of comparatively little private sector housebuilding and one of austerity for many households. The opportunity to buy their own house was something that went beyond the aspirations held by their parents and would have been considered prestigious even for their own generation. These homes still represent a considerable asset for their owners. However, they often also represent an increasing burden as both they and the owners advance in years. For the elderly with reduced income and possibly the occurrence of health problems it becomes more and more difficult to heat and maintain houses which, although appropriate for raising a family, are now too large. Compounding the difficulties is the fact that as these houses continue to age they require more effort and money to maintain them. Houses built between the wars are reaching the point where major attention should be given to areas such as wiring, plumbing and the structure of the building.

As the couple age one partner inevitably dies leaving one, usually the woman, to cope with the home alone. Redecoration and many other maintenance tasks, so often the prerogative of the male, become the responsibility of the woman. As the burden increases there is a danger that the house will progressively fall into serious disrepair, maybe so much that it becomes beyond repair. The design of inter-war houses is also potentially problematic for older people. For example, almost all of the housing of inter-war estates is built with only one inside toilet. This is usually situated at the top of a steep set of stairs which have a sharp turn about three-quarters of the way up. Clearly as many people find they have difficulties with stairs as they age such a design is at best inconvenient and at worst dangerous to life and limb. Furthermore many inter-war houses were built at low

densities with large gardens. Gardening may have been a keen pastime for the couple in former years but can become an additional burden for the surviving partner.

It can be seen that the house of dreams is a potential nightmare. This is a picture which, for some has already become a reality. The Rose study showed the first signs of this. In the London Borough of Brent the local authority in conjunction with the GLC have set up an advice service for elderly homeowners who are experiencing problems with their houses. However, this is just start of the problem. These houses have only just started to become unfit and many of the occupants are only just reaching retirement. If things are allowed to run their natural course there are potentially massive housing problems for many as they enter their seventies and eighties. The prospects for these people are not helped by the continuing retrenchment in housing finance from the government.

The housing prospects for the elderly can be related to the interaction of present housing and household trends, changes in the population structure and the development of residential patterns in British towns and cities. This provides the arena within which public policy is acted out. It is in studying such interaction that my own research in the London Borough of Brent is concerned. The focus is on the housing prospect of owner-occupiers in late-middle age living in inter-war houses. However, this is just one of a whole range of possible studies which remain to be undertaken to build up a fuller picture of the diversity of the housing patterns of successive generations of elderly people. In developing my study I am always keen to hear of other similar studies or information about particular neighbourhoods where housing circumstances for elderly people have become or may become difficult. As awareness is raised of the range and extent of future problems and where they are likely to occur it may be possible to go some way in averting or alleviating them.

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CONTRIBUTORS:

Peter Laslett, Trinity College, Cambridge.

Leonie Kellaher, Sheila Peace & Dianne Wilcocks, CESSA.

Graham Fennell, School of Economic & Social Studies, University of East Anglia.

Robin Means, School of Advanced Urban Studies, University of Bristol.

Vera Ivers, Beth Johnson Foundation, Stoke-on-Trent.

Angus Stuart, Department of Geography, King's College, London.

BSG Directory of Members

REMINDER: IF YOU HAVE NOT COMPLETED THIS FORM PLEASE DO SO
BY 31st JULY 1985 (Return to: Sheila Peace, CESSA,
Department of Applied Social Studies, Polytechnic of
North London, Ladbroke House, Highbury Grove, London, N5 2AD.)

Name:
(Surname) (Forenames)

Title: DR / MR / MRS / MS / MISS (Delete as appropriate)

Other (specify)

Address to appear in the Directory:

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.....

Work Address if different from above:

.....
.....
.....

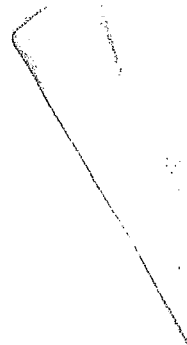
Day-time Telephone Number:(please give
STD code if necessary)

Occupation (please give brief details of current employment or
position):

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Research Interests (where appropriate please give title of current
research and name of funding body):

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