

# 20th Century Sparks!

## Poverty

### Living in slum conditions

**In the 1930s the Government spearheaded a campaign to demolish urban 'slums' - housing which was unsafe, damp or inhabitable. Many buildings and streets were demolished and cleared in Brighton and people were moved to new housing.**

**On this page and in Re-housing we explore the memories of the streets and neighbourhoods which disappeared during the 1930s in Brighton and Hove, and the new communities which emerged.**



'Slum' dwellings scheduled for demolition  
*Brighton and Hove in Pictures*

The inhabitants were united by poverty, and built up strong support networks within the community to help them survive the rigours of their lives; not everyone had extended families, but everyone had neighbours. The demolition of a neighbourhood is not just the destruction of buildings, it is also the destruction of a complex social system.

People felt they belonged to an area of the town, (a small collection of streets around their home) and everyone knew where that area began and ended. Although almost all the buildings only survive as photographs, memories of living in 'Backyard Brighton' are very much alive.

*Backyard Brighton*

#### **Brighton Borough Council Health Committee Report: 29.11.34**

Nos 9-15 Dorset Buildings.

Nos 9-12 inclusive are damp walled houses with unhealthy sliprooms and small sculleries opening onto very small yards.

No 13 is a damp walled house and although it has a large garden to the north has only a small confined yard.

Nos 14 & 15 are damp walled houses opening onto very confined yards.

*Backyard Brighton*



## Poverty

### Living in slum conditions - continued

**When 'Backyard Brighton' was being written in the late 1980s a call went out in the local press for people to come forward with memories relating to the Council collection of photos. This letter, included in the finished book, reacting strongly to those homes being referred to as 'slums'.**

Regarding your article and pictures of the houses in old Richmond Street, Carlton Hill and surrounding streets in Brighton, I object to them being called slums. The people who lived in these houses were good, clean, working-class people. They kept their houses spotlessly, and the front doorsteps and each bit of pavement was swept and washed nearly every morning.

In the summer evenings we would sit out on the front steps enjoying a laugh with our friendly neighbours with a jug of beer at 4p a pint. No filthy litter or vandalism like today and no fear of thieves. These streets were far from slums. They were cosy houses for happy families.

*R.J. Weedon, Hollingdean Road, Brighton. Published in The Evening Argus 8 July 1988 and Backyard Brighton*

#### **The difficulties of paying rent**

Practically all working class houses were let at a weekly rental. There were so many empty houses in the various streets because families could not afford to pay the rent. To encourage a tenant to take over a house, the owner would show the tenants over the house and say he was prepared to paint, decorate and paper the walls of every room. Then he would accept a week's rent and hand over the door key.

*Albert Paul - Poverty, Hardship but Happiness*

People would be unable to pay their rent, which would only be five shillings for a house, and that shared with two or three families, living in slum conditions, not dirty, but crowded because there was not enough money.

*John Langley - Always a Layman*

# 20th Century Sparks!

## Poverty

### Re-housing

**As Brighton council began to demolish old areas of the town families found themselves in re-developed areas and new homes. Despite supposed better amenities this transition of change wasn't easy, as these two extracts from 'Backyard Brighton' show.**

We received notice that we would have to move and we were offered a house on the Manor Farm Estate, but my father said it was too far away from his work (he worked at the Royal Crescent Hotel as a kitchen porter and had to work funny hours and week-ends) so they offered us a flat in a new block opposite the Stag pub, on the site of the old Crescent Cottages. They were lovely flats.

I don't think any of us objected, we just accepted what we were told. Most people were fascinated by the thought of having electric light and bathrooms, but many have moved back to the area now their families have grown up.

I think the redevelopment has improved KempTown, but it's not homely any more. That was comfort, that house in Edwin Place was lovely. This flat is very nice but blessed cold, we were never cold in Edwin Place. I've got central heating and everything but it doesn't come up to the standard of those little houses. If they'd put a bathroom and electricity in them it would have been lovely, it was such a pretty street.

*Gladys Amelia Jane Stenning - Backyard Brighton*

In 1936 my parents were told they were going to be re-housed as Preece Buildings were going to be demolished. They were quite happy to go as they had no real amenities in their house. Manor Farm was the area we were to be moved to and I went three times with my father to the estate.

These houses were like Buckingham Palace compared with the Preece Buildings, with running water, a bathroom, plenty of living and sleeping space and electric light with just a switch. They also came with an electric cooker with the Corporation crest on it and an electric kettle. My mother was always afraid of electricity and didn't want to use them.

*Victor Henry Cox - Backyard Brighton*



Dorset Buildings, pre-demolition  
*Backyard Brighton*



Dorset Buildings, c. 1935  
*Brighton & Hove in Pictures*