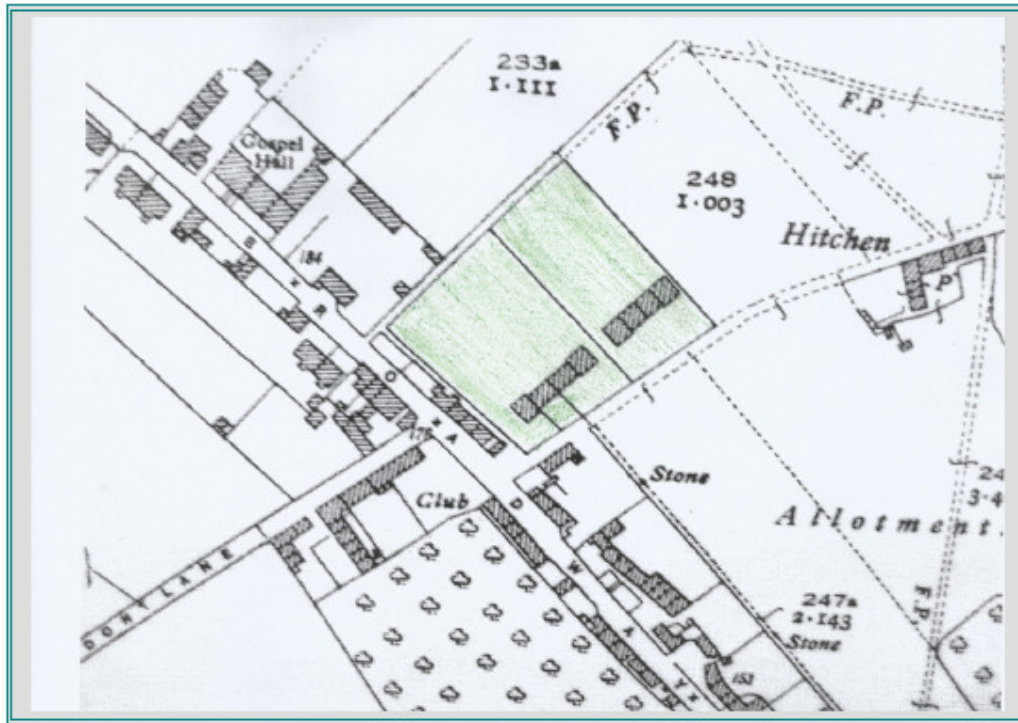


Early Social Housing

Text: David Gibbs

The first village social houses, or council houses, were built in 1925. The Local Authority at that time was Chard Rural District Council. The houses, a terrace of four, were built at the entrance to Hitchen. In 1927, a second terrace of four houses was built alongside, as shown on the 1928 map detail below.



In the years that followed, a third terrace was built plus two semi-detached houses. In addition, more council houses were built at Newchester Cross and in Church Street. Then came the war and all such building came to a halt, not to be resumed until the late 1940s when the wide-open spaces of Hitchen, with its crisscrossing footpaths that had long been a unique feature of the parish, gradually disappeared.

In July 1946, my family moved into one of the middle houses of the 1927 terrace, the second tenants of the property. It had three-bedrooms, a living room, kitchen, downstairs bathroom and a separate downstairs toilet. (Since that time the house has been extensively modernised and is now a two-bedroom property with an upstairs bathroom and a much larger kitchen.)

When the houses were built there was no mains water supply. Water was drawn from a well with the aid of a hand pump mounted on the wall above the wooden draining board, alongside the stone sink. By the time we moved in, a mains supply had been connected but there was no means to heat water except in the bathroom - just a bath incidentally, no hand basin - where there was a 'copper', a large built-in bowl with a fire basket beneath. This enabled my mother to boil clothes on washday - always on Monday back

then - and to heat bath water, dipped out with a hand-held dipper and poured into the bath alongside. There was no hot water tank or airing cupboard.

Electricity was connected but the original installation was very limited. It consisted of ceiling lights in the living room, kitchen and front bedroom. There was not a single power point and no cooker panel. My mother had to cook on the living room fire, which had an oven above it, or on oil stoves, but after a short while the power supply was extended, at my parents' expense, so that we then had lights in all rooms, a cooker panel that also accommodated an electric kettle in the kitchen, and a power point in the living room. My mother also acquired an electric iron, which she plugged into the kitchen light fitting; this meant that the two flatirons she previously used that had been a feature of our home life for so long were now redundant. No longer did she have to heat them by propping them in front of the open fire, or by placing them atop a low burning oil stove, one iron being heated whilst the other was in use, the correct temperature being determined by a smart spit onto the surface of the hot iron. There was no gas supply; it wasn't available in the village until the 1950s.

A feature of our property and those alongside was the large amount of garden they each had, as you can see on the map, I believe the theory was that it would be possible to grow sufficient vegetables to feed a family. Our front garden had a length of about 25 feet (before the Hitchen access road was built) and the back garden was around 180-200 feet, and very heavy clay soil at that. But all the gardens were fully cropped back then, I don't recall a single plot being uncultivated. Lots of tenants also kept a few chickens. Below you can see an early rent card, for the period 1947-48. The total rent and rates at that time was nine shillings and seven pence (9/7) per week, less that 50p in today's money. Sadly, in those pre-welfare state days, when the wages of an ordinary workman was around £5 per week, many families who desperately needed a council house simply couldn't afford one. Consequently, the very first tenants included several one-child families rather than large families and many of the breadwinners had stable employment rather than being workers in less secure employment. They included a painter and decorator, two self-employed builders, a postman and even the village blacksmith.

It's interesting to read the Regulations and Conditions associated with tenancy. Knowing the good, hard-working people who were our neighbours for many years, I have to say I think some of the stipulations are somewhat patronising, even insulting, What do you think?

(Unfortunately the reproduction is not as distinct as it might be and you may need to use the Adobe Reader magnification facility to read the small print.)

CHARD RURAL DISTRICT COUNCIL.

RENT CARD.

THIS CARD MUST BE PRODUCED WHEN PAYING RENT. NO OTHER RECEIPT WILL BE GIVEN.

1947-48.

SERIAL No. mel/35.

NAME OF TENANT.....

ADDRESS Hitcham
Memmoth, Som.

TENANCY COMMENCED.....

DATE					
RENT	<u>6/6</u>				
RATES	<u>3/11</u>				
REBATE OF ANY					
TOTAL... ..	<u>9/7</u>				

HOUSING ACT, 1936.

SUMMARY OF SECTIONS 58, 59 AND 61.

1. After the FIRST day of JANUARY, 1937, an owner who causes or permits his dwelling to be overcrowded is liable to prosecution for an offence under the Housing Act, 1936, and, if convicted, to a fine not exceeding five pounds. Any part of a house which is occupied by a separate family is a "dwelling."
2. A dwelling is overcrowded if the number of persons sharing it is more than the "permitted number," or is such that two or more of those persons, being two years old or over, of opposite sexes (not being parents living together as husband and wife), would sleep in the same room.
3. The "permitted number" for the dwelling to which this Rent Card relates is persons. In counting the number of persons each child under two years of age counts as half a person, and a child of less than one year is not counted at all.
4. The Act contains special provisions relating to overcrowding already existing on the above-mentioned date or which is due to a child attaining the age of either one or ten years after that date, or which is due to exceptional circumstances. Full information about these special provisions and all provisions as to overcrowding can be obtained free on application to the Local Authority, whose address is:-

THE CLERK OF THE RURAL DISTRICT COUNCIL,
SNOWDON HOUSE, CHARD.

Medical Officer of Health:

Dr. C. C. COURT,
THE RIDGE, STATION ROAD, ILMINSTER.

Rent Collector:

Mr. H. P. BATTEN, SNOWDON HOUSE, CHARD.

Regulations and Conditions of Tenancy.

1.—The tenancy shall be by the week, and shall be determinable, on either side, by 4 weeks' previous notice, such notice to expire on a Monday.

2.—The rents shall be payable in advance on **Monday** in each week. The authorized Collector of the Council will collect the rents at such intervals as will be notified by him to the Tenants from time to time, and give receipts therefor on a rent card. The Tenants shall see that all sums paid to the Collector are entered on this card. The Tenants shall receive their rent cards of the Collector whenever required to do so. If the rent is in arrears at any time, the Council or their Executive Committee may at once give the defaulting Tenant notice to quit the dwelling. The Rates, including Water Rates or Charges (if any), shall be paid by the Tenants to the Collector in weekly instalments with the Rent.

3.—Dresses, paving or any other part of the premises, or the fixtures therein, damaged by the Tenant or through his negligence will be repaired by the Council at the cost of the Tenant. Cracked or broken glass or lead lights must be replaced immediately by the Tenant. Chimneys in use must be swept once at least in every six months.

4.—Firearms, pistols or other similar fire weapons to be kept at least 15 yards from the structure of the rooms.

5.—No Tenant will be permitted to smelt, or take in molten, or to keep a shop, store, warehouse or factory of any kind without obtaining the previous sanction of the Council.

6.—The placing in the Water Closet of rags, bottles, or anything likely to choke it or the drain is strictly prohibited. In case of violation of this Regulation the expense of clearing the W.C., and drain will be charged to the Tenant.

7.—Junks and dry horse manure only are to be thrown into public dustbins. All liquid refuse is to be thrown down the Water closet or sink, according to the nature of the soil.

8.—Notification must immediately be given to the Sanitary Inspector of any case of infectious or contagious disease occurring in the dwelling, and the Tenant must agree to allow the person affected to be removed to a Hospital if such removal is considered to be necessary by the Medical Officer of Health.

9.—The Council shall be at liberty, by their agents or workmen, to enter and report the state of repair and cleanliness of any dwelling at all reasonable hours of the day, and to execute any repairs therein.

10.—No urinals, pots or pannes shall be kept on the premises without the consent of the Council.

11.—Rubbish must be kept clean and not used as dumpstons.

12.—Tenants shall not, without the previous consent of the Council, erect on the premises any machine, shed, construction, enclosure or other building. No trees or plants on the premises shall be cut down or removed without the consent of the Council.

13.—Any Tenant, who, in the opinion of the Council, shall neglect to observe these Regulations, or cause or impede or obstruct any of these regulations, or shall cause or create any disturbance or inconvenience to the neighbours shall be subject to notice under Clause 1, without a remedy of any kind on account of such notice, and the Council shall not be liable for any claim by such Tenant for any damage arising therefrom.

14.—Tenants are required to keep the dwellings, paths and lanes, and the garden, front and back in a clean and orderly condition.

15.—Inadequate repairs, repainting and redecoration (other than such as the Tenant may be responsible for under Clause 3 hereof), as may be necessary from time to time to keep the houses in good condition, will be undertaken by the Council, and Tenants are not allowed to do such work without the consent of the Council. Tenants are expected to exercise all reasonable care in their occupation of dwellings.

16.—Tenants must insure their furniture and other property against damage or destruction by fire.

17.—The entry into possession by a Tenant of any of these dwellings shall be conclusive evidence, as against such Tenant, of his acceptance of, and assent to, of, all the foregoing conditions, and of his agreement to be bound thereby.

18.—The decision of the Council upon any matter or question arising out of the above Regulations shall be final.

As these Regulations are made for the benefit of all the Tenants, they are requested to see that the same are observed in all respects.

Finally, here's a peek inside the rent card. Note the rent was paid on time, month after month, as it continued to be year after year throughout a tenancy that continued for several decades. In the management of our family finances, rent money was always a priority.

ALL ENTRIES MUST BE MADE IN DUPLICATE THROUGH THE SPECIAL COLLECTION SHEET.

TOTAL DUE AND ADDRESS	PAID				REMARKS	DATE DUE	RENT	RENT	RENT	RENT	RENT
	CASH PAID	CHECK NO.	DATE PAID	RENT NO.							
						1902	15	02			
						1903	15	02			
						1904	15	02			
						1905	15	02			
						1906	15	02			
						1907	15	02			
						1908	15	02			
						1909	15	02			
						1910	15	02			
						1911	15	02			
						1912	15	02			
						1913	15	02			
						1914	15	02			
						1915	15	02			
						1916	15	02			
						1917	15	02			
						1918	15	02			
						1919	15	02			
						1920	15	02			
						1921	15	02			
						1922	15	02			
						1923	15	02			
						1924	15	02			
						1925	15	02			
						1926	15	02			
						1927	15	02			
						1928	15	02			
						1929	15	02			
						1930	15	02			

ALL ENTRIES MUST BE MADE IN DUPLICATE THROUGH THE SPECIAL COLLECTION SHEET.