

The Centenary of the Chartered Institute of Housing 1916 to 2016



As the *UK Housing Review* makes clear, housing is a long-term business. While the *Review* is 24 years old, CIH is now 100. It is timely to reflect on the past alongside the challenges of the future – the regular subject of the *Review's* commentaries on current trends and its analysis of contemporary issues.

Origins of the Institute

From the mid-19th century onwards, social reformers were active in trying to tackle the appalling housing conditions that existed in both the burgeoning towns and cities of the UK and in rural areas. In 1859 the Association of Sanitary Reform came into being, chaired by Lord Shaftesbury, and after the Royal Commission on the Housing of Working Classes published its report in 1884, exposing with more clarity the poor conditions in which many were living, the first major legislation was passed in the form of the Housing of the Working Classes Act 1885. A number of charitable housing trusts were set up, often based on bequests by philanthropists like William Sutton and Samuel Lewis, that continue to this day.

Numerous forward-thinking social reformers were active at the time but one of them is most closely associated with the origins of the CIH. Octavia Hill (1838-1912), who also helped found the National Trust and the profession of social work, had begun working to improve housing for the poor. Much has been written about her and it has to be said there are differing views. However, she was in certain respects the initiator of the profession of housing management when, at the age of 26, she took on managing two small groups of dilapidated houses in Marylebone, London. These homes had been bought by John Ruskin, a Victorian patron of the arts, watercolourist and prominent social thinker and philanthropist. He passed the properties to Hill to manage asking her to aim for a five per cent return. She rented the properties on weekly or short-term tenancies, employing

female housing managers whom she trained and who were equipped to deal with repairs, welfare issues and rent accounting. Key to her approach was personal contact with the tenants.

She continued this pioneering work throughout her life, taking on more homes from the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, before dying of cancer at the age of 73. In 1916 some of the women who had trained under her founded the *Association of Women Housing Workers* (later the *Association of Women House Property Managers*). This organisation codified the training programme with volunteer trainees being required to work without pay while they went through the process. The Association was never large but it grew steadily to over 400 members, and in 1948 changed its name to the *Society of Housing Managers* (and allowed men to join), publishing its own journal, *The Bulletin*.

At the outset, the association/society was for women only and in 1931, reflecting the rise of council housing as a mass form of provision, a group of mainly male local government officers from housing departments in the West Midlands established the *Institute of Housing*. Although the Association/Society was linked to the Chartered Surveyors

Institution for qualifications (subsequently the RICS) and the Institute's founders were also drawn from the property-based professions, the IoH took a somewhat more technocratic and less estate-based approach to housing. It ran its first conference in 1931, developed qualifying examinations and also



Six cottages in Southwark built for Octavia Hill at the turn of the century. Photo by Stephen Craven.

published the journal, *Housing*. These two strands, often characterised as people-based and property-based, co-existed until, with much soul searching, the two bodies merged in 1965 to create the *Institute of Housing Managers*.

The last half-century

This was probably the start of the modern era for the Institute though it has to be said that the focus then was very much on housing management and predominantly, given how housing was provided, by local authorities. The name was changed in 1974 to the *Institute of Housing* – much regretted by some former Society members. However in reality it was probably the appointment of Peter McGurk as Director in 1982 when the real changes took place – *Inside Housing* was launched in 1984 and this was also the year when the IoH was granted its Royal Charter (becoming the *Chartered Institute of Housing* in 1994), having put in place a long overdue university-based qualification process (along with a direct route for membership via prior experience and contributions). The offices in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland were opened in the 1980s and in 1999 the CIH merged with the former Institute of Rent Officers. It also launched HouseMark, followed in 2007 by setting up ConsultCIH, now the CIH consultancy.

The CIH slowly broadened its role in terms of membership and qualifications through the 1990s and into this century, partly reflecting the way housing provision and housing policy were changing. More members were working for housing associations and the private sector and more were outside mainstream housing management. Social housing as such was ever more about housing people on low incomes. Reflecting the structural changes taking place in housing, in January 2012 CIH introduced a new membership structure and a series of changes to the way the organisation is run, such as establishing a new governing board and taking an increasing international focus around social and affordable housing with activity in Australia, Canada and China.

Taking stock

Over its 100 years the CIH has moved from being focussed on property management with a membership drawn from private trusts and then local authorities, to being a much broader base with membership across the public and private sectors and much wider than one professional qualification. In so doing the CIH has extended its role and influence with the aim of providing the voice for the housing profession across tenures and countries.

While at times in the past housing need has certainly been greater than at present, problems have re-emerged with the ending of the post-war building boom, transfer of properties to homeownership through right to buy, the resurgence of private renting and the recent decline in the stock of social rented housing against a background of growing household numbers (trends all carefully monitored and analysed by the *UK Housing Review*, published by CIH either alone or jointly since 1999). The role of the Chartered Institute of Housing has changed enormously, but it is still very much required as the voice for housing and the home of professional standards.

History website

Take a walk through the history of housing in the UK with the CIH 100-year timeline – www.cih.org/100years