

## **The Royal Postgraduate Medical School and Student Residences**

### **The Ducane Housing Association Limited**

A History of events leading to its foundation, a commentary on the development of the site in Ducane road and an assessment of the future life of the buildings.

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### **Early intentions**

Since October 1976 when the first of the five blocks of flats comprising the Ducane Estate was taken over from the builders 521 leases have been issued to students studying at the School. The majority have been to students accompanied by their spouses and we have normally had over 100 children in residence at any one time. During the five years fifty two nationalities have been represented among our residents. Nowadays, it is taken for granted that each year many of the longer term postgraduates at the School will obtain accommodation for themselves and their families "across the road". But this was not always so.

Anyone making a study of the history of the School must be impressed by the frequency with which forward looking projects have at the outset been aborted by a change in financial and economic circumstances but which nevertheless have been achieved later, usually by a route quite different from that originally envisaged. So it was with student accommodation. The School was opened in 1935 under a Charter which assumed the provision of student accommodation. The intention had been to upgrade Hammersmith Hospital to the standard of a Teaching Hospital, to build a Postgraduate Medical School and to provide student residences. The amount allocated for the School's purposes was to have been about £250,000 but, in the event, due to the country's state of economic depression, this was reduce to £100,000. Plans to provide anything more than the bones of an academic establishment were abandoned.

Over the next thirty years two major exercises took place in an attempt to provide residences. Both were aborted. The first was to assemble the majority of the Institutes of the British Postgraduate Medical Federation onto one site and to include in the massive consortium necessary residences for students. One of the sites considered for development was at Hammersmith Hospital, the whole to be paid for by the sale of properties, many in central London, which would have become surplus. When this ambitious scheme fell through consideration was given to rising charitable money to build a high rise block of residences on the North Car Park at Hammersmith Hospital.

In the event Sir Isaac Wolfson made a generous gift to the School to be used for the benefit of students (as distinct from the furtherance of research and science) and the Wolfson Institute with its lecture theatres, its dining hall and common rooms was provided. A little later, but planned over the same years, the Commonwealth Building was constructed for the furtherance of medical research. The cost of the thirteen-storey building was met by gifts from Charitable Foundations and from the countries and peoples of the Commonwealth. The School also launched both an Endowment Fund and a Research Appeal Fund and whilst student accommodation was never out of the minds of the

School authorities the priority given to academic development made it increasingly hard to find sources of money for residences.

### **New initiative**

Nevertheless in 1965 the then Dean of the School, Mr Selwyn Taylor, stated a determination to see residences for students provided during his tenure of office and a new initiative to explore ways and means of achieving this was mounted.

In the same year, 1965, the School became an Institutional member of AFSIL Limited (Accommodation for Students in London) a Charity formed at the initiative of administrative officers of the London School of Economics, the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, the School of Oriental and African Studies, University College London and the Royal Postgraduate Medical School. The aim was to provide accommodation for postgraduate students and particularly married postgraduates. Whilst some provision had always been made for undergraduates and single students less had been done for married students. AFSIL now has some 70 units of accommodation and although they are not conveniently sited for attendance at the School they have been well used by our students over the years.

In 1965 the London Borough of Hammersmith produced a “White City Development plan” which included the intention to construct a concrete platform over many acres of railway lines on which were to be built residences. The School made approaches to have halls of residences for students included in the scheme. The whole project was later discarded.

In 1967 the British Railway Property Board declared the narrow strip of land on the South side of Ducane Road, lying between the road and the Central Underground railway lines, to be surplus to their requirements. The site was 1490 feet long and 55 feet wide at its widest point and narrower at its eastern end.

The school immediately approached British Rail. This seemed to be an opportunity not to be missed, even though there was neither money available to make the purchase, nor plans to develop the site. However, a problem arose. Apparently the British Railway Board had by law to offer the land for sale to the Greater London Council (or London Borough of Hammersmith) and could not entertain other potential purchasers until the GLC had turned down the offer. After correspondence with officers at the GLC the Chairman Sir Percy Rugg visited the school on St. Valentines Day 1968 and shortly afterwards, following consultation with the London Borough of Hammersmith the GLC relinquished their right of purchase in favour of the needs of the Hospital and School. However, in view of the difficulties imposed by the shape and position of the site and the condition of the land, the School authorities remained unconvinced that it could be satisfactorily developed.

In 1968 the School also joined Student Residential Centres Limited, another Charity, who provided accommodation for students in South London, and who expressed an interest in developing the Ducane Road site for postgraduate students studying at Hammersmith and at the Inns of Court.

The School invited AFSIL and SRC to co-operate with a view to their raising money to purchase and develop the land. An application for British Council OSWEP (Overseas Students Welfare and Education Places) grants was lodged by SRC. Although an outline plan was drawn up for the

development of the land and a feasibility study commissioned it was not at this stage finally established that it was practical to build on the land at an economic cost. In 1968 AFSIL withdrew from this consortium on the grounds that the project was financially beyond their scope. After three difficult years of negotiations the School also withdrew from the partnership with SRC.

Meanwhile an excellent building site in Goldhawk Road came on to the market the development of which would have involved co-operation with yet another party. In October 1970 knowing the difficulties imposed by the site at Ducane Road a meeting was called of students in attendance at the School. This meeting gave as its overwhelming opinion that whatever the difficulties of building on a narrow site between a railway and a main road the advantages for students of being “across the road” far outweighed the potential of a spacious site access to which would require public transport.

From then on the School authorities determined that the land in Ducane Road must be obtained by or on behalf of the School and developed as residence for students and that the difficulties imposed by the site must be overcome.

### **The Site**

The site itself has an interesting history. At the beginning of the last century (i.e. in the 1800's-ed) Wormwood Scrubs was a rough scrub country area stretching from Willesden to Hammersmith. At the time Kensington and North Kensington were built it was developed as brickfields. One of the owners of the land discovered that his estate contained the only piece of gravel in clay country. When he expended the gravel he let the empty gravel pits to Paddington Borough Council to shoot their refuse into until they had made it up to the original ground level. Then, by pre-arrangement, it passed to Hammersmith Borough Council as, allegedly, building ground but as you cannot build on newly made up ground it was to lie fallow for many years.

The first building to be erected on Wormwood Scrubs was the Prison, built by Sir Edmund Du Cane in 1874. It stood alone approached by a lane, Ducane lane. The Hospital was built in 1904 and to assist with its construction a light railway was run along the south side of the lane over the refuse dump to bring materials to the site. Not long after this the Great Western Railway Company built a railway line along the same side of Ducane Road primarily for the carriage of milk from the West Country to the big milk depot in Latimer Road (now Unigate at White City). Later, the Bank – Shepherd's Bush underground line was extended to provide access to the White City Exhibition. In 1910 this became the Central Line and was soon extended to the West running alongside the GWR steam railway line. Some forty years later the GWR line was removed and the land lay derelict or was used as allotments. In addition two shack type cafes were built and were much patronised by staff of the School and Hospital.

### **The Ducane Housing Association Limited**

To revert to the story of the Association the breakthrough came on 15<sup>th</sup> July 1970 when Lord Aberdare, then Minister of State at the Department of Health and Social Security stated in the House of Lords apropros housing associations and postgraduate students:

“I can say today that we accept straight away one suggestion which has been put forward, that housing associations for married postgraduate students should be eligible for the same

subsidies as other housing associations entering into arrangements with their local authority”.

The School has to thank Lord Stamp and possibly others for putting forward this suggestion to Lord Aberdare. Lord Aberdare visited the School in March of the following year.

In October 1970 Lord Coleraine (Chairman of the School) set up a small group (Sir Leon Bagrit, Mr David Rhodes, Mr Pat Matthews and Mr George Vellacott) to prosecute the intention to purchase and develop the land in Ducane Road. The group co-opted Mr Harold Campbell a leading expert and a pioneer of new initiatives in the housing association movement.

During 1971 contracts were exchanged with British rail for the purchase of land on the south side of Ducane Road running from a point opposite Artillery Lane (between the Hospital and the Prison) eastwards to the railway bridge in Wood Lane. The whole area amounted to 3.18 acres but this was more land than was required as some 1.07 acres of the narrow tail at the eastern end was unsuitable for building and had no road frontage. However, British Rail were adamant and would only sell if the purchaser bought the whole lot. It was also a condition of sale that the purchaser accepted partial responsibility for the maintenance of the footbridge which crosses from Ducane road to Bentworth Road, one staircase of which is on the land. Later this condition was to prove a thorn in the side of the purchaser.

On 30<sup>th</sup> March 1972 the Ducane Housing Association Limited was formed and registered with the Registrar of Friendly Societies (2021R). The foundation members were Sir Leon Bagrit, Professor John McClure Browne, Mr Harold Campbell, Lord Coleraine, Mr David Rhodes, Mr Selwyn Taylor and Mr George Vellacott. Immediately after registration Lord Coleraine resigned from the Chairmanship of the School and also from membership of the Association. The following additional persons were admitted to membership of the Association: Lord Garner, who was appointed Chairman, Mr Pat Matthews and Mr W W Windsor. These persons together with the foundation members were appointed to be the Committee of Management of the Association at the first Annual General Meeting and were responsible for steering the Association and its project in Ducane Road throughout the early difficult years.

## **The Land**

During this period land prices were appreciating monthly. Moreover, other potential purchasers including the Home Office were becoming interested in the site at Ducane Road. The Committee recognised that the opportunity to purchase the land might soon be lost. They also knew that once purchased it would be a saleable asset should it prove beyond the Committee's means to develop it.

In October, the same year as the Association was formed, although planning permission to develop the land had yet to be obtained and although it was not yet clear that a major building project to suit out purposes would prove viable, the Ducane Housing Association completed the purchase. To enable the Association to do this Mr. Pat Matthews arranged for the First National Finance Corporation to put up a bridging loan of £157,000 at a concessional rate of interest. On the day the purchase was made and in order to lessen the financial burden a parcel of the land was sold to European Site Developers Limited for development as a petrol station and the tail of land running

down to Wood Lane was also leased to the same firm. Later, European Site Developers built and sold to Gulf the petrol station in Ducane Road. The Company then went into liquidation and the lease of the tail of land was abrogated. In 1980 a half of the tail of land was sold to Womens Pioneer Housing Association who have housing in Wood Lane and needed land for offices and parking. Currently, in 1982, contracts are in the process of being exchanged for the sale to the same association of the remainder of this tail of land.

### **Planning Problems**

From 1971, before the Association had even been officially formed, the Architectural Planning Partnership with Arthur Boxall & Partners as Quantity Surveyors had been commissioned to produce a scheme for residences which would conform with the strictest yardsticks(\*) and with the Parker Morris standards(\*\*) imposed upon housing associations by the Department of the Environment and with the density of population for the site laid down by the London Borough of Hammersmith. These restrictions limited the capital cost of any scheme to a final yardstick figure of £1,943,000 (excluding legal costs, professional fees and the purchase of the land).

The years 1971 to 1974 were fraught with difficulties. The original feasibility study commissioned by SRC was found to be shallow and over optimistic as no survey of the land and no work to determine the foundations had been included. A new feasibility study was undertaken but this was inconclusive in that the recommended form of foundations was so expensive as to be quite outside practicality. A second and then a third opinion on the ground and the foundations necessary were sought and finally Professor Fisher Cassie pointed the way to a solution by placing a concrete slab on top of piles sunk between 40 and 60 feet into the ground. Even then the initial estimates for foundations and buildings were some £280,000 (14%) above allowable yardstick. To the distress of the Committee of Management much further work had to be done to reduce the cost of the scheme and the specification to which it had been hoped to build had to be cut back. As is so often the case when saving have to be made in initial capital cost the result was to increase recurrent maintenance costs in later years.

### **All parties at risk**

The dedication of the Association's Consultants during these years needs special mention for they undertook to work entirely at their own risk. If, as often seemed likely, the scheme had to be aborted they would not have been paid. Moreover, had they not during this period completed satisfactorily the vast amount of detailed work essential then there is no doubt that the project would have fallen under the moratorium on all capital schemes involving government finance imposed in 1975. This indeed was the fate of the plans for the redevelopment of Hammersmith Hospital.

- \* "Yardstick" refers to the formula used to calculate the total allowable capital cost for a project to be built with Exchequer Funds. Each component part, foundations, car parking, dwellings, play areas, noise abatement etc has a different yardstick figure (pounds sterling by cubic foot or etc).
- \*\* "Parker Morris Standards" were introduced in about 1965 and laid down the minimal standards to which housing provided from public funds could be built. Unfortunately, the relationship between the yardstick and the standard usually meant that the Parker Morris minimal became the maximum standard that could be obtained within the yardstick.

Our Consultants were not the only persons at risk. Under the Housing Act of 1957, amended by the Housing Finance Act 1972, a loan and a grant were provided to meet the capital costs of a scheme. However, the income which could be obtained from the completed project was restricted by Rent legislation to a level which it was known could not support revenue costs including servicing the loan. Under the legislation the deficit was met initially by Exchequer subsidies but these were withdrawn progressively each year. The lending authority had had the right to nominate tenants to occupy not less than 50% of the units built and in return the authority met the balance of the deficit from a Rate Fund Contribution. The School asked for 100% nomination rights for students and the GLC made the unprecedented concession of waiving its rights to Rate Fund Contributions.

Calculations showed that the revenue account of the completed project would run for the first 10 to 15 years at an average loss of £15,000 per annum (disregarding inflation) and that this annual deficit would have to be found from charitable sources. After 15 years the income from rents could be expected to balance the outgoings. In spite of this millstone and in the knowledge that the residences would also have to be furnished outside the GLC loan, the Committee of Management of the Ducane Housing Association determined to press on. Naturally, there were those on the staff and Council of the School who expressed alarm and feared that the project might founder or result in the School being called upon to meet an outrageously large deficit.

### **Progress**

In August 1972 the GLC sanctioned loan resources to meet the purchase of the site together with associated expenses, but this loan was not immediately taken up as planning permission was still delayed. Detailed planning permission was received from Hammersmith Borough in May 1973 but was turned down by the Department of the Environment, on the grounds that the density would be too high and there would be a lack of amenities.

Six months of further negotiations were necessary during which the plans were further amended and in January 1974 planning permission and consent to invite tenders was granted.

In September 1974 the GLC loan to purchase the land was taken up and our commitment to the First National Finance Corporation paid off.

In December 1974 the Architects, Quantity Surveyors and Solicitors received their first payments after four years of onerous and painstakingly detailed work and negotiations.

On 15<sup>th</sup> October 1974 Kirk and Kirk Ltd were awarded the contract in the sum of £1,943,000 (the contract allowed for fluctuations) to build 112 residences in Ducane Road while Concrete (Southern) Ltd were appointed main sub-contractors.

During the later years of negotiations the Housing Finance Act of 1972 was superseded by the Housing Act 1974. The Ducane Housing Association was registered with the Housing Corporation on 15<sup>th</sup> July 1975 (L0307) and the arrangements for financing the project were believed to have been correctly transferred to the regulations set out in the new Act. Briefly, these were that the major part of the capital cost of the project would henceforth be financed by government Housing Association Grant leaving the Association to service and to pay off, over sixty years, the residue of

the capital cost in the form of a loan from the Greater London Council. Fair rents had to be set by the Rent Service Officer and registered. The notional income from these rents less notional annual expenditure determined the amount of money available annually to service a loan. The size of the loan was fixed by the income available to service it. This in turn decided the size of the grant given (e.g. allowable capital cost less loan equals grant). In addition, under the 1974 Act, an Association whose income from Fair Rents turned out in later years to be sufficient to service the loan and meet its recurrent expenses up to carefully laid down notional allowances might make application to the Department of the Environment for a Revenue Deficient Grant. Thus, in theory, the Association was relieved of any liability to find Charitable monies to meet the annual deficits which would have occurred under legislation in force in 1972. The total capital cost of the project was £3,487,000. A Housing Association Grant of £3,068,000 was paid by the Department of the Environment leaving a loan with the GLC of £419,000 to be serviced and paid off over 60 years. However, no sooner had this transaction been completed than the Department of the Environment came back at the Association and claimed that the Association had not correctly transferred its initial arrangements made under the Housing Finance Act 1972 so that they came fully under the Housing Act 1974 and further that the scheme as completed contained higher standards than allowed by Department yardstick and the Parker Morris formula. The Department's claim on the Association for a refund of £84,000 to rectify these alleged irregularities came as an unexpected shock. Fortunately, in the debate which followed, the Department were most understanding and whilst the Association could not fully exonerate itself from having made unintentional mistakes in its procedures a negotiated sum of £42,000 was agreed and paid from the Association's Charitable monies.

During the initial period of negotiations the Greater London Council made two further concessions to the Association. In recognition that the units were to be leased to students for short periods of time relative to the normal length of lease experienced by the majority of associations the GLC agreed that our units might be leased on a furnished instead of the usual unfurnished basis provided the cost of furnishing the units was met entirely by the Association from non Exchequer resources. The GLC also agreed that two of the units might be leased on a permanent basis to the Academic Board of the School for the purpose of accommodating academic visitors of the School. Staff of the School were prohibited from taking up residence in the units provided.

### **Benefactions**

Between 1972 and 1975 the School together with the Committee of Management of the Housing Association launched an appeal for funds to assist the Association to furnish the units and/or meet any deficit arising in the early years. The appeal was well supported by the following generous gifts and a loan:

The Roy Studwick discretionary benefaction	50,000
Gifts towards furniture	
The King Edward Hospital Fund	45,936
The Kennedy Charitable Trust	1,000
The University of London	10,000
The University Grants Committee	40,000
The Royal Postgraduate Medical School Academic Board Fund	<u>4,000</u>
	150,936
Loan from University of London repayable by 1980	<u>45,000</u>

These gifts and the loan enabled the units to be furnished to a relatively high standard before initial occupation and also enabled the Association to pay to the Department of the Environment the sum of £42,000 referred to above.

### **Design Problems**

It is necessary to add here some record of the many debates which took place during the planning and design stage. The first inconclusive feasibility study prepared by John Smith and Associates was for 12 blocks built in brick on two floors providing in total 46 two bed and 45 one bed units and a larger flat for a resident Warden. The units were very small, more appropriate to undergraduates than postgraduates with families. This was followed, at the time of the SRC, AFSIL, RPMS consortium with a design which divided the site into two parts. To the East of the railway footbridge there were to be 60 one bedroomed flats and 5 two bedroomed flats on four floors to be managed by AFSIL and to the west 200 study bedrooms also on four floors but with communal facilities to be managed by S.R.C. A number of variations to the layout were proposed but as soon as the decision was made to form a housing association to carry out the development this scheme was abandoned.

At this stage the Architectural & Planning Partnership took over from John Smith and Associates. Their first sketch scheme was highly imaginative and consisted of eight hexagonal blocks each built around a courtyard. The scheme also envisaged a club house to be built on a concrete raft above the (notional) petrol station in Ducane Road. It was quickly appreciated that the cost of this scheme would be way outside allowable yardstick. The Committee of the Association agreed with the Architects that new plans were necessary based on two factors:

1. The highest possible density of persons per hectare had to be achieved (within the limits laid down by the Borough of Hammersmith) in order that the best advantage could be taken of the Department of the Environment Cost Yardstick Tables which controlled the final budget figure for the scheme.
2. The Construction and form of the scheme had to be kept as straight forward as possible in order that the simplest constructional techniques could be employed, ensuring the lowest possible prices from contractors tendering for the work.

In May 1972 the Committee accepted in principle sketch designs based on the provision of 116 dwellings to house 368 persons in 68 maisonettes and 48 flats. There followed delay whilst a full investigation, referred to earlier, of the foundations necessary was undertaken. Acoustic Engineers were engaged and as a result the GLC agreed to add to the yardstick a sum to cover the cost of double glazing and made some allowances for the high cost of foundations. Even so the first tenders received were still well above allowable capital cost. The estate had to be designed with staircases at each end of the five blocks. It now had to be redesigned with one staircase central to each block and four of the projected 68 maisonettes were lost. In addition the partially underground car park had to be left open whilst it had originally been intended to cover these areas with concrete platforms on which were to have been play areas for the ground floor units. The specification of the finish to be provided within the units had, sadly, to be reduced which has resulted in higher maintenance costs. However, play decks on the roofs of King and Weedon Houses and a laundry under O'Driscoll House were added.

Much debate and time was spent on determining the materials in which the estate was to be built. The peculiarities of the site restricted choice. For a long time the Committee of Management favoured brick. At the relevant time brick was in very short supply and prices soared. The alternative was a custom designed prefabricated structure known as a system building. The Bison system was chosen and Concrete (southern) Limited appointed as main sub-contractors. However, their system was modified by the Architects to include brick fronting to all blocks and the decision to make this modification has resulted in a far more acceptable end product than otherwise might have been the case. Not nearly as much was known of the possible shortcomings of the Bison System Building method and product as is known today. However, our solicitors working with our Architects obtained a ten year maintenance guarantee from Concrete (Southern) Limited against the two year guarantee normally offered. This was later to prove advantageous to the Association.

The Committee also gave months of consideration to the various systems available for cooking and for providing space and water heating. For a number of reasons which include expense and the type of structure chosen gas supply to the buildings was reluctantly ruled out. Steam heating supplied from the boilers in Hammersmith Hospital was considered but found impractical. The Committee was left with Hobsons Choice, all electrical heating and cooking. The structure lent itself most readily to the incorporation of ceiling heating. Moreover, this was the cheapest form of heating available and the limitations imposed by the yardstick demanded capital economy. However, it was with reluctance that the Committee finally accepted this form of space heating. In theory ceiling heating is reasonably economical in use if all tenants use it and the whole building is kept warm. In practice, when few tenants can afford to leave the ceiling heating switched on, the building becomes cold and it is extremely expensive for those who do use it. Moreover, the Parker Morris specification did not allow of the incorporation in the upper level rooms of the maisonettes of any central heating. After completion, at its own expense, the Association added fixed radiation heaters in those rooms. It is unfortunately also true that the loss of heat from System built dwellings is greater than from conventional buildings.

Now another problem confronted the Committee of Management. Bison type buildings are normally erected with the use of jib cranes of which there are an abundance in existence. The site in Ducane Road is next to railway lines and the London Transport Executive expressly forbids the use of jib cranes in proximity to electric lines. A gantry crane running on two parallel miniature railway lines had to be found and it had to be large enough to oversail the highest point of the five level buildings. It transpired that there was only one such crane in Britain. Although, at the time, final planning permission had not been granted the Committee gambled and booked this crane for a given date two years in advance. The gamble paid off and we were ready to start building when the crane arrived. In operation this massive crane was an unusual spectacle as it straddled the estate, one of its rail lines placed on what had been the southern pavement of Ducane Road (and which by courtesy of Hammersmith Borough we were allowed to use for this purpose) and the other running adjacent to the underground line. Each time the crane was moved, even an inch, safety regulations demanded that a bell ring automatically. Because of the cost of hire and the demand for the crane elsewhere work had to continue on a twenty four hour basis and regrettably the ringing bell caused much distress to patients in the hospital opposite. After the completion of Weedon and Turner Houses the crane had to be dismantled and re-erected to the East of the footbridge for the building of O' Driscoll, King and Daley Houses. Whilst the crane was on site a speed limit was imposed on trains using the line and in addition the LTE insisted on employing, at our expense, flagmen whose

duty was to warn train drivers in the event of an accident likely to endanger the lines. Fortunately neither he nor his supervisor ever had anything to do but for this service LTE put in a bill for £20,000 which our Solicitor working with the Quantity Surveyor finally reduced to £12,000. Perhaps this was one of the “higher standards” above Parker Morris norms for which the D.O.E. later held us responsible.

### **Management**

In September 1974 when for the first time, it really became apparent that the scheme was to be given the go ahead and that a contract would be signed for the erection of 112 dwellings before the end of the year. The Committee of Management, on the advice of the School, agreed to appoint professional managers to run the affairs of the Association (whilst Mr Vellacott was to remain project manager). The Co-Ownership Development Society Limited was chosen for this role. This decision was made on the grounds that on the one hand the management of a housing association required expertise and experience not available amongst university staff, and on the other, that the work of managing the Association was of such detail that it could not properly be contained within the brief of the School Secretary without detriment to his other duties. Whilst the reasons for making this decision were sound no sooner has C.D.S. taken over than they ran into large scale problems within their own society and fell short of what was expected of them in respect of their management of the Ducane Housing Association. Consequently in 1977 the agreement with C.D.S. was terminated and the management of the Association reverted to the Royal Postgraduate Medical School.

The School appointed an officer, (Mr George Vellacott who had been Secretary of the School since 1965 and who had been involved with the project from the outset) to be Honorary Secretary and Manager of the Association and provided him with secretarial assistance. Both these officers salaried by the School whilst the Association pays annually to the School a negotiated consessional management fee so that, in effect, the management of the Association is subsidized by the School. Except for this important help the Association has always been self-sufficient. In 1979 Mr. Vellacott was to obtain by examination the Housing Corporation and National Federation of Housing Associations Certificate in Housing Association Finance and Administration.

### **Completion of the Project**

Under a sub-contract clearance of the land and pile driving started in June 1974. The main contractors, Kirk and Kirk Limited moved onto the site during December 1974, and work on the foundations started in January 1975. There then occurred the only mishap throughout the whole contract. Due to a misreading of a plan or a surveyor's stake some tons of concrete for the foundations were poured into trenches dug on land belonging to the Home Office just to the West of Artillery Lane instead of just East of the same point. It seemed an inauspicious start but the Prison Governor and the Home Officer were very understanding and whilst the concrete remains where it was poured a new start to laying the foundations in the proper place was quickly made and work proceeded at pace. In the next months considerable difficulties were experienced in forming into one team and the three complementary work forces of Kirk and Kirk, Concrete Southern and the Crane operators for on no previous occasion had a gantry crane been used for erecting a Bison type

building. Consequently, the completion of the first blocks fell well behind programme but practically all this time was made up so that the final block was handed over in April 1977. A fine set of photographs exists showing the development in its various stages and these give some idea of the satisfaction that must have been given to all those involved. After so much striving the results of their work could finally be seen growing in concrete and a derelict site was coming to life.

In August 1976 the Committee appointed Mr. Colin Erskine to be resident Warden and Maintenance Officer and he took up residence at once before the first blocks were handed over in October 1976. Mr. Erskine was, at the time of appointment, on terminal leave from the Royal Navy after nineteen years service. He had joined at age 15 and risen to be Chief Petty Officer acquiring on the way both management skills and maintenance know-how. The experience he gained by being on site whilst construction progressed around him and the remaining buildings were completed was to prove invaluable although for him and his family this involved considerable hardship. When the last block was handed over in April 1977 Mr. Erskine had added to his existing duties those of Housing Officer.

The Right Honourable Lord Pitt of Hampstead declared the residence for students of the Royal Postgraduate Medical School to be officially open and unveiled a plaque at a ceremony held during the afternoon of Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> October 1977. There was considerable rejoicing. What had so often seemed unattainable had been achieved.

The five houses were named after foundation members of the School and its first Governing Body, Daley (Governor), King (Professor of Pathology), O'Driscoll (School Secretary), Grey Turner (Professor of Surgery) and Weedon (Chief Technician).

I mentioned earlier that a condition of the sale of the land by British Rail was the acceptance by the purchaser, the Association, of a liability to maintain that part of the railway footbridge which is on or oversells our land. This clause in the contract has given our Solicitor and the Management of the Association ten years of work and it is only in 1982 that a practical solution appears to be in sight and then only because if the bridge is not maintained at once it will become dangerous. No estimates are yet available but about a third of the cost of maintenance of the bridge will fall on the Association, a sum in thousands of pounds and this will recur every ten or so years. The bridge is not expected to have a life beyond the year 2000 and unless at that time permission is obtained to abolish a public right of way it is probable that the Association will be held responsible for a proportion of the cost of a replacement bridge.

Amongst those outside the immediate fold of the school, special gratitude is owed to Mr. David Rhodes and his firm of Solicitors, Berwin Leighton for endless patience in solving or advising upon the many legal problems which have arisen. Similarly Mr. Harold Campbell's guidance in housing association affairs was invaluable in the formative years. Whenever a problem arose Mr. Campbell was always certain it could be solved and knew at once to whom to introduce us and how the approach should be made giving freely of his own time to forward our project which so many times nearly floundered. It is also pleasant to record the excellent relationship which existed between our Committee of Management and the appointed Consultants and between the latter and the various building and other contractors. The officers at the Department of the Environment and at the Greater London Council gave much help and encouragement and were always understanding and flexible in their dealings.

The units have now been occupied for five years. The first months were a tense time for the Management of the Association as occupation built up more slowly than had been anticipated and voids are reflected in a loss of revenue. This slow build up was due to the nature of postgraduate training and the arrival of students in small numbers throughout the calendar year. However, by February 1978 the units were 100% occupied and since then voids have never been higher than 1.5% per annum whilst the turnover of tenants has averaged 60% per annum. The Association has never needed to have recourse to making an application for Revenue Deficit Grant.

### **The Buildings and their Future**

Although the buildings are of a very acceptable standard they are not perfect and it would be foolish to pretend that they are.

Mention of shortcomings in no way detracts from the generosity of Governments who put up excess of three million pounds of Exchequer funds to make practical the provision of accommodation to be leased to postgraduate students and their families.

The shortcomings fall into two categories. The first arise from the inflexibility of the yardsticks and Parker Morris formula which governed approved capital expenditure. The internal finish to the walls, particularly in the bathrooms and kitchens, is far from satisfactory and restricts maintenance to replacing the shoddy with the shoddy. Since completion all front door frames have had to be straightened. Additional locks have had to be added to front doors and to windows. In the first severe winter main inlets and drainage outlets including sewage froze solid and insulation had to be paid for from revenue when it should clearly have been capital cost. Likewise, to get within yardsticks, job lots of plumbing fittings and internal doors and frames were purchased and replacements of the same dimensions are not available on the market adding considerably to the cost of maintenance. Nevertheless, all the items so far referred to can or have been overcome or can be lived with although the concealed runs of plastic pipe used in the plumbing give cause for alarm. However, the major concern under this category of shortcomings is the ceiling heating and the manner in which it conceals normal electric wiring circuits. To date only a few circuits have failed but when they have rewiring in the normal way is not possible for the conduits are buried beneath the ceiling heating panels and the repair has to be external. And what of the life of the panels themselves? In theory they are replaceable in sections. In fact we do not believe that this will prove an easy solution and should many burn out over the same period it will certainly prove an enormous expense. Perhaps it is fortunate that the ever rising cost of electricity makes this form of heating beyond the means of the majority of our tenants and consequently the ceiling heating panels may have an abnormally long life through lack of use.

The second category of shortcomings are more major and arise from System Building. All the advice available to the Committee of Management in 1972-74 when it accepted a contract for the Bison form of System Building was that it was eminently suitable for this particular site and probably the only form of building as an end result cheap but satisfactory dwelling units. In 1982 the technical press and indeed the general press are full of condemnation for the system and one reads with dismay of blocks in different parts of the country, notably Hillingdon and Manchester, being dismantled within ten and fifteen years of erection. The problem in each case is damp, leaks and condensation.

To our great advantage and to the credit of our architects the frontage (the north side) of all the blocks of flats and maisonettes comprising the Ducane estate is constructed of brick and the main access balconies are supported by columns. Likewise all the staircases are formed with brick and are free standing. In the estates which are reported as disaster areas one reads that the chief cause of leakage arises from the unsatisfactory manner in which balconies and staircases are married to System Buildings. Indeed, in our own case the south side of the three blocks of maisonettes have balconies cantilevered out as fire escapes and leaking has occurred throughout the length of these.

The sagging of balconies has been reported on other estates but whilst sagging is not apparent on our south facing balconies £10,000 of work has had to be undertaken in an attempt to seal the joint above the point from which the balconies are cantilevered. Only time will tell how successful we have been. Bison's have also required two panels which were found to be chipped presumably during erection. Again it is too early to state that there are no other damaged panels. That the buildings have flat roofs is also a disadvantage which has to be accepted: periodic repair will be expensive. On other Bison Wall Frame System estates the rubber seal used to join the precast concrete panels has failed. A recent inspection of our estate has not brought to light any major deterioration in these joints.

Immediately upon occupation it was found that the upper level of the higher maisonettes (under the roof) were susceptible to an unacceptable level of condensation, a level not controllable by even the most disciplined tenant. The problem was additionally confounded by absence of any central heating in these rooms (Parker Morris Standards) and the addition of wall mounted radiation heaters, at the Associations expense did nothing to alleviate the occurrence of condensation. Under the guarantee obtained from contractors before the contract was signed, five of the most badly affected maisonettes were treated by adding all the main walls and the ceilings a second internal skin of specially prepared plaster board and insulation. Once this had proved successful the remainder of the thirty two maisonettes affected have been or are to be similarly treated. The end result appears to be satisfactory for while condensation may still occur at a minimal level it is controllable by the application of bleach and constant redecoration. However, the high turnover itself adds considerably to management and maintenance costs.

In theory these buildings have a life span of over sixty years. In practice what is likely to be their life span? One alleged expert has put this as low as twenty five years. I think this is unduly pessimistic. These buildings are not high rise and are not subject to stresses of the high rise System Buildings which have failed: the North frontage of our buildings is brick and I believe this to be a vital consideration: the management has been wide awake since first occupation and is ever present on the estate and consequently defects have been treated as soon as they have appeared and the cause been analysed: to date money has been available to undertake the work necessary to correct defects and to carry out day to day maintenance including constant complete internal decoration. Consequently, I am more optimistic. If these buildings continue to be properly looked after and the other considerations I have enumerated continue to be satisfied I believe the buildings can remain as acceptable residences for the future fifty/sixty years provided that the standards demanded by tenants remains static. If the standard of living was to rise greatly, for instance in the matter of space heating, or if there was any reduction in standards of maintenance, repair and redecoration these properties would soon be considered, along with so many others built in the 1960's and 70's, as slums.

In assessing the future the last question must be whether money will continue to be available to maintain the buildings in the manner I have suggested is essential. Under the Fair Rent policy established in the 1980 Housing Act and without recourse to Revenue Deficit Grant but with a management subsidy provided by the school I believe the answer would have been affirmative if it were not for the implications of the Grant Redemption Fund also included in the 1980 Housing Act and to become affective from 1983. If the Secretary of States determines to milk associations by recouping Housing Association Grant and allows no discretion as to what is necessary major maintenance or to make it so bureaucratically difficult to obtain permission to undertake maintenance, when it is necessary and no later, then I believe the usual life of this estate will be greatly shortened. Our Committee of Management has been bold by spending money as soon as a maintenance need has been apparent. The School has shown foresight in subsidising the management of the Association and both have been bold in trusting the on site management to get on with the job. If the introduction of the Great Redemption Fund forces the School and the Committee of Management to alter its policies then the life of these buildings will be slums within a further five year period.

In 1982 the composition of the Committee of Management of the Association was Mr. Selwyn Taylor (Chairman), Mr. H.H. Blandford, Mr. S. Duckwoth, Professor V. Dubowitz, Mrs. M.G Elder, Dr. Imogen Evans, Dr. Malcolm Godfry, Mr. George Vellacott (Secretary), Miss. Andi Wakeman, Professor R.B. Welbourn, Dr. J.R. Welsman and Mr. W.W. Windsor.

In February 1982 a Senior Monitoring Officer from the Housing Corporation formally visited the Association and reported well on its functioning.

The advantages which the existence of the Ducane estate has brought to the School and to postgraduates and their families who are housed across the road, at low rentals and with no travelling expenses are quite enormous and far outweigh the fact that the estate consists of cheap housing needing even more looking after than would more expensive conventional dwellings. It is also pleasant to be able to record that over the first five years the vast majority of postgraduate student tenants have been outspoken in their appreciation of both the accommodation offered and the service provided.