



The Association of Women House Property Managers,
Abford House, Wilton Road, Victoria, S.W. 1.

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**THE SCOPE OF A
HOUSE PROPERTY MANAGEMENT DEPARTMENT,**

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ONE of the big post-war problems which Local Authorities have had to solve is that of the housing of the poor. Moreover, experience is teaching them that to build houses and tenant them is but a small part of the work, and that with their position as landlords starts one of the greatest difficulties.

The management of these new estates is a fact which has to be considered very seriously by Local Authorities, several of which have appointed women estate managers trained on the Octavia Hill system to help them.

Before commenting on the Octavia Hill system I want to put before you an average way in which many Municipal Authorities manage their new estates.

Firstly, there is a rent collector, who calls weekly for rents and to receive complaints.

Secondly, repairs are received and executed by the Surveyor's Department.

Thirdly, all matters relating to complaints (other than repairs), legal business, etc., are dealt with by the Town Clerk's Department.

Fourthly, the Housing Committee selects tenants often from the reports of the staff of the Medical Officer for Health.

That is, four departments dealing at different stages with one matter, with the consequent delay and lack of individual interest which is often present when one has to deal with only a small part of a job.

By the creation of a House Property Management Department the work is centralised in one department, with an advantage to both tenant and landlord: to tenant, because there is one official to

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whom he can refer all matters relating to his tenancy; to the landlord, because there is now someone who knows the facts relating to each tenant from his application to the termination of his tenancy.

Miss Octavia Hill laid down two essentials to her work: (1) That of co-operation between landlord and tenant; (2) that of sound business methods.

These are only possible where the manager has a full personal knowledge of and interest in each individual tenant.

It is, therefore, the first task of a House Property Management Department to visit the applicants for the tenancies of the new Corporation houses, carefully to take up references, and generally to gain a sound knowledge of their individual needs, etc.

As a rule, Housing Committees lay down certain categorical conditions of tenancy, and selections are made from applicants complying with such conditions; but I would like to emphasise how necessary it is to have a knowledge of the applicants before they become tenants, in order properly to carry out the next task of the House Property Management Department: that is, the judicious placing of these applicants on the various estates.

Very much can be done by the grouping and grading of tenants, and excellent results can be obtained by putting tenants from bad areas amongst neighbours who will be helpful to them without being superior.

Moreover, by this personal visit to all applicants it is possible sometimes to effect exchanges, whereby a tenant of a less highly rented house in the borough can be offered the tenancy of a Corporation house, if the applicant from the bad area can be accepted as tenant of his house.

This is a means of forwarding the so-called filtering process in housing reform, whereby each grade of tenant moves up one.

Next, a weekly call for rent and to receive any complaints keeps the manager in touch with the tenants.

During this weekly visit not only is the rent received, but complaints of all kinds can be heard and inspection of the houses can be carried out, so that many matters can be settled on the spot which before had to go through several departments.

Again, by establishing from the beginning personal relationships the manager is able, firstly, to make inspections of the premises without appearing merely an inquisitive official; and, secondly, where rent is in default, to know whether it is a case of genuine

temporary hardship and will be remedied in due course, or if it is default from a tenant who should be forced to pay or quit.

I might comment here on the fact that on 36 houses allotted for the purpose of rehousing displaced tenants in Chester the arrears at the end of the first six months were roughly £10 (this was before the creation of a House Property Management Department), while after the creation of a House Property Management Department the arrears on 50 houses allotted for the same purpose for the same period, namely, the first six months, were nil. Also, at the end of the first quarter after the creation of a House Property Management Department the total arrears on the estates coming under the department were reduced by about one-third.

Part of the work of a House Property Management Department is to endeavour to co-operate not only with other departments, but with outside agencies of a social nature, in order that all efforts may be used to improve the individuals and to maintain a high standard on the estates.

For example, mothers can be put in the way of getting much-needed milk; suspect T.B. cases can be reported. In turn the school attendance officers can help the department by reporting cases of unsuspected lodgers, etc.

Personally, I have found that the local Council of Social Welfare can be of great value in many ways, both to myself and as a body to whom I can send tenants wanting help and advice outside the scope of this department.

I have endeavoured to show how a high standard of management could be obtained, and I should like to quote here Miss Octavia Hill's own words, written 30 years ago:—

"Repairs [must be] promptly and efficiently attended to, references carefully taken up, cleaning sedulously supervised, overcrowding put an end to, the blessing of ready-money payments enforced, accounts strictly kept, and, above all, tenants so sorted as to be helpful to one another."

This standard can only be maintained, as Miss Hill insisted, by assiduous personal attention; because of this much time and care has to be bestowed on each individual tenant.

Experience has shown us municipal workers that, in dealing with new property only, where there are little or no repairs to be seen, a manager or assistant cannot deal with more than 250 to 300 tenants.

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Moreover I should like to emphasise most strongly that every worker engaged on this work must be fully trained. It is as essential for the assistants to be as skilled as the manager, because on each of them falls the task of the weekly visit, and it is on these regular calls and the consequent personal relationships between tenant and representative of the landlord that the co-operation which is best for both depends.

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