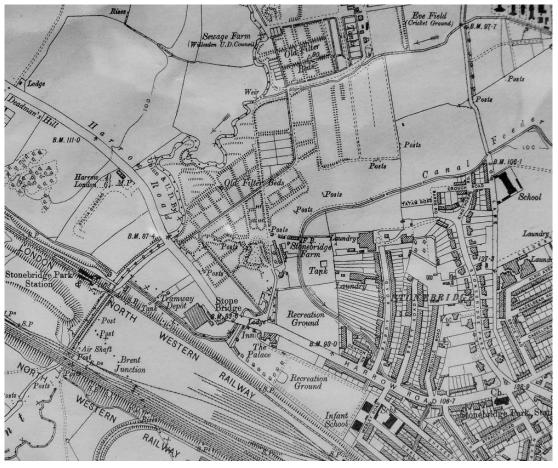
# Homes fit for Heroes – Willesden Council's Brentfield Housing Scheme.

One of the many interesting items in the Local History Collection at Brent Archives (in boxfile LHC1/HOU/3) is a booklet produced by Willesden Urban District Council in 1921. It tells the story of the first Council housing estate built in Willesden (and Brent). This centenary year of the Housing & Town Planning Act, 1919, seemed a good time to make a facsimile copy of the booklet more widely available, online.

The 1919 Act followed on from a 1917 report by the Tudor Walters Committee, which identified poor housing conditions as the reason why so many men recruited to fight during the First World War were unfit. It encouraged local Councils to build half a million decent new houses, which would be subsidised by the Government, over the next three years. The plan was soon known by the slogan "Homes fit for Heroes".



The site for the Brentfield Estate, and its surrounding area, [Reproduced from the 1920 edition of the Ordnance Survey 6" to one mile map of Middlesex, sheet XVI]

Willesden U.D.C. had already been considering building some homes before the war had broken out. By November 1918, it had prepared proposals for an estate, on land previously used as part of its sewage treatment works at Stonebridge Farm. The idea for this Brentfield Estate (called after the ancient field name for this area) had already been approved by the Government, under the Housing of the Working Classes Act, 1890, even before the 1919 Act was passed.

Work should have started on the estate's first roads and houses before the end of 1919, but a series of delays, mainly caused by changes to the Council's plans because of interference by various Government bodies (and the decision to go ahead with a North Circular Road, which would cut across the site), meant that work did not begin until 1920.

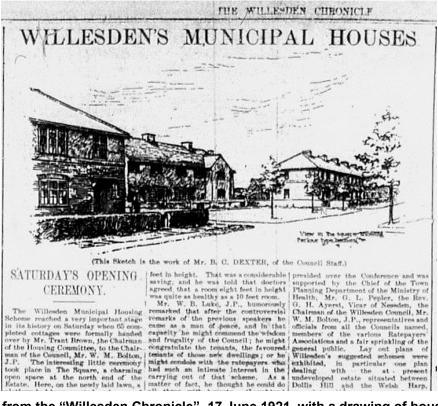
In the end, the Government agreed that the Council could build the estate's roads and sewers by direct labour (at a price of £45,835-10s-6d), although the houses would be built by private contractors. The first phase were built by Messrs. Godson & Sons of Kilburn, and by July 1920 the Council's Housing & Town Planning Committee were able to visit the site to see work in progress.

By the end of 1920, application forms were being issued to people who wished to be considered as tenants for one of these Council houses, and the rents that would be charged for them had been agreed. These were 15/- a week (exclusive of rates) for a three-bedroom house with a parlour, and 12/6 for one without a parlour.

In February 1921, names were agreed for the roads on the estate, with roads "1" and "2" called Garden Way and Mead Plat. By mid-May, the first 32 houses were ready, apart from connecting them to the gas supply, and it was agreed that the tenants chosen for them could move in as soon as this had been done.

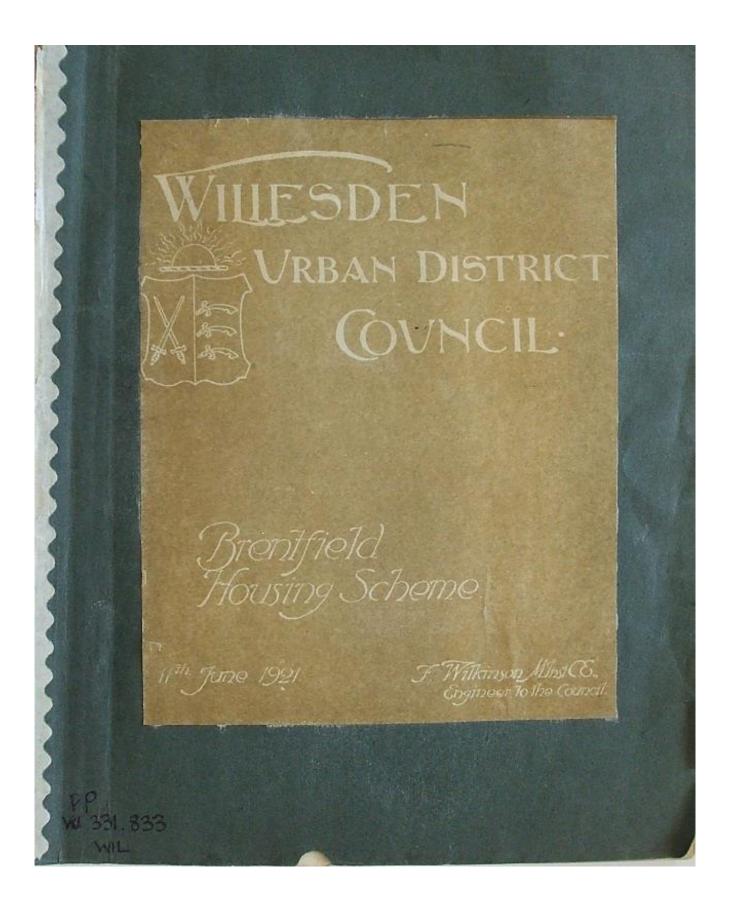
The Council had received more than 1,000 completed application forms for housing, and priority was given to ex-servicemen with families, who were living in the most overcrowded conditions. Council officers visited the homes of all short-listed tenants, to check those conditions, and to ensure applicants could show that they were 'Willesden residents of some years standing'.

On Saturday 11 June 1921 there was a ceremony, on the grassy square at Mead Plat, for the formal hand-over to the Council of the first 65 homes (out of a total of 591 planned for the estate). The event was reported in the "Willesden Chronicle" newspaper, and commemorated with the booklet, written by the Council's Engineer and Surveyor, Mr F. Wilkinson, which is reproduced in full on the following pages.



## Philip Grant, September 2019.

Part of the report from the "Willesden Chronicle", 17 June 1921, with a drawing of houses at the square. [Source: Brent Archives – local newspaper microfilms]



LHCI/HOU/3

WILLESDEN URBAN DISTRICT COUNCIL.

### BRENTFIELD HOUSING SCHEME.

HOUSING AND TOWN PLANNING COMMITTEE.

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Municipal Offices, Dyne Road, Kilburn, N. W. 6 11th June 1921.

F. WILKINSON, M.Inst.C.E.,A.M.I.Mech.E. Engineer & Surveyor.

#### BRENTFIELD HOUSING SCHEME.

The site of the Willesden District Council's Housing Scheme originally formed part of the lands granted by King Athelstan about the year 925 to the monks of St. Erkenwald for the support of the monastery attached to the Cathedral Church of St. Faul. The land was included in the manor, or prebend, of East Twyford which included a large portion of what is now the western part of Willesden. In Domesday Book (1086) it is recorded that Durand and Gueri, Canons of St. Paul's, held this manor of the King. The prebendal lands were in the course of time divided up into several farmsteads and the Brentfield Estate covers the greater part of the old Stonebridge Farm lands which adjoined the Brent River near an old ford on the road to Harrow - one of the two fords which gave the ancient Saxon name to the locality. Some lands which originally belonged to the still more ancient farm called Normans (of which records exist dating from 1596) are also included.

The history of housing for the working classes in Willesden started in 1854 when after much discussion a cottage was built in the Parish Close at a cost of £115 and let at 4/per week rent. The question once raised was discussed spasmodically at the parish vestry meetings and in 1857 a move was made to build ten cottages under the Labourers' Dwellings Act. Hach cottage was to cost £100 to erect and to have a "keeping room" of 150 square feet, two bedrooms, a washhouse and pantry, and to be let with 8 poles of land at 5/6 per week.

In 1915 the question of housing was brought forward in connection with the Housing of the Working Classes Act and some preliminary house plans were prepared, but, owing to other business and the intervention of the War, the matter was in abeyance until the question of the local and national shortage of houses became urgent when the matter was again pushed into the forefront of practical politics, culminating in the passing of the Housing and Town Planning Act of 1919. The present scheme of the Willesden District Council is the result of a request made by the Local Government Board in July 1917 as to the need for housing accommodation in the district. Plans were prepared in November 1918 showing the utilisation of lands at Twyford and Stonebridge owned by the Council. The land at Twyford being adjudged unsuitable, was disapproved by the Local Government Board, leaving the Stonebridge site of 63 acres to be proceeded with. This site later having its ancient name resuscitated and being known thenceforth as the Brentfield Estate.

Detailed plans for the laying out of the site were submitted to the Ministry of Health in January 1919 and approved, but, owing to the reintroduction of the scheme for constructing the North Circular Road, which traverses the whole length of the Estate, it was necessary to abandon the first lay out and prepare the present scheme which was approved in June 1919. In July of the same year house plans for the first 32 houses were also submitted and approved. Tenders for the erection of these houses and the incidental roadmaking works were obtained in August 1919, one tender being accepted. Owing to the question of the rental of the proposed houses being delayed by the London Housing Board the scheme was held up until 5th November and,when asked to sign the contract, the builders withdrew their tender.

At the suggestion of the Ministry of Health fresh tenders were obtained from the London Master Builders' Federation but were not acceptable. The designs prepared by the Willesden District Council were then abandoned on the urgent representation of the Ministry and plans prepared by the architectural department of the Ministry were substituted and altered to suit the requirements of the Housing Committee of the Council, these plans being eventually adopted on 5th January, 1920. Still further delay being incurred in the production of Bills of Quantities promised by the Ministry, the contracts for house building were not signed until 31st May, 1920.

The Contractors for the 199 houses now nearing completion are Messrs. Godson & Sons of Kilburn and Messrs. Leslie & Co. of Kensington. A further 60 houses are now being arranged for.

(2)

The complete scheme for the Brentfield Estate comprises 591 houses of the following types :-

458 Houses with 3 bedrooms, living room and parlour. 116 Houses with 3 bedrooms, living room but without parlour. 17 Shops.

The construction of roads and sewers, which was commenced in February 1920, has been carried out by direct labour under the supervision of Mr. F. Wilkinson, M.Inst.C.E., the Engineer to the Council, Mr. H. C. Fowler, A.M.I.C.E. being the Resident Engineer in charge of the work.

The completed scheme provides greens and open spaces which can be adapted for the provision of bowling greens and tennis courts, and a central site of 2 acres has been provided for a school. A clinic for the service of the immediate locality is proposed on a site fronting Harrow Road.

An endeavour has been made in the naming of the roads to preserve some of the ancient place names of the locality which might otherwise be lost, while at the same time care has been taken that no name is duplicated in the same postal district.

Of the names, Normansmead preserves the name of an old meadow on the ancient farm of Normans, and Brentfield Close keeps in remembrance an old enclosure of the same name now covered by the Great Cenral Railway goods depot. Pitfield Way and Dryfield Close take their names from fields on which they are situated. Wyborne Way preserves the name of one of the holders of the farm whose name had become attached to the land he occupied, and Foxholt Gardens perpetuates the ancient enclosure known as Foxholes on which the road now stands. Durant Way takes its name from the Durand who held the land of the King at the time of the Domesday survey.

Other names take their rise from either their position or the endeavour to prevent duplication. Those in the first category being Mitchell Way, Brook Path, Conduit Way, The Slype and Twybridge Way.

(3)

