There has been a fundamental transformation of the housing supply in England and Wales since the beginning of this century, when most families lived in private rented accommodation, up to the present, when the majority either own their home or rent it from a public authority. This study looks at a vital stage of this development - the growth of the public sector in housing before the Second World War - and examines, in particular, the experience of an important area in North East England. This was the region which at the turn of the century had the most severe housing problems and where by 1939 local authorities had done much more than most to improve conditions. The study begins by considering briefly the philosophies held by housing reformers in the early twentieth century and the course actually taken by national housing policy up to 1939. The specific problems of County Durham at the turn of the century are then analysed and an account is given of the attempts made by local government before the First World War to deal with them. The bulk of the study is devoted to the experience of the inter-war years. An analysis is made of the physical achievements of local authority housebuilding within the county, the factors that constrained this action and the alternatives that were sometimes adopted in its place. Finally, the study examines in some depth the new responsibilities assumed by local government in the implementation of national housing policy. These duties involved local government in the twin roles of builder and landlord; and, by drawing on hitherto-unused council records of the inter-war period, the final two chapters of the study examine these roles particularly from the local authority viewpoint.

Abstract

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