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Manifesting the Imagined Homeless Body: A Case Study of the Men's Social Services Centre, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, UK

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Abstract

In this article, we explore the changing ways in which the homeless body has been conceptualised by architects and providers of accommodation for single homeless individuals. Tracing developments from the post-war period to the present, we focus on the needs and characteristics of single homeless individuals as they are variously imagined and constructed through the architectural design process. Through detailed examination of the life course of the Ryder & Yates-designed Salvation Army Men's Social Services Centre, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, UK, we explore how conceptions of the homeless body—shaped by, inter alia, architectural references, professional orthodoxies, and prevailing ideologies of homelessness—influenced the lived experience of the building. In so doing, we bring renewed attention to the capacity of architectural design to generate and shape the affective responses of the single homeless body, and thus the architectural profession's vital role in tackling the homelessness problem.

Keywords

architectural design; homeless body; hostels; single homelessness; social control

1. Introduction

In March 2020, as the UK entered the first of a series of national lockdowns, the government announced plans to make 37,000 emergency accommodation places available to homeless people. Disproportionately affected by chronic health conditions, homeless people were considered both uniquely vulnerable to Covid-19 and exceptionally ill-equipped to ward off its effects. They were also, other commentators argued, a direct threat to the social distancing measures upon which an increasingly desperate government was embarked.

This somewhat conflicting framing of homeless people as simultaneously “vulnerable” and “troublesome” has long been a feature of the UK (and wider international) policy landscape. For most of the past century, in fact, the homelessness policy response has been characterised by a curious combination of care, suspicion, and coercive control (Mitchell, 2003).

Such a response betrays, in part, a frustration at our inability to grasp the homelessness problem. Indeed, despite decades of government intervention, homelessness levels are increasing. In 2022, 3,069 people were estimated to be sleeping rough in England on any given night: a 26% increase on the previous year’s figure (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, 2022) and a mere fraction of the total number of people living in temporary and/or other insecure accommodation (Fitzpatrick et al., 2023). Thus, at this juncture, it seems almost inevitable that supported accommodation (“hostels”) for those without permanent housing will remain a central component of the UK policy response, mirroring its significance in other European countries where homeless numbers are similarly on the rise (Foundation Abbé Pierre, 2017).

Over the past several decades, research has shed valuable light on the experiences of homeless people (e.g., men, women, youth, seniors, and families) in a wide range of geographical and institutional settings (see, for example, May & Cloke, 2014; McMordie, 2021). Despite this, our understanding of hostels—in which large numbers of homeless people reside—remains limited by their opacity and by methodological challenges associated with the sometimes-chaotic circumstances within them. Although designed as sites of refuge, research has also shown hostels to be sites of “threat,” including to material safety, self-identity, and autonomy (see, for example, Holt et al., 2012). Thus, a disjuncture is revealed between the bodily experience of hostels and the realities envisioned in the architectural plan. Yet, few studies have examined the lived experience of hostels through the confluence of architectural design and the homeless *body*. This article fills this gap by examining the relationship between conceptions of the homeless body, the architectural design of hostels, and the complex nature of experiences within them.

Beginning by considering dominant conceptions of the homeless body, the article then briefly reflects on the development of the hostel landscape in England from the post-war period to the present, teasing out the changing ways in which policymakers, service providers, and architects have conceived of and catered to the homeless body. The discussion is then grounded through a detailed examination of the design and lived experience of the Salvation Army Men’s Social Services Centre, Newcastle-upon-Tyne (hereafter Newcastle), UK. In this, we explore the extent to which design principles and ideas have, throughout the building’s life, meshed with more contextual understandings of the homeless body, as expressed by employees and residents. We also consider some of the particularities of the homeless body, the simultaneously supportive and moralising tendencies of much architectural design practice, and the wider lessons to be learned from the building’s 50-year lifespan.

2. Understanding the Homeless Body

The homeless population is diverse, comprising individuals with varied backgrounds, experiences, and priorities (Anderson & Christian, 2003). Nonetheless, there are several widely accepted sub-groups within the homeless population, including rough sleepers, hostel dwellers, and “sofa surfers” (the non-statutory or “single” homeless), as well as families, older people, and young people (the statutory homeless), among whom some degree of homogeneity can be found. The rough sleeper and single homeless populations that

are the focus of this article are predominantly male, owing in part to homeless women often having more housing rights than men due to, *inter alia*, pregnancy or maternity, having dependent children and being victims of domestic abuse. There is also evidence that women are better able to navigate homelessness, as seen through their increased utilisation of informal support networks (Bretherton, 2017).

Additional studies have revealed the multiple disadvantages facing single homeless people. These include Homeless Link's annual survey of single homeless needs and provision, the latest of which identified high levels of mental ill health, needs relating to offending behaviour, and substance misuse problems (Homeless Link, 2023; see also Bramley et al., 2020). Levels of severe mental illness, drug use, contact with the criminal justice system, and poor physical health have been found to be generally higher among males, with female homelessness more closely linked to poverty and the nature and availability (or lack thereof) of support (Busch-Geertsema, 2010). Linked to this, a growing body of research indicates that the lives of rough sleepers and single homeless individuals are frequently characterised by histories of trauma and adversity. Often connected to challenging childhood and familial experiences, these histories are noted as causal factors in heightened levels of isolation, loneliness, and often ultimately homelessness (Sanders & Brown, 2015). Indeed, homelessness itself is widely reported to be traumatic and to leave lasting mental and physical impacts, including depression, chronic illness, and respiratory and serious pulmonary diseases (Lewer et al., 2019). All too frequently, these impacts combine and compound, resulting in a life expectancy approximately 30 years below that of the general population (Thomas, 2012).

Despite the myriad challenges facing single homeless people, attitudes toward their plight are polarised, giving rise to a diverse policy and practice response. On the one hand, "trauma narratives" of homeless people "in constant need of rescue" (Dillabough & Kennelly, 2010, pp. 3–4) have long provoked offerings of food and friendship, particularly from voluntary, community, and faith groups. On the other hand, and despite increased understanding of the structural causes of homelessness, there remains an overriding emphasis on the individual shortcomings and deviant characteristics of these "wayward souls." This emphasis tends to focus the debate on issues of "responsibility" and how best to "manage" the behaviour of single homeless individuals, including through measures such as legal prohibitions on activities such as going to the toilet outdoors, the use of public space protection orders to deter rough sleeping in areas such as shop doorways, and the deployment of "hostile" architecture such as anti-homeless spikes (Anderson & Christian, 2003; Johnsen et al., 2018).

According to Kawash (1998), these overt strategies of coercion expose several underlying rationalities. Firstly, they articulate a deep-rooted perception of the homeless body as threatening to public safety and the moral order. Secondly, they highlight the continuing separation of public and private in capitalist societies, and how the literal home-less-ness of the homeless body positions it outside society's hegemonic norms. The result, Kawash (1998) explains, is that homeless bodies are both frequently denied access to the public realm and required to render themselves "smaller" in it (Kawash, 1998). This does not imply that all homeless individuals comply with these coercions; researchers have also traced acts of "creative resistance" by homeless people, including the construction of temporary structures on footpaths and in leftover spaces (dos Santos, 2005), as well as the occupation of seemingly uninhabitable spaces such as sewers and storm drains (Lancione, 2019). Yet, while these studies remind us that four walls are not necessarily essential to practices of homemaking, their findings merely reinforce the normative appeal of the hostel as the "proper place" for the single homeless body (Bretherton, 2017).

3. The Hostel Model and Landscape

The provision of (emergency) hostel accommodation has long been the UK's dominant response to homelessness, and this shows no signs of abating. There are currently 911 accommodation projects ("hostels") for single homeless people in England, collectively providing 33,093 bed spaces (Homeless Link, 2023). These are spread across a variety of accommodation types, ranging from large hostels run by major voluntary organisations to small shelters and refuges run by modestly sized charities and church groups. The users of these hostels are similarly diverse, with more than a third of projects catering to young people between the ages of 18–24, including consistently high numbers of care leavers, and approximately one-in-ten serving those with high or complex needs (Homeless Link, 2023). Despite this complexity, most projects subscribe to a logic whereby homeless individuals move progressively through a series of residential services before, finally, being supported into independent living (Johnsen & Teixeira, 2010).

The purpose and quality of hostels have undergone dramatic changes over the past half-century. Emergency accommodation first became widespread in the 1970s, when its role was limited to providing a "safe space" to eat, sleep, and wash. Despite awareness of the limitations of emergency hostels, the absence of funding to renew and refurbish them meant many services operated through goodwill and out of old, disused buildings that were not fit for purpose. In many ways, this reflected a wider impetus to *discourage* homelessness applications and long-term residency in hostels through the avoidance of "excessive comfort" (Fitzpatrick & Wynnanska, 2007). Since the 1990s, however, a series of initiatives, including the Hostel Capital Improvement Programme (2005–2008) and Places of Change (2008–2011), have been launched, all aimed at establishing minimum standards and "levelling up" actual and normative hostel conditions (Fitzpatrick & Wynnanska, 2007). Critically, these initiatives granted local authorities and other homelessness services substantial funding to, *inter alia*, replace and refurbish large-scale hostels, transform night shelters into short-stay assessment centres (many linked to daytime services), and increase the number of referrals to employment support (Department of Communities and Local Government, 2007).

More recently, in 2020, the government published its National Statement of Expectations (NSE) for supported housing, providing comprehensive guidance on the effective planning, commissioning, and delivery of supported housing. This has driven further improvements in physical standards, leading to the closure of many large hostels and the emergence of smaller, more specialised facilities, mainly catering to families with children, single (childless) people, and both younger and older people. The NSE has also prompted increases in the level of support hostels administer, with providers now delivering an average of ten supplementary services, ranging from general housing advice and digital skills training to "meaningful activity" (Homeless Link, 2023). On top of this, hostel providers have been encouraged to adopt psychologically- and trauma-informed approaches to care, with evidence suggesting that services employing these approaches achieve more positive outcomes with users than those that do not (McMordie, 2021). All of this indicates that supported accommodation has progressed significantly beyond the concept of being merely "emergency accommodation," where *any* accommodation is considered preferable to *none*, to a stage where minimum standards, defined more holistically, are gaining traction.

Even with these changes, the effectiveness of the UK's hostel provision remains the subject of considerable debate. Evidence indicates that hostels often prove highly effective in assisting individuals to meet immediate needs and cultivate the skills and resources necessary for independent living (Johnsen & Teixeira,

2010). However, levels of eviction and abandonment are high, especially among those with complex needs (McMordie, 2021), with many single homeless people reluctant to reside in hostels due to concerns about safety and welfare (Mackie et al., 2017). At the same time, the professionalisation of the UK's homelessness system has (as elsewhere) fuelled a more punitive attitude towards those who refuse "treatment," creating a situation in which hostels become a place where the homeless body is "tolerated, temporarily and for short periods of time" (Kawash, 1998, p. 327). In the last two sections of this paper, we have explored conceptualisations of the homeless body and the hostel accommodation landscape separately. In the section that follows, we bring these discussions together, thinking about the homeless body in relation to the architectural design of hostels.

4. Hostels, Architectural Design, and the Homeless Body

Despite the contribution of hostels to the management of homelessness, there has been relatively little examination of the architectural design of hostels and its impact on the efficacy of provision. Partly, this is due to the limited number of hostels designed specifically for the homeless population; however, even where they have been, there has yet to emerge a comprehensive study of how the homeless body was imagined and how this imaginary manifested in the design, layout, and material finish of the buildings created. While little may be known about architects' understanding of the *homeless* body, the body more generally is widely acknowledged as the primary site and vehicle of human experience. Indeed, scholars and practitioners have long conceived of architectural forms as the physical reflection of the human body (Imrie, 2003), with its dimensions, proportions, and properties serving as essential components in the design process. Arguably the most vivid illustration of this tendency is modernist architect Le Corbusier's (1948) "Modulor Man," an anthropometric scale of proportions whose idealised silhouette borrows from both the Fibonacci sequence and the hulking depictions of detectives in English crime novels.

For all its notoriety, the concept of the modulator man has been roundly criticised, with much of the criticism directed at its rendering of the human body as "able-bodied, taut, upright, male and...as self-evidently invariable, normal, vigorous and healthy" (Imrie, 2003, p. 49). In fact, with the possible exception of its maleness, the Corbusian framing of the human body runs contrary to much of the evidence presented here; evidence that has highlighted the frequently pained corporeality of the homeless body. Given this, it would be understandable to perceive the Corbusian framing to be an aberration within an otherwise thoughtful project of human-centred design. But as recently as the turn of the century, practising architects were observed engaging in processes of "self-imaging," or adopting "their own bodies as the dominant point of reference" (Imrie, 2003, p. 53). In his study of the education and training of practising architects in the UK, Imrie (2003, p. 47) encountered an overwhelmingly blunt treatment of the human form, one that left it "without sex, gender, race, or physical difference." He also noted the central and enduring role of design texts, exemplified by Neufert and Neufert's (2000) *Architects' Data*, in constructing and reproducing geometrical discourses.

While the profession still has much to learn, recent research inspires confidence that architects are at least more aware of their role as "body workers," and more willing to participate in person-centred design processes (Bromley, 2012; Buse et al., 2017). They are certainly more aware of the limitations of conceptualising buildings as mute and passive, rather than the outcome of myriad human, material, and discursive practices, all with their own cultural and political inflections (Kraftl, 2010). In this latter schema, the homeless body is not subject to

the building's design; rather, it too possesses agency and intentionality, responding to its circumstances in a variety of ways, ranging from open defiance to appropriation and homemaking. Datta's (2005) study of the lived experiences of emergency shelters is illustrative in this regard, showing how some homeless families are able to cultivate a sense of home through the procurement of furnishings and appliances.

However, while acknowledging the significance of recent attempts to foreground the materiality of everyday embodied practice (see, for example, Kraftl & Adey, 2008), we also contend that this approach is now itself becoming something of an orthodoxy. In other words, though we are sensitive to the pitfalls of determinist thinking, and to the fact that architectural design always exceeds symbolic and representational interpretation (Kraftl & Adey, 2008), we also perceive limitations in the shift away from representational approaches over the last two decades (Dewsbury et al., 2002). In particular, pushing cultural and representational influences the margins risk obscuring their vital role in the constitution of human and non-human worlds, and particularly those in which power is unevenly distributed and socially contested (Thien, 2005).

5. Methodology

In the remainder of this article, we conduct a detailed examination of the design and lived experience of the Salvation Army Men's Social Services Centre (hereafter "the Centre") in Newcastle, drawing upon data obtained over a 10-year period and through three main activities. First, searches were undertaken in the archives of Ryder Architecture, the Salvation Army, and Tyne & Wear Archives and Museums (Discovery Museum). These elicited a wealth of information on the history and origins of the Centre, including drawings, photographs, and specifications (many rich with handwritten annotations), as well as more general information on the accommodation landscape of which it formed part. Although possessing flat, representational characteristics, these sources shed important light on the perspectives of key stakeholders regarding the homeless body. Searches of the British Newspaper Archive were also conducted, introducing us to the perspectives of those living and working in the Centre throughout its lifespan. Second, archival materials were considered in conjunction with our own first-hand experiences of visiting and engaging with residents of the Centre, collected through previous participatory and (visual) ethnographic studies involving approximately 40 participants (Irving & Moss, 2018). While the aim of these studies was to scrutinise the experiences of individuals navigating the homelessness system in Newcastle as a whole, they also yielded valuable insights into conditions within the Centre specifically. And third, we collated the insights of approximately 20 further individuals working in homeless accommodation across the city, many of them gathered on-site within hostels and other types of temporary accommodation, including as part of various outreach activities. For this reason, many of our conversations were not voice-recorded, but rather documented in field notes and reflective memos (Power & Jansson, 2008). What follows, therefore, is a broad and deliberately impressionistic account of bodily existence at the interface between the architectural plan and contingent reality.

6. Case Study: The Men's Social Services Centre

6.1. Values and Ethos

The Men's Social Services Centre (hereafter "the Centre"; see Figure 1) opened on Friday, 10th January 1975. Custom-designed and purpose-built, it was heralded by the building's commissioner, the Salvation



Figure 1. The Men's Social Services Centre. Photo courtesy of Ryder Architecture.

Army, as a place of care and support for single homeless men, including those with serious substance and mental health concerns. Founded in 1865 under the leadership of the Methodist minister General William Booth (1829–1912), the Salvation Army had, over the intervening century, established itself as one of the most forward-thinking institutions in the homelessness sector. Certainly, from its inception, it was highly progressive: firstly, in recognising homelessness as the outcome of a complex interplay between various personal vulnerabilities and structural challenges such as addiction, loneliness, and unemployment; and secondly, by providing support aimed at addressing the root causes of homelessness rather than just its symptoms, and by performing this work in a way that was neither time-sensitive nor conditional. Such thinking about the causes of and potential solutions to homelessness was not met with agreement in academic and policy circles until at least the early 2000s, and in some respects, remains contentious today (see, for example, Fitzpatrick, 2005). Thus, the Centre can be conceived of as an extreme case through which to examine the causal patterns and trajectories of wellbeing in hostel accommodation (Flyvbjerg, 2006).

Of course, the Salvation Army's fiery rhetoric and stringent interpretation of Methodism was not entirely welcomed, with many in society critical of its views on consumption and leisure (a situation famously chronicled by George Bernard Shaw in his 1905 play, *Major Barbara*). Within the Salvation Army, these practices were deemed detrimental to individuals and families and considered contributing factors to what many perceived as an era of "moral decadence" ("Tynesiders gamble and drink far too hard," 1959). Many of their most disparaging remarks were directed at the working class communities of northern England, where they contended that drinking and gambling were endemic ("Tynesiders gamble and drink far too hard," 1959). Indeed, both these vices were implicated in the downfall of many of the men presenting to the Salvation Army, a significant proportion of whom were judged "hopeless...[and inclined to] follow the path of least resistance" (Morgan, 1967, p. 6). Such remarks earned the Salvation Army's "zealous proselytizers" (Clope et al., 2010, p. 56) rebuke, both from those suspicious of its efforts at social control and those disillusioned by its reluctance to challenge the structural bases of inequality. Yet, in the absence of any statutory provision for single homeless people, the Salvation Army had, by the middle of the 20th century, cemented its position as one of the UK's leading providers of homeless accommodation, with its network of shelters growing to offer lodging for almost 10,000 men by the late 1960s (Smith, 1969).

The specific origins of the Centre can be traced to a 1965 review of the Salvation Army's hostel programme, *Tragedies of Affluence* (Salvation Army, 1965). This highlighted that despite the best efforts of the Salvation Army, up to 35,000 men nationally could still be found seeking “shelter and friendship” on a given night. The context in which the review was published was undoubtedly a challenging one—and no more so than in Newcastle. By the early 1970s, the city's homelessness problem was acute, prompting one leading social worker to label it “scandalous” and observe how more than 100 individuals could be regularly found enduring “freezing conditions in park shelters or seek[ing] refuge under the bridges of Newcastle's Quayside (“Scandal' of the homeless,” 1974). Yet, if the need for new housing for single homeless people was clear, it was, the authors of *Tragedies of Affluence* admitted, “not enough [for the Salvation Army and other organisations involved in providing basic needs] to provide a roof and a rough bed”; they had to transform the nation's hostels into “places that will restore a man's self-respect, with carpets, curtains, showers and games rooms” (Salvation Army, 1965, p. 11). The Salvation Army thus embarked on an ambitious new programme of hostel development which, in its commitment to improving physical standards, in many respects anticipated the Places of Change agenda of the 2000s (Cloke et al., 2010).

Unusually for an organisation wedded to tradition, the Centre was designed not by the Salvation Army's own in-house development team but by an external practice, Ryder & Yates. Established in 1953, Ryder & Yates, at its height, was the most powerful purveyor of architectural modernism in the North of England (Carroll, 2009; Giddings & Moss, 2017). Greatly influenced by the Russian émigré architect Berthold Lubetkin (1901–1990), for whom both (Gordon) Ryder (1919–2000) and (Peter) Yates (1920–1982) had worked during his short stint as Architect Planner of the Peterlee New Town project, and in Yates' case by the famed modernist Le Corbusier, with whom a lifelong friendship had been forged in post-war Paris, the practice pursued a variety of work including commercial, industrial, and residential endeavours; indeed, in 1969 the practice designed an extension to the Salvation Army's Newcastle maternity home (and later women's hostel), Hopedene (Carroll, 2009). Taking particular inspiration from Lubetkin's ambition for public buildings to exhibit not only functional clarity but also aesthetic appeal and inspirational qualities, the two architects developed a design on City Road that embodied the latest in architectural thinking and a progressive understanding of the homeless body. In his remark that the Centre would “serve in love those who need not only a shelter over their heads and food for their bodies, but spiritual healing for their souls” (Salvation Army, 1975), Clarence Wiseman, the recently-elected General (international leader) of the Salvation Army, alludes to a deeper commitment to addressing the needs of the homeless, viewing their bodies as creative, thinking subjects rather than passive, unthinking objects.

6.2. Location and Spatial Context

The Centre was built alongside the Keelmen's Hospital (see Figure 2) in the heart of Newcastle's Quayside. This followed extensive consultation with the local authority (Newcastle City Council), which supported the consolidation of multiple sites dedicated to addressing the homelessness crisis. In fact, it was believed that the merging of the two sites would engender “a feeling of ‘place’”—in which residents of the Centre, too, would have a stake—and make “an important contribution to the urban scene” (Ryder & Yates, 1972, no pagination). Centrally located, in contrast to more recent initiatives which have sought to remove homeless people from urban centres by sequestering them in shelters on the periphery (Mair, 1986), the Centre lived up to its billing as “the easiest place for someone new to the area to find” (Ryder & Yates, 1972, no pagination), while a 24-hour open-door policy ensured those presenting could “be sure of a clean bed and

good meals round the clock” (Ryan, 1976, p. 122). Against the current policy emphasis on “area connection,” whereby access to homelessness support services is contingent upon geographical connectedness, these policies appear surprisingly enlightened, with the homeless body judged on its merits rather than on any institutionally imposed descriptors.

To further integrate the Centre into the surrounding landscape, Ryder & Yates “respected the height of its older neighbour and its relationship to the road, sweeping the building back in an asymmetrical curve of brick and glass” (Pevsner & Richmond, 1992, p. 477; see Figure 3). Set back from the passing traffic, and with a generous frontage made up of manicured lawn and Peter Yates’ signature “earth sculptures” (essentially undulating mounds of earth atop a concrete substrate),” the Centre cut an impressive, if imposing, figure, and the efforts did not stop there. In a gesture that evoked Lubetkin’s Highpoint II at Highgate, the entrance to the Centre was outfitted with a distinctive boomerang-shaped canopy, which, on the occasion of its official opening, was described by Sir James Steel CBE as seeming to symbolise the organisation’s “outstretched arms of caring” (Carroll, 2009, p. 111; see Figure 1). More than a mere decorative element, the canopy radiated a welcoming spirit distinct from contemporary homeless hostels with their anonymous exteriors and secure entry systems, offering those passing beneath it a sense of belonging, dignity, and hope. In the clamour to

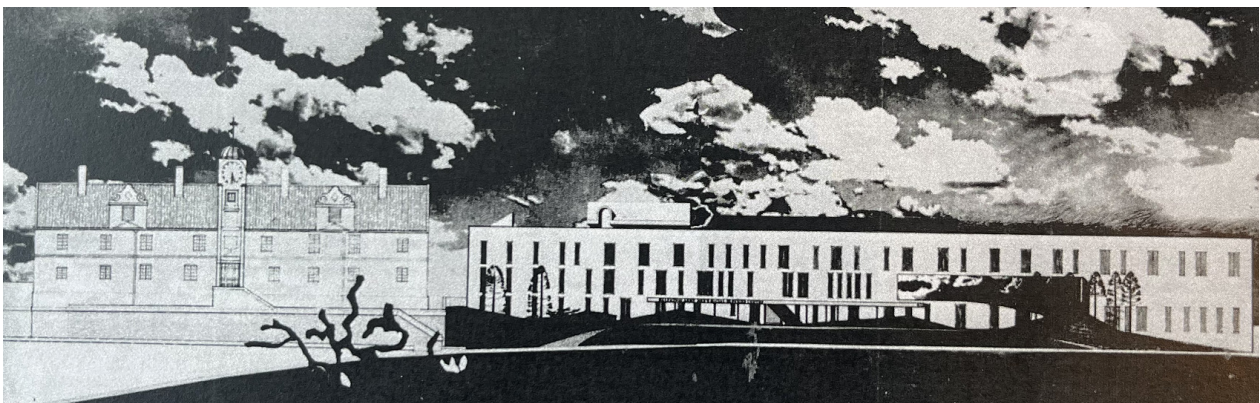


Figure 2. The Men’s Social Services Centre (right) and early 18th-century Keelmen’s Hospital. Image courtesy of Ryder Architecture.

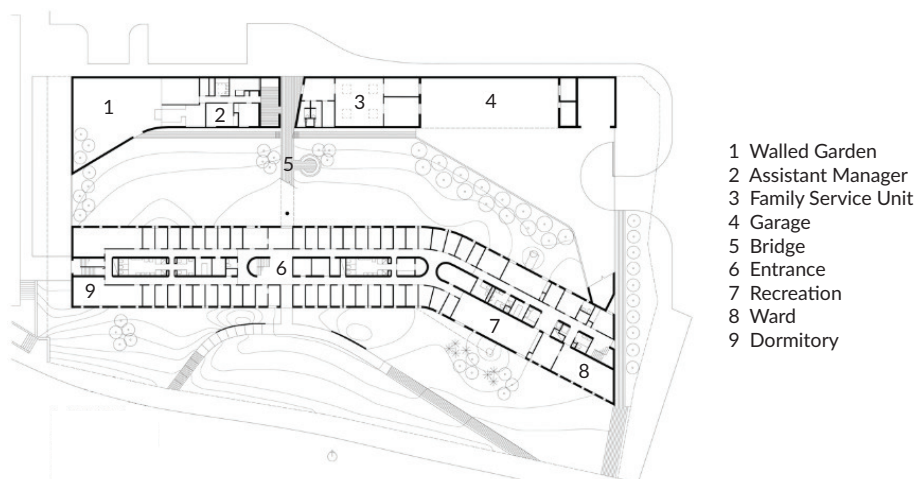


Figure 3. Building schematic. Image courtesy of Ryder Architecture.

better understand the everyday lived experiences of architectural space, it is important not to overlook the “ambient power” (Allen, 2006) caught up in such features, for visual communication and storytelling through them (as well as other signs and symbols) are processes which shape and compel human action.

6.3. Internal Layout and Fabric

Similar concerns for the thoughts and feelings of residents were embodied in the building’s façade and other decorative elements. Most notably, in a clear debt to the region’s shipbuilding heritage, the Centre borrowed the form and silhouette of a liner, with its rows of small windows resembling window-only cabins (Carroll, 2009). With this, a sense of togetherness and common cause is evoked, perhaps in the face of a sea of indifference; the 1970s was, after all, a decade in which single homelessness was still largely waiting to be discovered, much less dealt with. Furthermore, in recognition of the diverse experiences and individuality of the building’s residents, the seemingly “casual arrangement of the windows”—which actually exemplified Le Corbusier’s modulator proportions—was purposely “designed to avoid the institutional scale and spirit” of its predecessor, the “Men’s Palace” (Ryder & Yates, 1972, no pagination).

For similar reasons, the building stood just three storeys high and, upon its opening, had the capacity to accommodate 184 men—three-quarters of them in cubicles rather than open dormitories (see Figure 4). Although this compares favourably with contemporary provisions, the Centre’s capacity fell short of expectations set during the Salvation Army’s ambitious yet ultimately challenging funding campaign. So much so, that at the time of its opening, the Centre accommodated no more men than had been housed at the former Men’s Palace, whose “long soulless corridors...clinical looking white tiled walls...[and] sparse bathing facilities” had identified it as no longer “fit for purpose” (“Salvation Army on the move,” 1974), and indeed, whose limited proportions had been implicated in the death of four men during a fire eight years earlier (Hedley, 1967). A key feature of the Centre’s design, however, was the facility to reconfigure the internal partitions, which allowed, for example, the dormitories to be transformed into single bedrooms. Thus, by the mid-1990s, the Centre consisted of a reduced 98 rooms, and by the time of its closure in 2014, only 66 rooms, now equipped with en-suite facilities, were in use. This downsizing reflected a wider shift towards smaller hostel models that better catered to the safety, privacy, and dignity of those seeking support (Fitzpatrick & Wygnanska, 2007).

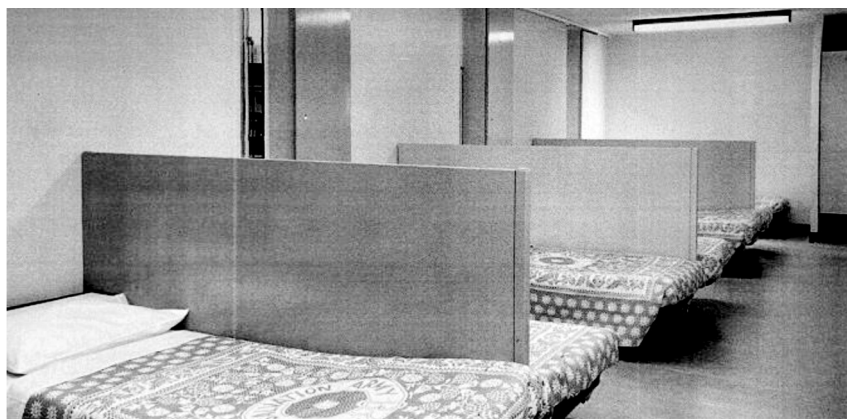


Figure 4. Dormitory bedrooms. Photo courtesy of Ryder Architecture.

All residents had convenient access to essential amenities, such as toilets and washing facilities, and were encouraged to utilise the in-house washing machines; however, it was observed that not all residents availed themselves of these facilities (Ryan, 1976). Certainly, alongside evidence of staff engaging in a variety of practices of care, there was a strong sense of the challenges of working with vulnerable and sometimes compromised bodies. The use of hard-wearing, wipe-down materials, for example, including the same blue brindle bricks that comprised the Centre's exterior walls, reveals a concern for hygiene and safety, while much is also made in the building's specification document of the Centre's two-stage ventilation system, complete with "boost" facility to "clear unwanted smells" (Ryder & Yates, 1972). Far from innocuous, such references align with longstanding portrayals of the homeless body as a source of "stench, waste and bodily excretions" (Kawash, 1998, p. 329). According to Mary Douglas, such "impurities" are widely seen as synonymous with social and moral defilement, but only (and crucially) in certain institutional settings. In other words, impurities are only considered as such because of the "systematic ordering and classification of matter" (Douglas, 1966, p. 35). In the social-reformist context of the Centre, where any impurity would likely have been seen as an impediment to communion with God, cleanliness and bodily hygiene would have been prerequisites for full and active citizenship, and therefore strongly promoted. That for some residents these ideals would have been difficult to attain (such was the precarity with which they lived) merely underscores the simultaneously coercive and enabling nature of much homeless service provision.

6.4. Communality and Socialisation

The Centre's facilities and services were housed in a central linear core, within easy reach of the bedrooms. This proximity was deliberate, being particularly important to the old and infirm who were located on the building's first floor. A small lift provided access to the other floors, catering to those who were unable to navigate the curving, partly open stair-well, although the Salvation Army was known to exhibit a suspicious attitude toward social mixing in confined and unsupervised spaces (Taylor, 1987). Residents also enjoyed access to various communal areas, including day rooms and a large canteen, which were supervised by the Centre's staff—numbering 28 in its early days—along with a small unit of volunteers, among whom women were often noted to serve "as mother figures to the men" (Ryan, 1976, p. 123). Whether the men themselves were complicit in this quasi-maternal relationship is unclear, but it is evident that the development of open, trusting relationships was integral to their engagement with the Centre's regime and policies (Watson et al., 2019). Residents were not under constant supervision, since the Salvation Army was committed to the Centre being considered "home" by the men, but staff admitted to keeping a "watchful eye" and intervening when concerns or issues arose (Ryan, 1976). In this sense, the Salvation Army mainly focused its efforts on rehabilitation, both by fostering healthy interpersonal relationships and cultivating a non-authoritarian atmosphere of nurturing and compassion (Garside, 1993).

In these ways, many of the Centre's communal areas acquired a distinctly "domestic" character, with their modern design and open-plan format encouraging family-like interaction and interdependence. Rich in spiritual significance, eating together was seen as a particularly important means of social and religious bonding, with one staff member reporting that a full-time cook was "kept busy in seeing that the ever-popular canteen is supplied with nourishing food" (Ryan, 1976, p. 123). Interestingly, such comments paint a more favourable picture of the caregiving environment than that conveyed by Kawash (1998), for whom the tendency of homeless services is to provide food that is "quick and easy" rather than nourishing and healthy. They also exemplify an attitude toward single homeless men, often associated with the

Salvation Army, that views the absence of family and informal support networks, along with the assistance and discipline they provide, as perhaps the most critical factor contributing to the downfall of homeless men. Certainly, providing advice and guidance on housing and resettlement was much less of a priority for the Salvation Army during the Centre's early years, as illustrated by Newcastle-based Brigadier Henry Jones's comment that, while "[t]here is liaison with council departments, and a few down-and-outs can be brought back to their families or into a permanent job and home...[the Salvation Army] is mainly concerned with housing, feeding and clothing the men" (Morgan, 1967, p. 6).

Contributing to the animated atmosphere, a south-facing oriel window, partly cantilevered to align with the curve of the building and running the length of one side of the canteen, allowed a ready supply of natural light to filter through (Carroll, 2009; see Figure 5). Typical of those admired by Le Corbusier, who considered ample light and clean air essential for the rational development of the individual, this window holds a prominent position in depictions of the Centre. Through the window, residents would have taken in views of the street and the Centre's grounds, which, in its early years, contained seats for those wishing "to sit and doze in the sun" (Ryan, 1976, p. 123). Scenes of this nature contrast sharply with those portrayed in contemporary sources, where the homeless body is invariably denied the opportunity to be still or idle (Jocoy & Del Casino, 2010). They are also striking for the way they challenge popular assumptions regarding how homeless people do (and *should*) spend their time; however, this should not be so surprising, as in previous projects exploring the everyday lives of homeless people, participants have discussed a range of attitudes and behaviours characteristic of "normal" functioning lifestyles (Irving & Moss, 2018).

Within the day rooms (see Figure 5), it was envisioned that the men could occupy themselves and form friendships through informal games and handcrafts. And, in an echo of earlier Salvation Army initiatives to promote the reintegration of single homeless individuals, some residents were permitted to take on paid work, with one staff member noting that "[m]uch of the casual work is done by residents...who are looking for a job, many of them discharged prisoners trying to get back on their feet" (Bovey, 1995, p. 5). Such accounts contrast sharply with those of the sector today, in which welfare benefits are often shown to impede employment opportunities for individuals living in high-cost supported accommodation (Webber et al., 2023), despite the well-documented benefits of work for individual wellbeing. One of the residents, Peter, who secured a job as a kitchen porter, said, "When I first came here, I didn't think I'd last long, but I've been here four or five years now, and it's all right" (Bovey, 1995, p. 5). In addition to work, opportunities for spiritual development could be found in the Centre's chapel. However, spirituality was as much a collective endeavour as an individual one, with prayer sessions taking place six days a week and Sunday gatherings regularly attracting up to 100 men (Ryan, 1976). Participation in religiosity has been shown to confer a range of benefits to homeless people, including reduced levels of substance misuse and psychological distress (Lovett & Weisz, 2021), though it is less in evidence in today's more secular environment and the debate over whether it is a conservative force or an emancipatory one remains polarised.

In the building's central core, a prevalence of curved walls express concern for the infirm, but also for the potential unruly behaviours of residents, reflecting commonplace understandings of hostels as both forces for change (Johnsen & Teixeira, 2010) and sites of retrenchment (McMordie, 2021). These walls are almost immediately counterpointed, however, by the contrasting geometry of the Centre's internal corridors, the linearity of which evokes Le Corbusier's (1948, p. 68) belief that "[t]he regulating line is a guarantee against wilfulness." Viewed in a more positive light, these corridors can be taken as means of orchestrating

neighbourliness and spontaneous conversation (see Figure 6). Certainly, the long corridors and dormitory-style rooms were envisioned to foster the development of friendships and alleviate the sense of isolation commonly associated with the homeless condition (Sanders & Brown, 2015). In this schema, the homeless body was not only deemed “salvageable” with the understanding and support of peers, but actually capable of giving back to the evolving economy of care. Indeed, it was with a sense of regret that some staff described how the transition to single-occupancy rooms—which unfolded over the course of the Centre’s first two decades of operation—had in fact diminished the sense of community spirit. As one source, Mark, reflected: “Time was when everybody looked out for each other. That doesn’t happen as much now.

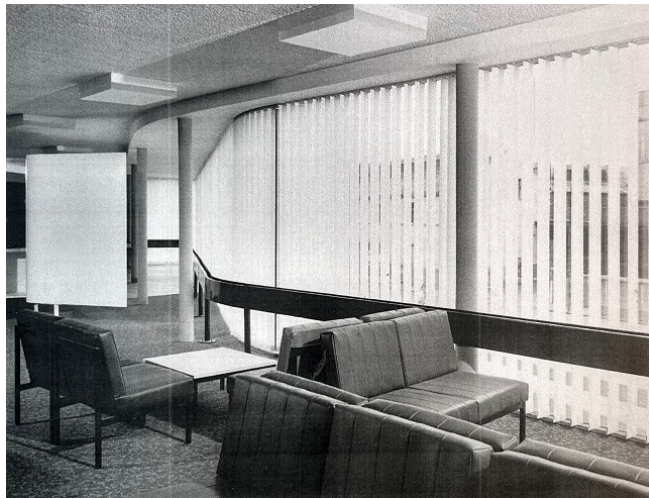


Figure 5. Communal day room. Photo courtesy of Ryder Architecture.



Figure 6. Internal corridors. Photo courtesy of Ryder Architecture.

Men go to their own rooms, shut the door and that's it" (Bovey, 1995, p. 5). Of course, underscoring the more general point about the difficulty of balancing intervention and independence, while peers are undoubtedly a crucial source of support for many single homeless men, it is also true that being compelled to be "in public" can have equally detrimental effects (Holt et al., 2012).

7. Conclusion

The contemporary hostel landscape, homelessness policy, and practice have progressed significantly since the immediate post-war period. While nonetheless punitive and stigmatising at times, today, practices are informed by an ethos of care, empathy, and welfare. Consequently, contemporary hostels which are a central component in housing the homeless population, strive to create atmospheres and environments characterised by this more modern, progressive ethos. However, what has arguably been overlooked within the contemporary hostel landscape is the importance of architectural design.

With this in mind, we have examined the location, key design features, and materiality of the Men's Social Services Centre to consider what lessons might be drawn. In so doing, we have explored the "body work" undertaken by the architects, Ryder & Yates, and their client, the Salvation Army, in anticipation of the (imagined) bodies that would inhabit the building. While respectful of the dimensions, proportions, and properties of the human body, our analysis reveals that the design of the Centre moved beyond traditional conceptions of the human body, instead reflecting the multiple and competing constructions of a body which is both highly vulnerable and dysfunctional. Accordingly, the building boasted features which were simultaneously empathetic and coercive, intended to facilitate the care and support of the inhabitants, while nonetheless seeking to manage any anti-social proclivities.

In many respects, the physical and psycho-social environment created reflects much that is now considered "best practice," and there is evidence that the building was successful in shaping the cognitive and affective responses of those who inhabited it, encouraging activities such as healthy eating, friendship building, and religious worship. Consideration of the lived experience of the Centre thus further highlights the positive role that person-centred buildings can play in the lives of those with limited agency, and it is perhaps not surprising that in 2015 the building received the status of "a significant welfare building with a highly distinctive character...[and a] high order of design quality and execution" (Historic England, n.d.).

Sadly, for some, the Centre closed in 2014 amid concerns about the efficacy of large-scale congregate environments for those with complex needs. Indeed, ideologies of care for the homeless have increasingly moved away from this model of single homeless accommodation (Fitzpatrick & Wynnanska, 2007). While the occupancy of the building reduced dramatically over its lifespan, even this sat outside new and preferred norms for hostel occupancy. The analysis thus reminds us of the relatively limited capacity of buildings to flex in response to changing norms and values. However, despite its difficulties, this article has sought to demonstrate that we should not dismiss the Centre as a complete failure. Instead, we ought to consider what lessons can be learned from its architectural design and how these might be harnessed in the new hostel landscape, perhaps allowing the Centre to live on in spirit if not in form.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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