

## Dr Alan Holmans CBE, 1934 – 2015

Many in housing take for granted the case for well-constructed and regularly updated assessments of housing needs whether at a local, regional or national level. Indeed such assessments have been a core rationale for the *UK Housing Review* since it was first published 23 years ago. In 2015, Alan Holmans, the creator and contributor of most of the significant housing statistics produced in Britain from the 1970s onwards, died at the age of 80. He had two long careers, first as a civil servant up until his retirement as Chief Housing Economist from the Department of the Environment in 1995 (which he joined after teaching at the University of Glasgow) and then as an academic researcher at the Cambridge Centre for Housing and Planning Research (CCHPR), retiring again in 2010 but continuing as an Honorary Research Fellow right up until his death.

Alan published his first assessment of housing needs in Britain in 1970 in the first issue of *Social Trends*.<sup>1</sup> This was but a taster to the three Technical Volumes published in 1977 to support the Housing Policy Review for England and Wales which culminated in the consultative document *Housing Policy*. Alan wrote much of the three volumes and also assembled a huge amount of data which have since formed the basis for all further housing forecasts in England. In 1987 and despite being a civil servant, he published *Housing Policy in Britain: a History* which discussed in considerable detail the evolution of housing policy from 1945 to 1979 (including the pre-history back to 1844) noting that 'for reasons of propriety no comments are made about the policies of the present government'.<sup>2</sup>

Alan wrote a series of monographs within the government (on house prices (1990), the employment circumstances of council tenants (1993), house property and inheritance (1994) and after.<sup>3</sup> Then on retirement from government he continued his projections of demand and need for housing especially in England but also Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, together with many other policy-based reports. It would be no exaggeration to say that his work on demand and need has formed the basis for estimates of new housing requirements (and the land and finance needed to achieve them) for over forty years. Whenever new household projections were published Alan would update his estimates often for the Town and Country Planning Association and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation but also for Shelter, the Council of Mortgage Lenders and others. His last piece of work with CCHPR was a projection of housing demand and need to 2031 for the Public Policy Institute for Wales which he worked on from his hospital bed! It should be noted Alan eschewed spreadsheets and models preferring his 'figuring' by long-hand tabulations, checked and cross-checked.

Mention has already been made of his interest in history. In 2005 he published his seminal compilation *Abstract of Historical Statistics of British Housing*<sup>4</sup> and, in 2012, a *History of Household Projections*.<sup>5</sup> Of course these volumes flowed out of his encyclopedic knowledge of government housing statistics and surveys. Alan was closely involved in the development of the Survey of English Housing, the English Housing Survey and in the 'housing trailers' linked to the Labour Force Survey. Finally, we should not ignore various reflective articles – in *Housing Studies*,<sup>6</sup> edited books on housing policy<sup>7</sup> and on social trends<sup>8</sup> along with two contributions to the much under-referenced and ODPM-funded evaluation of English Housing Policy from 1975-2000<sup>9</sup> and his chapter on housing requirements in the TCPA's 1996 *The People – Where will they go?*<sup>10</sup> In the *UK Housing Review*

2006/2007 Alan had a chapter on 'Rising house prices: a look at the history' which did indeed look as far back as the 1930s.

Alan believed in evidence-led policy well before this term was coined. As his colleague Christine Whitehead has reminded us, '...he loved sorting out the numbers and his immense understanding of how the housing system worked meant that how he used them made policy sense. What he enjoyed at CCHPR was having the freedom to put his own interpretation on his findings rather than being constrained by his civil service position - and, as he often said, "having to draft round difficult issues".'

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<sup>1</sup> Holmans, A. (1970) *A forecast of effective demand for housing in Great Britain in the 1970s*. Social Trends, volume 1. London: HMSO.

<sup>2</sup> Holmans, A. (1987) *Housing Policy in Britain: a History*. London: Croom Helm.

<sup>3</sup> And on *Housing Equity Withdrawal* (DoE, 1996), *Negative Equity* (DoE, 1997), *Divorce, Remarriage and Housing* for DETR (2000).

<sup>4</sup> See [www.cchpr.landecon.cam.ac.uk/Projects/Start-Year/2005/Other-Publications/Historical-Statistics-of-Housing-in-Britain](http://www.cchpr.landecon.cam.ac.uk/Projects/Start-Year/2005/Other-Publications/Historical-Statistics-of-Housing-in-Britain)

<sup>5</sup> See [www.cchpr.landecon.cam.ac.uk/Projects/Start-Year/2012/Other-Publications/History-of-Household-Projections](http://www.cchpr.landecon.cam.ac.uk/Projects/Start-Year/2012/Other-Publications/History-of-Household-Projections)

<sup>6</sup> Holmans, A. (1991) 'The 1977 National Housing Policy Review in Retrospect' *Housing Studies*, 6(3) pp.206-219.

<sup>7</sup> Holmans, A. (1997) 'UK housing finance; past changes, the present predicament and future sustainability' in Williams, P. ed. *Directions in Housing Policy*. London: Paul Chapman.

<sup>8</sup> Halsey, A.H. (1972 and subsequent editions) *Trends in British Society since 1900: A Guide to the Changing Social Structure of Britain*. London: Macmillan.

<sup>9</sup> Holmans, A. (2005) *Housing and Housing Policy in England 1975-2002: Chronology and Commentary* London: ODPM; and *The Context for Housing Policy Since 1975: Statistical Time Series With Commentary*. London: ODPM.

<sup>10</sup> Hall, P. et al (1996) *The People: Where will they go?* London: TCPA.