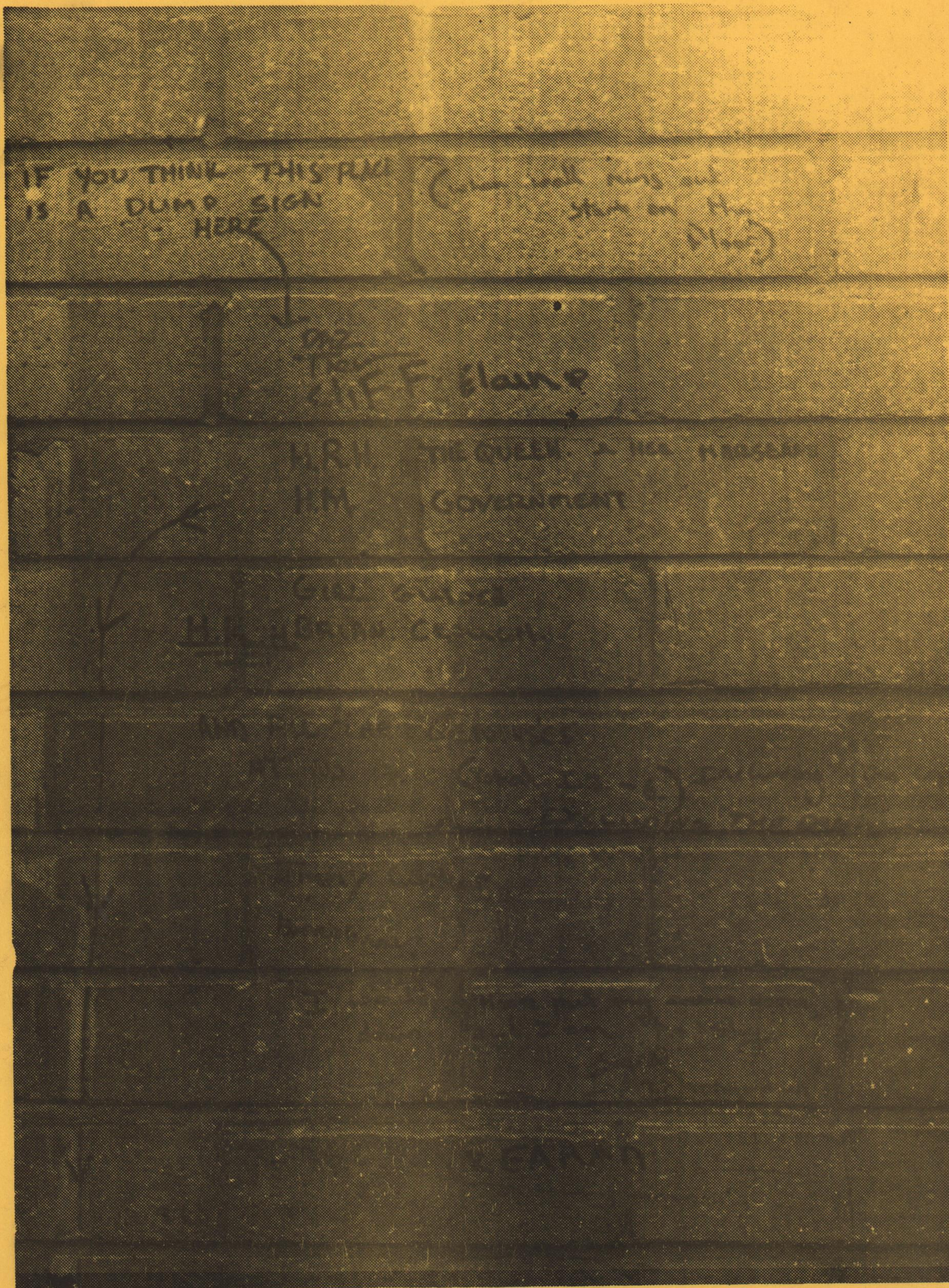


# CAUNTON AVE. FLATS



# A REPORT BY C.A.F.T.A.

# **INTRODUCTION**

1.1 This report is about Caunton Avenue Flats. It has been prepared by tenants living in the flats complex and concerns the living conditions that make up the major part of our everyday experience. It is about dampness - it is about inadequate heating, and it is about insufficient ventilation - factors which in combination give rise to a miserable and unhealthy experience for all tenants.

1.2 As a report it is aimed at members of the Housing Committee, who will have an opportunity to vote over proposals for improving the living conditions faced by tenants in Caunton Avenue Flats. It is also for the edification and information of others who should be aware of our situation.

1.3 Until now the approach by the Housing Department to the issues raised by Caunton Avenue Flats has been, by any standards, piecemeal, and there has not been any attempt to face the problems in an honest, realistic or constructive way.

1.4 We believe, as tenants who live day after day in these appalling conditions, that only when our views have been heard and taken into account can a comprehensive and long lasting solution to the problems outlined in this report be found.

1.5 Accordingly we put forward four proposals which the Housing Department must meet if the tenants of Caunton Avenue are not to continue suffering unnecessary hardship.

# **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1). An official and public recognition of the problems regarding dampness, inadequate heating and insufficient ventilation which are endemic to Caunton Avenue Flats.

2). That a full independent survey of the flats be undertaken by a body such as the Building Research Station with a guarantee that all the recommendations it contains are followed up and acted upon.

3). That the recommended, necessary work should be carried out quickly, certainly before Autumn 1979.

4). That residents be offered a choice of de-canting or a reduction in rent while necessary repairs are carried out.

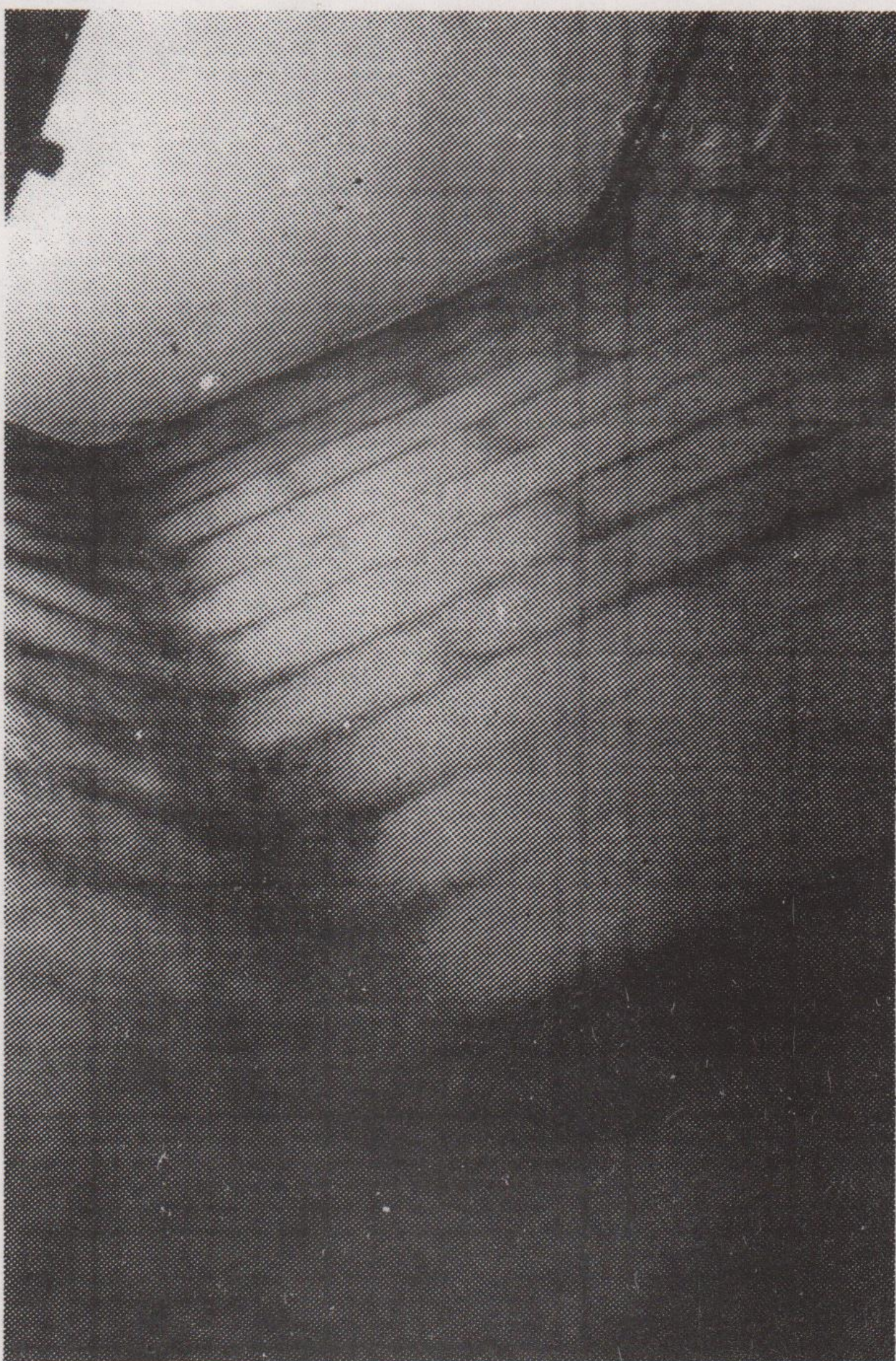
As landlord, the Council has an obligation to its' tenants. We suggest that only when these four proposals are met will it make a start in fulfilling its obligations to its tenants in Caunton Avenue.



Rising Damp.



Condensation.



Water Penetration Through Walls.

# **THE PROBLEM**

2.1 "It's disgusting. The walls in the downstairs bedroom go green when it rains. Water comes in through the ceiling and runs down the corner of the walls. My two children now share an upstairs bedroom which is damp, but not so bad. They share because we can only heat one room at a time".

- Tenant with two children aged 6 and 3 years.

2.2 "The bedroom gets so damp I have to dry my bedclothes in the living room each night before going to bed".

- Tenant, aged 83.

2.3 There are 111 dwellings in Caunton Avenue Flats of three distinct types: maisonettes, flats and houses. A randomly selected sample taken by Caunton Avenue Flats Tenants Association (CAFTA) which included 25% of the total number of dwellings and covered all three types found that over 82% of the sample dwellings contained extensive amounts of damp.

2.4 Damp wasn't confined to any one part of the dwellings but on the contrary was distributed throughout. Large damp black patches on at least one ceiling were common to practically all, and tales of carpets, curtains and clothes having become mildewed and needing to be destroyed were legion.

2.5 Among other common manifestations of dampness are walls turning black (or green) and 'bowing'; areas of wall above window lintels becoming covered with black fungi; water entering through the roof and running down the corners of walls into rooms below; food cupboards being largely unusable and collecting pools of water; ceilings flaking; wallpaper falling off walls; and on end houses particularly, a clear outline of each breeze-block showing through the wall.

2.6 In the same survey over 96% of the respondents expressed an unhappiness with the efficiency and/or adequacy of their heating systems. The only heating built into the dwellings is background heating (although a number of tenants had moved to Caunton Avenue believing this to mean central heating), fired by individual gas or electric units.

Depending on the type of dwelling there are warm-air ducts to the hallway, living room and possibly kitchen or downstairs bedroom.

2.7 No upstairs rooms are heated by 'background heating'. To obtain even a modicum of heat in those rooms that are heated, the units must be left on for the major part of the day. To achieve a reasonable standard of warmth it is necessary for tenants to supplement the heating by whatever means they can. It has become common practice in the houses during cold weather for tenants to retreat to the kitchen where they can heat the room by lighting the oven and leaving the door open.

2.8 Heating bills of above £70 each quarter are the norm and it is not uncommon to find tenants paying in excess of £100 per quarter - this for a level of heating that would be the minimum required by law in an office building.

2.9 The two issues of heating and dampness are inextricably linked with that of ventilation. The cheapest (and therefore, most favoured) way of supplementing heating is by paraffin burners, which inevitably increase the amount of condensation which appears to be structurally induced, and adds to the dampness. The question of heating is particularly pertinent when the new tenancy agreement states in item number 13 that tenants are "Not to use in the premises any calor gas or paraffin appliances and not to store in the premises any inflammable liquids or substances", yet tenants are not offered any reasonable alternative method by which to heat their homes.

2.10 This situation is in turn exacerbated by the design of the dwellings not allowing for adequate ventilation. There are no quarter or half windows. To let air in either an entire window has to be opened, or alternatively the outside door in the living room. Tenants are thus faced with a choice of condensation or exposure to the elements. There are no half measures. For ground floor occupants there is no real alternative - to open a window leaves ample room for passers by to lean into the room, or even climb in if they so wish.

2.11 In February 1978 CAFTA commissioned two reports: from a roofing specialist (Appendix A) and from a building engineer (Appendix B). The roofing specialist concluded that a complete renewal of the roof would be the only way of effecting a long lasting solution to the problem. The building engineer found

"the majority of units suffer damp conditions due to a variety of causes: condensation, rising damp, water penetration into walls, defective roofs, and balcony waterproofing".

Causes and remedies he adjudged thus:

"the causes of the dampness are due to lack of traditional building construction knowledge, combined probably with applications of novel forms of construction. Some of the defects can be readily solved by insulation and modifications to the buildings, but some are inherent in the construction method and might be impossible to solve".

His conclusions are also clearly spelt out:

"Some of the units are so damp through the combination of the above problems as to pose a threat to the health of the occupants, and the structural elements within appear not to meet the performance standards of the Building Regulations 1976 made under the PHA 1961".

2.12 These reports were given to the Housing Department 9 months ago, since when living conditions have deteriorated still further. There has been no acknowledgement by the Housing Department of the circumstances in which we are required to live and bring up our children, and no attempt at an effective, long term solution.



A Toddlers Bedroom With Water Entering Through Walls  
and Ceilings.

# THE STORY SO FAR...

"You must agree that it would be most improper for me to press for preferential treatment in my own ward".

- Letter from Counc. Green, ward councillor.

3.1 9.12.77 A letter sent by CAFTA to Mr. Agass, Principal Housing Officer giving details of problems of dampness in two specific dwellings.

3.2 3.2.78 Letters from CAFTA to Councillors Green and Bradbury (ward councillors) describing instances of fungi on walls and ceilings, and mildew on furniture and clothes.

3.3 7.2.78 Letter from Councillor Green offering to have damp in the flats complex investigated, but saw the problem as specific to particular dwellings and asked for individual addresses.

3.4 February 1978 Report received from an independent structural engineer for a roofing company recommending a complete renewal of insulation and roofing material. Report also from a building engineer listing problems as condensation, rising damp, water penetration into walls, defective roofs and balcony waterproofing and suggesting the level of dampness in a number of units is such as to pose a threat to the health of the occupants. The report estimated the cost of repairs and remedial work would run into a six-figure sum.

3.5 25.4.78 A further letter to Mr. Agass reporting wet floors, areas above windows turning black, ceilings where large black damp patches had formed.

3.6 12.5.78 Letter from Mrs. V. Bell, Chairperson, Mapperley Ward Labour Party, agreeing "that the dampness problem in the flats needs immediate attention"..... but ..... "it was learnt yesterday that the Council officials had plans to work on the problems of your complex in the immediate future and we therefore felt that they should be allowed a short time to make good this intention before more positive action was taken".

3.7 18.5.78 Letter from Councillor Green: "Your general statement that many units are subject to excessive damp and condensation is so wide - ranging that it would require a door to door and house to house inspection which I feel the Housing Department cannot at present undertake".

3.8 23.5.78 ,.Article in Nottingham Evening Post headed 'Tenants Life a Misery' in which it was reported a tenant in Caunton Avenue had taken five weeks off work because of illness due to dampness, and describing wall damp, water soaking into bedroom ceilings, wallpaper peeling from walls, and carpets being ruined by water soaking through the floor. "A housing official said they had not had any reports of rising damp or condensation. Some leaking roofs had been recently inspected and would be repaired"....."An environmental health spokesman said some dampness complaints mainly condensation, had been investigated. The flats had their own heating, but many elderly tenants did not use it because of high running costs, he said".

3.9 7.6.78 Meeting between CAFTA committee and Mr. Agass. Mr. Agass reported that 'a report is scheduled to be made to the committee by the officers on the Caunton Avenue Flats ..... work on the report would start when management resources were released from similar work currently being undertaken on Balloon Woods and Hyson Green Flats'.

'Mr. Agass said that the Housing Department recognised that there were at least problems of rain penetration, condensation and sign pasting, and also that a full scale investigation by the Building Research Station (as at Kingsthorpe Close) might be necessary'. 'Copy of Mr. Mr. Moores report submitted to Mr. Agass. CAFTA stated they didn't want to be party to a piecemeal repairs when clearly a major overhaul of the Estate was required. (Taken from the minutes of that meeting).

3.10 19.6.78 Meeting between CAFTA committee and Mr. Agass and Mr. Bexon of the Housing Department. CAFTA were informed damp-proofing work was to be carried out on certain properties, although it was not clear how these were to be selected.

(From the minutes): 'CAFTA welcomed this but stressed that they still regarded an overall look at the structural problems of the Estate as being most important'.

The Housing Department gave CAFTA 50 leaflets on dealing with condensation for use as appropriate'.

'After meeting, No. 20 Culdrose Walk was inspected in relation to conflicting reports on the dampness and the commissioned reports by CAFTA. Now agreed by Housing Department that there was damp that required serious investigation.

3.11 25.7.78 Meeting between CAFTA and Mr. Agass.

(From the minutes): 'Housing Department said that they now planned to check all roofs throughout the development and to check all dwellings for dampness. This work has started and it was anticipated that it would be completed by Spring 1979, depending on what problems are found'.

'Detail of how to tackle the cold floors and cold beams bridging the cavity walls which cause condensation was still being considered by the Housing Department.

3.12 5.8.78 Further letter to Mr. Agass pointing out areas of damp which had re-appeared after repairs had been carried out.

3.13 5.1.79 CAFTA meeting with Mr. Agass and Mrs. Dixon (Housing Officer). CAFTA was told complaints made about the damp had been few, and the Department of Technical Services thought they were minor problems.

3.14 31.1.79 CAFTA meeting with Mrs. Dixon, who offered to arrange for a further inspection of all dwellings reported as damp; the inspection to be conducted by an architect from the Housing Department and an inspector for Technical Services.

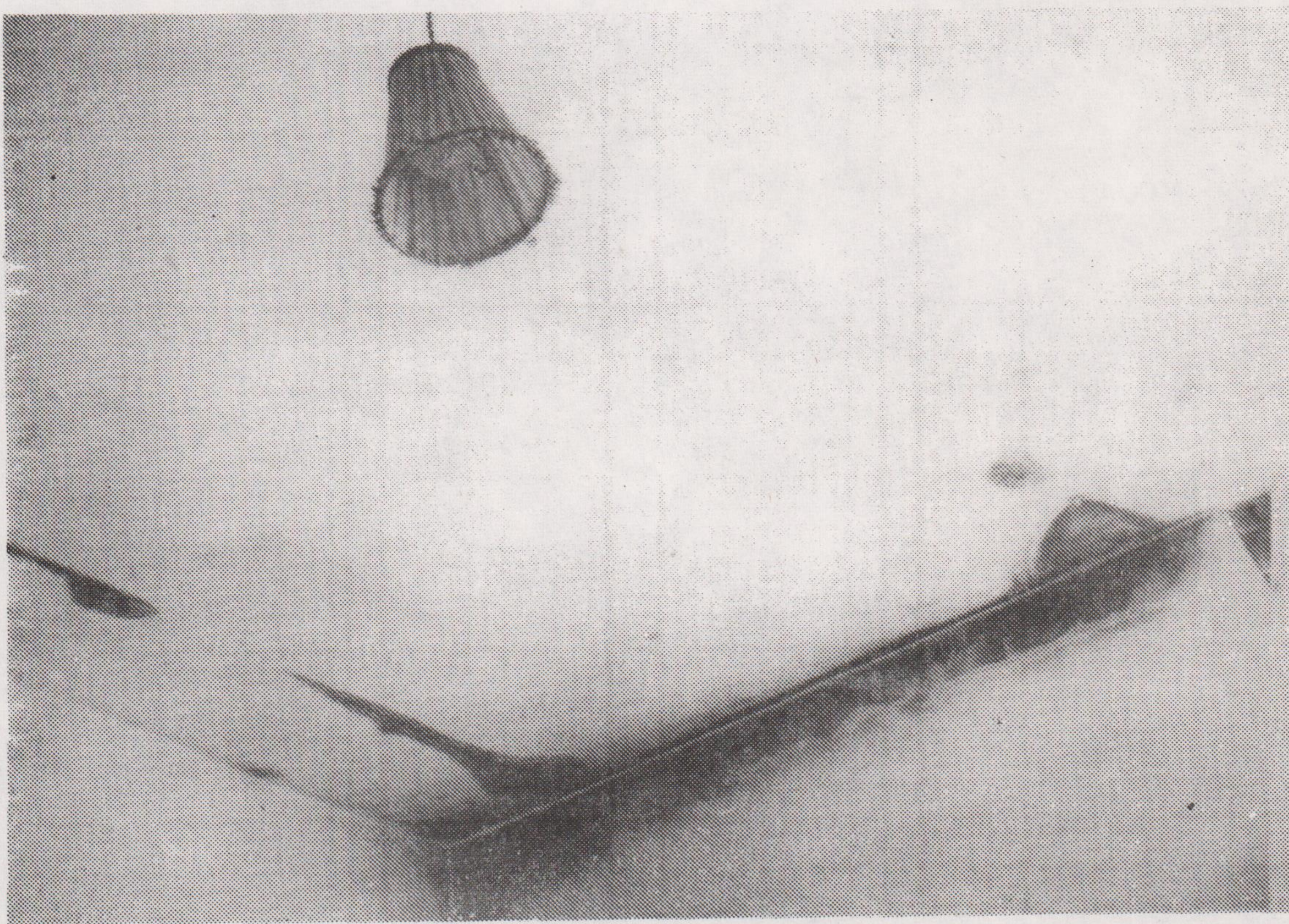
3.15 7.2.79 Mrs. Dixon given a list of 38 dwellings with extensive damp - approximately 90% of the dwellings visited up to that time.

3.16 14.2.79 Mrs. Dixon, together with Mr. Farrar and Mr. Cox inspected 12 of the dwellings on the list supplied by CAFTA. The inspectors felt they could determine problems and causes on the strength of those 12 inspections - particularly as they had inspected several of the homes last July for a similar purpose.

3.17 7.3.79 CAFTA meeting with Mr. Agass and Mrs. Dixon. It was stated Mr. Farrar and Mr. Cox's report will be prepared, and recommendations made regarding expenditure, to the next Housing Committee.



Living With Defective Roofs.

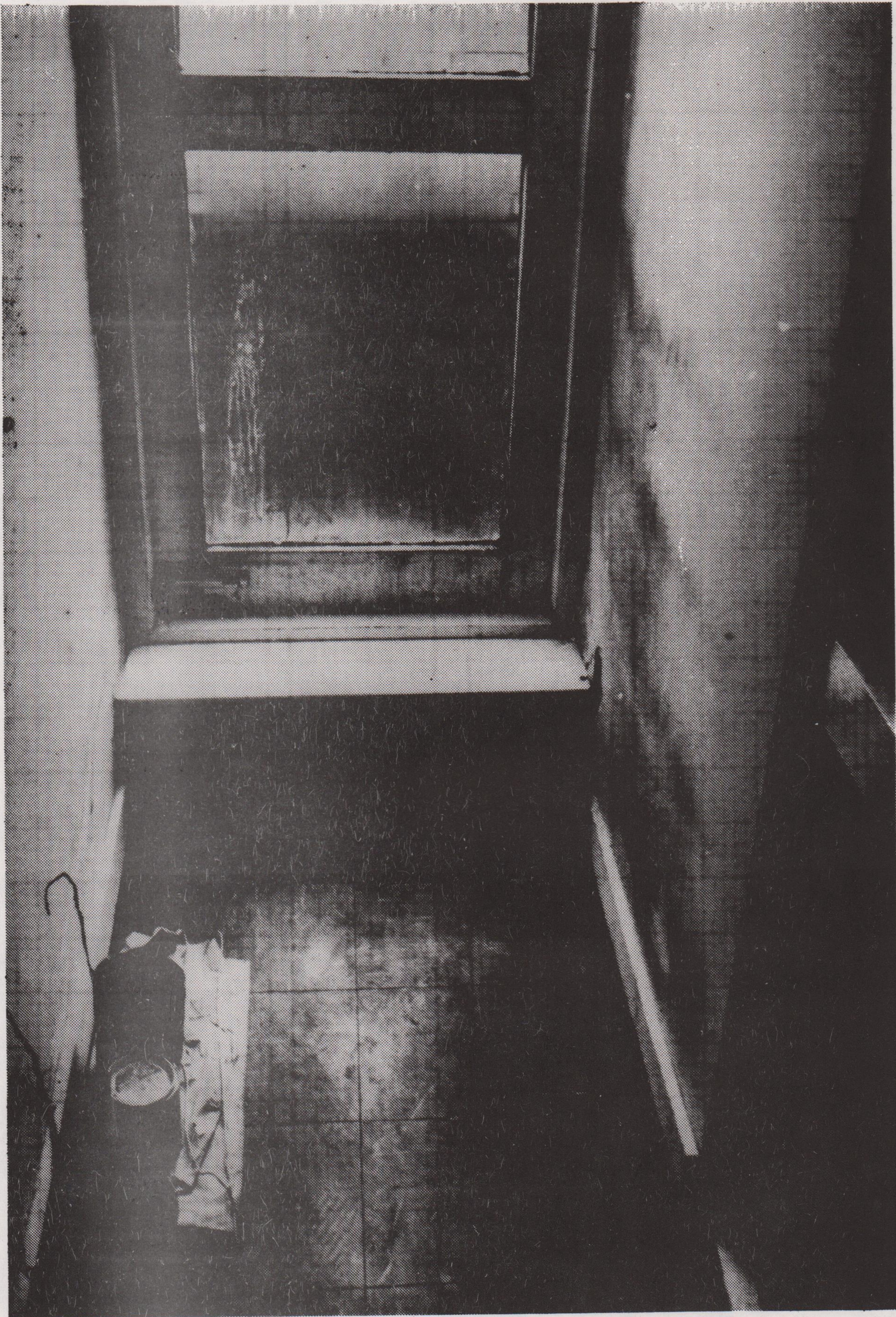


# WHICH WAY NOW?

4.1 When listed in chronological order it can clearly be seen that over the last fourteen months the Housing Department has consistently been unwilling to see the tenants problems as problems pertaining to the whole flats complex. Instead their analysis has been individualized and consequently trivialized. Discussions with the Housing Department have not progressed beyond offers to deal with individual problems. Our direct experience of this shows us that it barely solves the problem in the short term, let alone in the long term. Their standard response has been 'to conduct a survey' as if that is somehow a solution in itself.

4.2 Problems regarding dampness, heating and ventilation are endemic to the whole estate. They were 'built in' when the flats were constructed. Until this is not only understood (we believe it is already to a large extent) but accepted and acknowledged by the Housing Department, we, the tenants of these flats, have no hope of a better, healthier way of living.

4.3 The problems remain the same as first set out fourteen months ago. The only difference is that they have increased and been exacerbated by the winter. It is questionable if some dwellings are truly habitable, in the literal sense of that word, even now. They most certainly will not be if no remedial action is taken before the Autumn. They will not be if that action is insufficient or inappropriate.



Badly Fitting Doors and Windows Let In More Damp.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

☐ 5.1 A). That there is an official and public recognition of the true nature of the problems regarding dampness, inadequate heating and insufficient ventilation which are endemic to Caunton Avenue. ☐

5.2 It may be a political 'sop' to continually have 'surveys' and 'inspections', but enough is enough. It has been action which has been needed over the last 14 months. It is needed now more than ever.

5.3 'Patching up' operations don't make sense in practical terms, economic terms or in terms of the well-being of tenants. Such an approach to the problems is basically dishonest and should be recognised as such.

☐ 5.4 B). That a full, independent survey of Caunton Avenue Flats be undertaken by a body such as the Building Research Station, with a guarantee that all the recommendations it contains are followed up, and acted upon. ☐

5.5 It must be a more thorough survey than those carried out by the Housing Department, and should obviate the need for any further surveys or inspections.

5.6 The terms of reference must be guided by questions of long lasting, effective solutions to the problems, rather than by issues of low cost.

5.7 From our experience to date we have no confidence this would be the case with a survey conducted by either the Housing Department or Department of Technical Services.

☐ 5.8 C). That the recommended necessary work should be carried out quickly, certainly before Autumn 1979. ☐

5.9 The prospect of facing another spell of wet or cold weather in Caunton Avenue Flats, should they remain in their present structural condition, is unacceptable to a large number of tenants, particularly the old, sick and those with young children.

☐ 5.10 D). That residents be offered a choice of  
de-canting or a reduction in rent while necessary  
repairs are undertaken. ☐

5.11 It seems inevitable that repair work will be extensive (see Appendix B) and that a number of dwellings will be rendered temporarily uninhabitable in the process. To alleviate unnecessary stress tenants should be fully appraised of how the repair work will affect them individually and given a choice of other temporary accommodation or reduced rent to compensate for the inconvenience.

5.12 We, as tenants, believe that if these four proposals are met it will be of mutual benefit to the Housing Department and the tenants. It will be a step towards bringing the quality of housing stock as represented by Caunton Avenue, up to a reasonable, habitable standard - a standard that every tenant has a right to expect.

# APPENDIX A

## Caunton Ave Flat/Maisonette Complex, Nottingham

Construction:- Flat roof

Sub-strata : Probably concrete units or wood wool slabs and screed.

Vapour Barrier & Insulation: Unknown

Built up roofing : Probably 3 layers of felt and stone chipping finish.

Problem : Ingress of moisture into the dwellings probably caused by damage to the built-up roofing at the verge detail around the roof perimeter or at the numerous penetrations through the roof by vent and ventilation extract pipes, resulting from general settlement of the structure.

### Remedial Solution

The most satisfactory answer would be to completely strip off the chippings and the built-up roofing, renew any insulation as necessary and relay the following water proofing,

Specification: One base layer of perforated bitumen glass fibre venting felt, such as "Rubervent", followed by one layer of bitumen glass fibre felt type 3B to BS747, ie "Glasphalt", with a capping layer of bitumen heavy duty polyester base felt, ie "Ruberfort", all bonded together in hot bitumen.

In lieu of stone chippings, asbestos cement tiles should be used because of the difficulty in restricting foot traffic.

The opportunity could be taken of enhancing the insulation and providing any suitable vapour barrier whilst the roofing is completely stripped away.

Providing the stone chippings have not punctured the capping layer these could be removed and a more economical solution would be the addition of one layer of special polyester bitumen felt, such as "Derbigum" applied in accordance with the manufacturers instructions.

6th February 1978.

# APPENDIX 'B'

## Report on Dampness at the Cauntton Avenue Estate, Mapperley

Two visits were made to the site on 30th January and 1st February 1978 to observe the condition of the buildings in relation to dampness and structural condition.

There is no doubt that the majority of units suffer damp conditions due to a variety of causes, condensation, rising damp, water penetration into walls, defective roofs and balcony waterproofing.

Some of the units are so damp through the combination of the above problems as to pose a threat to the health of the occupants, and the structural elements within appear not to meet the performance standards of the Building Regulations 1976 made under the PHA 1961.

Two units were visited, a maisonette on Culdrose Walk and an old persons single unit in the same area.

IN the maisonette damp conditions were evident

- a) from the poor constructional detail of the asphalt balcony
- b) below the windows, from the lack of effective window sills
- c) in the food cupboard, from the position of the air vents

condensation was evident

- d) above window heads, due to possible 'cold bridge' of deck spanning cavity
- e) in kitchen and adjacent room, due to exposed concrete slab forming the ceiling at the lower balcony access.

IN the old persons dwelling, damp was observed

- f) from the wall adjacent to footpath access, due to defective JPC
- g) from roof due to defective roof gutter detail
- h) from parapet top, due to porous brick and ineffective coping detail
- i) in softwood timber external meter cupboards, due to ineffective flashing of timber.

The general condition of the drainage is very poor, many gulleys are blocked, gratings missing and pools of water lying around. The paintwork condition is so delapidated as to present a threat to the effective protection to the softwood timber used.

cont.....

The causes of the dampness are due to lack of traditional building construction knowledge, combined probably with complications of novel ways of construction. Some of the defects can readily be solved by insulation and modifications to the buildings, but some are inherent in the construction method, and might be impossible to solve.

Without further detailed information as to the actual construction we are unable to advise you further, but we feel on the basis of our current observations that the cost of repairs and remedial work will run into a six figure sum.

Bryan Moore DIC, C Eng, MICE, MIMunE, MRTPI

Principal lecturer

Trent Polytechnic