

# The Duke of Bedford's Model Cottages in Tavistock, 1840 – 1870

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(Figures 1-6)

## INTRODUCTION

FEW of those who designed and built model cottages for the labouring classes in the nineteenth century regarded their dwellings as a complete remedy to the appalling problems of housing shortage which then existed, but they were seen as examples which others might follow and they were viewed as an ideal to which all should aspire.<sup>1</sup> Prominent amongst the landowners and philanthropists who built workers housing in the last century was Francis, Seventh Duke of Bedford whose cottages on his lands both in Woburn and Tavistock<sup>2</sup> not only earned him fame in his own day, but also continued to exert an influence on styles and attitudes long after. But while both the Duke and others published descriptions and specifications of the cottages at the time of their construction, surprisingly little detailed analysis of the building programme has been carried out since.<sup>3</sup> This gap in our knowledge is especially true of Tavistock, where the Duke of Bedford was an absentee landlord, and of which he had much less to say in his own published writings which concentrated on Woburn. And yet model cottages remain a prominent feature of the Tavistock landscape and the Bedford Archives of the Duke's West Devon property are rich in evidence of how these remarkable little dwellings came to be built.<sup>4</sup>

## A HOUSING CRISIS IN TAVISTOCK

When an exceptionally rich copper lode was struck by a party of miners working in a disused shaft on the Duke's Tavistock estate late in 1844, no one could have predicted the dramatic effects of their discovery on the surrounding district.<sup>5</sup> But in a matter of months the new Devonshire Great Consolidated Mining Company had been established

and was already the focus of a spectacular mining bonanza which brought a flood of migrants to the area eager for employment. Indeed the population of Tavistock rose by 30 per cent from 6,272 in 1841 to 8,147 by 1851. A peak of population occurred in 1861 when the total was 8,965; this represented an increase of 43 per cent in only two decades. (Table I).

TABLE I  
*Population and Housing in Tavistock, 1801-1881*

<i>Census</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Population</i>		<i>Houses</i>	<i>Housing</i> <i>Unoccupied</i>	<i>Being Built*</i>
		<i>Females</i>	<i>Total</i>			
1801	1430	1990	3420	472	9	—
1811	2209	2514	4723	495	11	8
1821	2563	2920	5483	680	23	7
1831	2635	2967	5602	—	—	—
1841	2960	3312	6272	822	34	14
1851	3998	4149	8147	1019	18	7
1861	4329	4636	8965	1152	30	8
1871	3637	4144	7781	1144	50	2
1881	—	—	6914	1124	—	—

\* on census night.

Note: the figures refer to the borough of Tavistock.

Sources: Parliamentary Papers 1852-53 vol. LXXXV.

Census 1861, Population Tables I, London, 1862.

Census 1871, Population Tables I, London, 1873.

Census 1881, Population Tables I, London, 1883.

The town and parish of Tavistock could hardly have been more ill-prepared for such an influx of newcomers. The Duke's policy hitherto had been to limit the number of leases granted on his land for building domestic accommodation. This enabled him not only to ensure that cottages never stood empty for want of tenants, when they would yield no rent, but also afforded a measure of ducal control over the population whereby those likely to become a burden on the poor rate could be effectively excluded.<sup>6</sup> An inevitable effect of this policy was the gross overcrowding of the existing housing stock which was already a scandal in Tavistock before the copper boom began. By the mid-1840s the arrival of an unprecedented number of miners and their families turned a bad housing situation into a crisis which even his Grace was obliged to acknowledge.

Excess population was not however the only factor which influenced the Duke's change of mind. Sanitary and health conditions in Tavistock had been unequivocally condemned in a comprehensive report published in 1846.<sup>7</sup> Water supply and drainage were said to be inadequate

and the number of families occupying single rooms had trebled from 150 in 1831 to 453 in 1846. Moreover, the Sanitary Report had the important effect of drawing the attention of the Press to the evils of poor and insufficient housing in Tavistock.<sup>8</sup> Undoubtedly this spate of adverse publicity played an important role in persuading the Bedford Estate to take action.

#### THE COTTAGE BUILDING PROGRAMME

The need for new cottages in Tavistock had in fact been recognised privately by the Bedford Estate well before the public outcry reached a peak. As early as 1836, for example, on taking up his post as the Duke's new Steward in West Devon, John Benson had reported that

Many parts of the town are so old and decayed and, at the same time, so very shamefully dirty, as to be hardly worth repairing and the outlay on them is almost thrown away.<sup>9</sup>

But the policy of the Estate would allow only housing that was "well and substantially built"<sup>10</sup> and this meant that vital rebuilding work to replace dilapidated property was an extremely slow process which, in the absence of additional resources from the Duke, offered little hope of ever significantly expanding Tavistock's stock of houses. Moreover, the emphasis was always on the farm properties and not on industrial workers' housing.<sup>11</sup> Model cottages had been erected for agricultural labourers under the direction of the Duke on his Woburn estates before 1845, and a few similar dwellings had been built in Tavistock in 1842<sup>12</sup> but in neither case was the aim to cope with any sudden massive increase in population. Nevertheless, when the Estate did embark on larger-scale house building projects in West Devon, the Duke's key officials already possessed some of the necessary expertise to carry through the work. Bedford insisted on building the new cottages to his usual high specification. His steward doubted whether "they could be built to pay, with such rents as we should get"<sup>13</sup> but the Duke would not compromise.

Bedford's obstinacy over building standards was an even more significant obstacle in view of his reluctance to devote, at any one time, more than a tiny fraction of his income accrued from the West Devon estate to cottage building schemes. In 1856 for example, the Duke's property in Tavistock yielded a clear profit of £27,000.<sup>14</sup> Set against the average cost of one of his model cottages which was between £50-£90 (depending on its size and exact specification), it is clear that his Grace was prepared to do rather less about the need for decent housing on his lands than might have been supposed from the sentiments which earned him a glowing reputation when he expressed them in the *Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society* in 1849.

To improve the dwellings of the labouring class, and afford them the means of greater cleanliness, health and comfort in their own homes, to extend education, and thus raise the social and moral habits of those most valuable members of the community, are among the first duties and ought to be among the truest pleasures of any landlord.<sup>15</sup>

Bedford thus sought to enhance his personal reputation through the wider publicity which his cottage-building activities had attracted; but the truth was that in Tavistock his efforts fell well short of meeting the full extent of the desperate need for cheap, sound workers housing. In June, 1847 it was estimated that at least 200 cottages were urgently required.<sup>16</sup> Ten years later, the demand for housing continued almost unabated with "new dwellings occupied as soon as they have been built, and even before they have been finished".<sup>17</sup> John Benson reported in 1851 that there would be no difficulty in finding tenants for as many as 500 new cottages.<sup>18</sup> But the plans proposed by local officials of the Estate in Tavistock were always pruned in scale at Bedford's head office in London. For instance, Benson recommended building 100 new cottages at Mill Hill in Tavistock to ease the accommodation problems of the quarryworkers who were said to be living in exceptionally squalid conditions.<sup>19</sup> Only 24 were eventually built. The Tamar river port of Morwellham was said to need "at least forty or fifty cottages . . . before the resources of the place can be developed", but only half that number were erected.<sup>20</sup> When the Commissioners appointed by Parliament to enquire into the condition of mines in Great Britain arrived in Tavistock to take evidence in May, 1863 it is hardly surprising that Richard Sleman, a local surgeon who also acted as a mine doctor, could only report that

Although the Duke of Bedford has erected very good cottages, other parts of the town have been still overcrowded.<sup>21</sup>

Even as late as 1871 the *Tavistock Gazette* continued to lament the "unsatisfactory state" of the dwellings of the labouring classes in the district.<sup>22</sup>

Nevertheless over a period spanning two decades (1845-1866) eight fairly large groups of cottages were built; some in the town of Tavistock and some in the surrounding parish. (Fig. 1). First to be constructed were the 18 cottages in Dolvin Road which were begun in 1845 (Figs 5b and 6a). Four more were added close by on a site adjacent to Vigo Bridge in 1856. But the largest "estate" was located near to West Bridge where in 1850 some 64 terraced cottages were erected (Figs 5a and 6b). Twenty cottages close to Wheal Maria (a mine in the Devon Great Consols Group) were built three years later, followed by another

score at Morwellham in 1856. (Fig. 4b). Twenty four cottages were built in 1859 at Parkwood on the eastern outskirts of the town, while 36 were erected at Fitzford, overlooking the canal to the west in 1862 (Fig. 5a). By this time the seventh Duke had died, but his successor continued the programme in 1866 with the last major group of 40 cottages built on the Kilworthy road, overlooking the town from the north. Together these groups comprised some 250 new dwellings.

In addition there were numerous isolated terraces and pairs of cottages scattered throughout the parish. It became common in the 1850s and 1860s for Bedford Estate workers to be assigned to building a few cottages during the winter months when repairs to the farm properties were made difficult by the weather.<sup>23</sup> Thus, amongst others, there were the six cottages built at Gulworthy in 1850, two larger ones at Church Park in 1853 and a terrace of four at Lumburn in 1864. (Table II).

TABLE II

*Details of Some of the Bedford Estate Cottages Built in Tavistock*

<i>Location</i>	<i>Number of Cottages</i>	<i>Date of Buildings</i>	<i>Special Features</i>
Mana Butts	4	1842	Three storeys, semi-detached, brick built.
Dolvin Road	18	1845-48	In three terraces. Brick built, rear, but no front gardens.
Westbridge	64	1850	Terraced with front and rear gardens. Rubble-stone walls. 'showpiece estate'.
Gulworthy	6	1850	Terraced. In the style of Westbridge. Very large gardens.
Wheal Maria	20	1853	Semi-detached. Prosaic, functional appearance. Large rear gardens. Outhouses and standpipes visible in access lane.
Church Park	2	1853	Semi-detached, large gardens.
Crowndale	2	1854	
Bowrish	4	?	Terraced. Large gardens. In the style of Westbridge.
Vigo Bridge	4	1856	Semi-detached, double fronted. Large gardens.
Morwellham	20	1856	Five terraces. Very simple design. No upstairs dormer windows.
Parkwood	24	1859	Six terraces. No front gardens for three of the terraces.
Fitzford	36	1862	Six terraces. Large gardens front and rear. Some overlook the canal.
Lumburn	4	1864	In style of Westbridge. Very large gardens.
Millhill	24	?	Six terraces. Large gardens. Chapel at end of row.
Kilworthy	40	1866	Ten terraces. Gables, yellow brick quoins and bay windows on ground floor of end cottages. Generous gardens.

It is however hard to establish the exact number of new model cottages built in Tavistock by the Dukes of Bedford in mid-Victorian times. Surviving rent books fail to distinguish between new dwellings and cottages which had simply been repaired and, in any case, some dwellings in the "Bedford mould" were built specially for particular kinds of employces and should perhaps be regarded in a different way. For example a new cottage for the woodranger was built at Blanchdown in 1850<sup>24</sup> while in 1859 a pair of cottages were erected close to Tavistock Guildhall for the accommodation of the town's policemen.<sup>25</sup> Local directories certainly seem to overestimate the total. By 1878 for example, White's Directory suggests that around 400 cottages had been built<sup>26</sup> whereas 300 is a more probable figure.

#### COTTAGE DESIGN

Theophilus Jones was employed as architect-surveyor on the Bedford Estate in West Devon during the critical years when housing demand was heaviest. The census of 1851 reveals that Jones, then aged 46, was born in Anglesey and had a house in Dolvin Road, Tavistock.<sup>27</sup> Of all the key figures engaged in building cottages on the Duke's behalf, Jones seems to have been the one most disturbed by the squalor and deprivation he encountered. He was also the most outspoken in his criticisms of Estate policy; some of his letters to Christopher Haedy, chief steward of the entire Bedford Estate, certainly never minced words.<sup>28</sup> Jones emerges however as a meticulous professional no more prepared than the Duke himself to compromise on building standards, but perhaps more genuinely concerned to improve the living conditions of ordinary Tavistock folk than almost anyone else who was involved. But his was no easy task. The designs he produced had not only to meet his own high standards, as well as those of his Grace, but must also possess the virtue of cheapness.

Of course Jones was able to draw on the plans of cottages already built at Woburn and, to a lesser extent, on the Devon farm properties; but each new project in Tavistock seems to have been separately conceived with individual decisions taken on the appropriate number of cottages to be built at each location together with the size and style of the dwellings and their detailed constructional specifications. Of course some design elements quickly became standard and these remain the distinguishing features of Bedford model cottages in Tavistock. (see Figs 4-6). Window frames and the dressed-granite sills, quoins, and porches were virtually mass produced from 1850 onwards. As many as 40 masons were on the Estate payroll in Tavistock at certain times, although the usual complement was around fifteen.<sup>29</sup>

Until 1846 cottages were constructed in locally-made brick, but

when building work in Dolvin road was halted because all the available supplies were being used to line new sewers in the town, a decision was taken to use rubble-stone in all future house-building projects.<sup>30</sup> Duchess slates were used for roofing; guttering was lined with lead and downpipes were made of cast iron. The full specification for the Westbridge site was submitted to the Duke's central office in Bloomsbury in 1849. A summary is presented in Table III. Jones had carried out a

TABLE III  
*Cottage Design Specification: Westbridge, Tavistock 1849*

Accommodation	Kitchen Living Room Scullery/Wash house	Parent's Bedroom (grate) Boy's Bedroom (cupboard) Girl's Bedroom
Outside	Pigsty Ashpit	Drying Ground Garden
Construction	Rubble Stone walls Dressed Granite step, sills, lintels Duchess Slate roof Lead-lined eaves and gutters Cast Iron rainwater pipes Granite drying posts Flint Tile (9 inch) floors Cast Iron oven and grate (in living room) Mains Water: each pair of cottages to be served by a brass standpipe and small granite reservoir	
Cost	Total Sixty-four Cottages £5,719 18s. 9d. Each Cottage £89 7s. 5d.	

*Source:* D.R.O. L/1258 ADD 8; D.R.O. L/1258 ADD 8 Buildings 3 July, 1849.

careful site survey which showed that the ground floor of the dwellings would be 12 feet above the ordinary water level of the River Tavy and 7 feet above the level of "extraordinary floods".<sup>31</sup>

The cottages were plainly built, the only ornament being a small slab bearing the ducal crest or a metal plate showing the date of their construction. Some were erected as terraces, while others were semi-detached. (Table II). Most had two rooms downstairs—one fitted with a cast-iron cooking range, the other with a copper—and two or three bedrooms upstairs, one of which had a fireplace. Outbuildings for wood and ashes, as well as a pigsty were provided. Each pair of cottages shared a standpipe bringing water from the reservoir, and most had generous garden plots. (Fig. 2).

While the cottages appear similar, they do vary in the detail of their design. Those at Wheal Maria, for example, were a good deal more crude than the two pairs built next to Vigo Bridge. The latter were

WESTBRIDGE COTTAGES, TAVISTOCK

ELEVATION



North and South Fronts

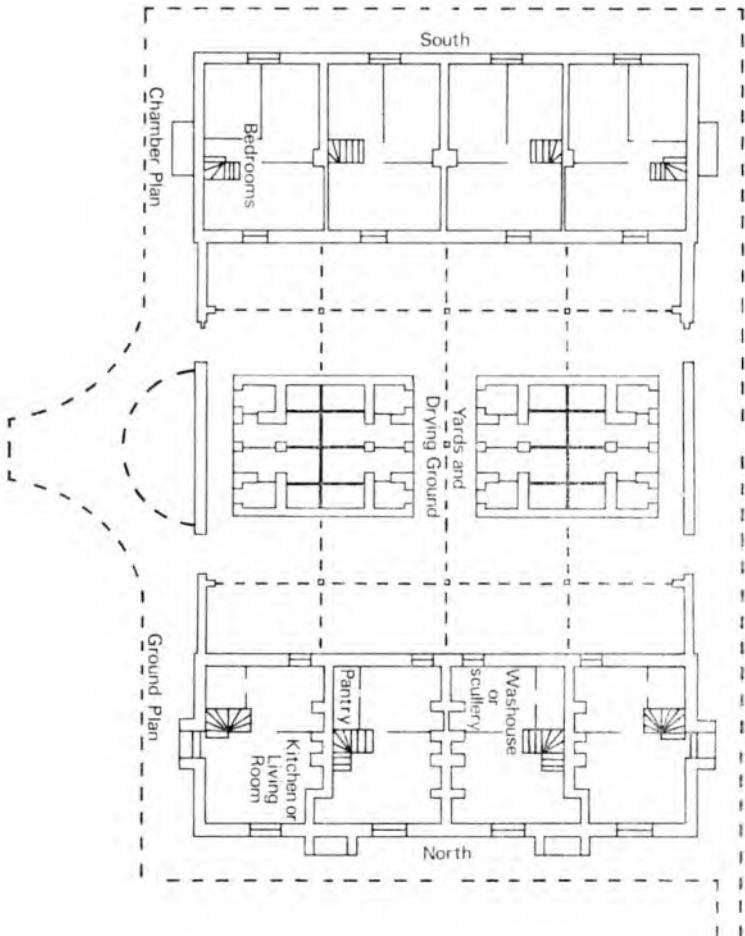


FIG. 2. *The Plans for Westbridge Cottages D.R.O. L/1258 ADD 80: 1849.*





Westbridge Cottages



Morwellham Cottages

Figure 4



Fitzford Cottages



Dolvin Road Cottages

Figure 5

larger and more imposing (Fig. 3). When the last group of cottages was built on the Kilworthy road they were still more embellished with gables, yellow-brick coins and bay windows.

We observe that some of them, which overlook the town, vary from the simple rigour of the well known Bedford pattern. A little concession has been made to architectural grace, and the uninitiated might regard one or two of the more prominent blocks almost as villas. They present a very tasteful appearance.<sup>32</sup>

Jones' work quickly set a pattern in cottage building which inevitably influenced the kind of cottages built by smaller-scale landowners elsewhere. By 1852 lithographs of the plans of cottages erected in Tavistock had already been prepared.<sup>33</sup> Such was the demand that the supply was soon exhausted and more had to be hurriedly printed.

As a rule cottages were let to those who had a settlement in Tavistock or had resided in the parish for at least five years.<sup>34</sup> Rents were modest and in the range one shilling and sixpence ( $7\frac{1}{2}p$ ) to two shillings and sixpence ( $12\frac{1}{2}p$ ) per week. Sites on the outskirts of the borough were chosen to ensure that the cottages did not attract gas and police rates.<sup>35</sup> While the Estate was careful to maintain a strict control of its tenants the rules were relaxed somewhat when the cottages at Wheal Maria, Morwellham and Millhill were ready for occupation. At the request of the mining and the quarry company the Duke agreed to allow workers who were not natives of Tavistock and had only recently moved to the district to become tenants of his model dwellings. In the town itself, the Estate was not prepared to be so flexible.<sup>36</sup>

#### THE DUKE'S ROLE

Although his visits to West Devon were infrequent, the Duke of Bedford took a keen interest in both the design and building of his Tavistock cottages. In July 1849, for example, his comments on the Westbridge designs were received by Mr Benson. Bedford objected to the position of the fireplace opposite the door in the end cottages.

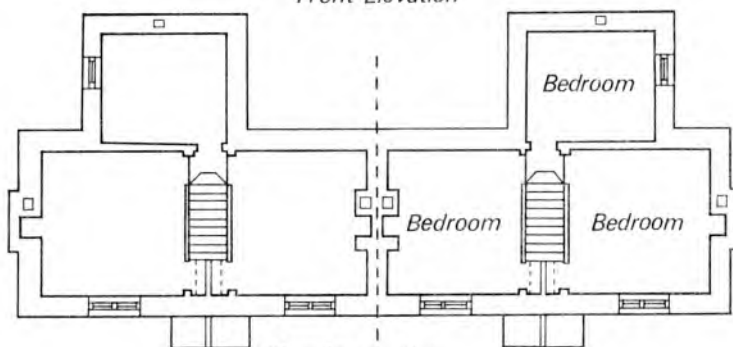
... the people in rough weather could not stay near the fire (which) ... in stormy weather would be blown up the chimney.<sup>37</sup>

Common entrance porches to pairs of cottages were also, he said, "objectionable", because they were liable to "injurious familiarity between the families."<sup>38</sup>

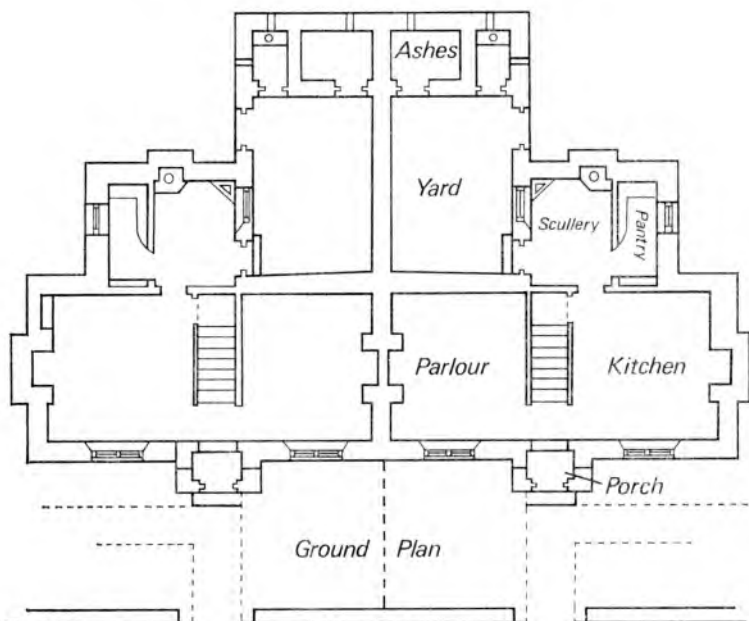
In July 1851, the records reveal that the Duke was staying at Endsleigh Cottage—his West Devon retreat near Milton Abbot. He received both John Benson and Theophilus Jones when plans to build more cottages at the mines and at the Millhill quarry were discussed.



Front Elevation



Chamber Plan



Ground Plan

FIG. 3. *Vigo Bridge Cottage Plans.* These were larger, semi-detached Cottages, built in 1856.

The weather was appalling. Towards the end of the month the Duke drove to Millhill to inspect the proposed site for the cottages himself, but it was too wet for him to get out of his carriage. He also visited sites in Blanchdown Woods and in the hamlet of Ottery.<sup>39</sup>

Occasionally the Duke's interference must have been extremely vexing to his officials. After long delays, ducal sanction was finally received to commence work on twenty cottages at Wheal Maria, but when the work was actually in progress Bedford ordered that the water closets which had been installed inside these dwellings should be removed. Benson tetchily reported that in complying with his Grace's wishes the architect had decided that he might as well add pigstyes since this would barely alter the extra costs already incurred by erecting separate outbuildings for the closets—an expense which the original design had been seeking to avoid.<sup>40</sup>

#### CHEAP COTTAGES

The need to refer proposals to the Bedford Estates central office inevitably meant delays. Sometimes this caused opportunities to be lost. A long debate over whether a much cheaper version of the model cottage might be appropriate for the accommodation of miners began in 1849. It was not resolved until late in 1851. Theophilus Jones first mooted the possibility when he wrote to the central office on the subject of Tavistock's growing housing crisis in March 1849.

Such is the want of cottage accommodation that I have been informed by the Agent to the Millhill Quarry that a room about 14 feet by 12 feet in the neighbourhood of the Quarry is occupied by a man, his wife, six children, and four single men lodgers.<sup>41</sup>

Few of the Duke's employees were ever prepared to spell out the problem as bluntly as Mr Jones who was, nevertheless, shrewd enough to employ a little conscience-pricking flattery to win his argument.

I am happy to think that I am under a nobleman who does not turn a deaf ear to this great existing evil and intends to remedy it as fast as possible.<sup>42</sup>

Three issues had been raised. First, it was clear that many more family dwellings were urgently required. Secondly, a separate solution to the problem of accommodation for single men might be considered; and thirdly, building should proceed "as fast as possible."

The idea of building lodging houses for single male workers at the copper mines and at Millhill quarry was examined in the following months. Two objections were identified. One was that family dwellings ought to take priority, while the other was the difficulty envisaged in

managing the premises in a state of moral orderliness. Mr Jones felt that . . . scarcity of lodgings for single men has proved a source of much evil as many . . . are obliged to seek lodgings in low public houses and other depraved habitations.<sup>43</sup>

Even he was prepared to admit that by building larger cottages, unmarried miners might be better accommodated as lodgers with families. John Benson exposed the real dilemma.

The only way in which I think (a lodging house) would be likely to answer its purpose well would I conceive be if we could get one of the Captains of the mine to undertake the management.<sup>44</sup>

This was the end of the matter: the Duke and the Mining Company were already in dispute about the terms of their lease.<sup>45</sup> Any co-operative venture either to erect or simply to manage workers' accommodation was hardly likely to receive the approval of either side.

Erecting cheap cottages remained a distinct possibility rather longer. Mr Benson was strongly in favour of them until the end of May 1851 when he suddenly changed his mind. Initially he stated his argument thus

I have some doubts whether all of these (mining cottages) should be built in the same substantial manner as we are now in the habit of building because we cannot look at their being permanently required—mining is ever to be looked at as a speculative matter and not as everlasting. . . . As a matter of investment I consider a lower priced article would pay better in this case.<sup>46</sup>

On impulse it seems, Benson began "going into the state of the population having reference to the increase since 1841, compared with extra house-room".<sup>47</sup> No amount of juggling with the figures could disguise the fact that "a large proportion of our increase must remain permanent even in case of a depression at the mines". A few weeks later Benson met Mr Thomas Morris, resident director of Devon Great Consols Mining Company. Morris was adamant that the Adventurers (shareholders) of his company would not be prepared to invest in building workers' cottages. Mr Benson was full of scorn at this reaction and he noted with some bitterness that the Adventurers took an altogether different view when it came to paying for a large new house to be built for Mr Morris.<sup>48</sup>

Now the matter rested entirely with the Duke. Even though Theophilus Jones submitted two separate plans for cheap cottages each with three estimates of costs<sup>49</sup> (the lowest figure was a mere £39 15 od), (Table IV), Bedford insisted on modifications which meant a more substantial and more expensive dwelling.<sup>50</sup> But the Duke's decision took three months to arrive. Both Jones and Benson had become

impatient. It was already October, 1851 and the Estate was heavily committed to a project to rebuild Kilworthy Farm and to carry out major repairs to Endsleigh Cottage for the Duke.<sup>51</sup> It was thus too late to begin work on new cottages that year and in fact none were begun until the end of 1852.

TABLE IV  
*Mr Jones' Estimates for Cheap Cottages*

	<i>Two Bedrooms</i>	<i>Three Bedrooms</i>	<i>Specification Details</i>
A.	£39 15s. od.	£50 1s. 6d.	Plain, with slate sills and rough arches. Covered with patent asphalt. Cheap yellow American timber throughout.
B.	£44 3s. 10d.	£56 10s. 8d.	The same but with slate roof covering.
C.	£53 0s. od.	£67 10s. od.	The same as Westbridge but economies made by omitting pigstyes, fencing, levelling ground and piped water supply to the dwellings.

*Source:* D.R.O. L/1258 Letters 60c *Design of cheap cottages*, Benson to Haedy, 19 June 1851.

#### A SOCIAL CONSCIENCE

There is no doubt that the Duke of Bedford and his officials were acutely sensitive to public opinion about Tavistock's housing problems. In 1854 the *Plymouth Herald* argued that leases of sixty years should be granted in Tavistock to encourage private builders to erect urgently needed new houses.<sup>52</sup> Benson commented that such a change of policy would cause numerous administrative problems and that, in any case, speculative builders would still not be interested. It was, he argued, the cost of materials and labour, together with the prospect of low rents which deterred them and not the short leases offered by the Bedford Estate. But he admitted that complying with the *Herald's* suggestion "might have the effect of stopping the outcry".<sup>53</sup>

Distanced from local pressures, the central Bedford office in Bloomsbury could take a more objective view.<sup>54</sup> While slightly longer leases were eventually granted for private housebuilding in Tavistock, they were to be made available only to those who intended to reside in the dwelling they built themselves.<sup>55</sup>

Always a more volatile character. Theophilus Jones was incensed when delays in reaching a decision on whether to build less expensive cottages for the miners meant that all cottage-building had to be shelved in 1851. There was a bitter argument with the Duke's steward

when Jones was informed that he might be allowed to build "a few cottages as a token gesture". Benson sent an intriguing account of the quarrel to the Bedford chief steward, Christopher Haedy.

. . . (he says) building only a few will make no *splash* and that is what Mr Jones seems always to aim at. Indeed he takes all the credit of Westbridge to himself as a philanthropist and he says he is for cottages while I am for farm buildings and if it had not been for him Westbridge would never have been built . . . he gave me a lecture on my duty as steward and (said) that I ought not to provide better for the beasts than for the people.<sup>56</sup>

The rift was evidently all too much for Mr Jones who was taken ill a few weeks later.<sup>57</sup> His work was taken over temporarily by Mr E. Rundle who began work on cottages at Wheal Maria, Church Park and Crowndale late in 1852.<sup>58</sup>

While the attitudes of both Benson and Jones towards building cottages are clear from surviving documentation, that of the Duke himself is harder to fathom. We know he relished his image as the "Good Duke"<sup>59</sup> and certainly he ranked as one of the nation's most enlightened and benevolent landowners. Moreover, in addition to newly-built housing, the West Devon estate benefitted greatly from reconstructed sewers,<sup>60</sup> new schools,<sup>61</sup> street widening schemes,<sup>62</sup> and the comprehensive redevelopment of Tavistock's town centre.<sup>63</sup> The ninth Duke was even responsible for providing new public swimming baths in the town.<sup>64</sup> Blessing and financial support was also given to local societies. A good example is the Tavistock Cottage Garden Society. Mr Jones was full of approval. On the second anniversary of the formation of the Society he noted that it

will be the means of doing a great amount of good, the publicans are beginning to complain at the absence of working men from their houses.<sup>65</sup>

The Duke was a subscriber to the Garden Society as well as to the Bath & West of England Agricultural Society.<sup>66</sup> But this public generosity belied an intense private parsimony. Long delays in coming to a firm decision about committing extra resources to cottage building may reflect an inner struggle between the Duke's social conscience and his naturally frugal approach to expenditure. In any case the fact is that he could have done a great deal more but he seems to have been content to contribute just enough to ensure that his good reputation remained intact and adverse criticism was avoided.

It is an old saying but age does not affect its force, that property has its duties as well as its rights and . . . witness to this are the



numberless rows of well-built, convenient cottages for the labouring classes which meet the eye in all directions.<sup>67</sup>

Even the Duke himself could hardly have hoped for a more rosy eulogy.

#### CONCLUSION

In their own way Tavistock's model cottages represent an important early step on the road towards effective town planning and building control in Britain. The legislative framework which now ensures decent standards of accommodation and environment for most people in this country has its roots in the tentative piece-meal process begun in mid-Victorian times by private landowners like the dukes of Bedford.<sup>68</sup> But more important, in an historical context, is the plan and design of the model cottages themselves. In Tavistock they convey to us, as eloquently as any written evidence, the profound class consciousness which called them into existence. These were, after all, dwellings which the Victorians considered "fit" for those occupying the lower rungs of society's ladder and in bricks and mortar they contain valuable lessons about the value system and the paternalism which was an all-pervading feature of nineteenth-century Britain.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to Stephen Johnson for the photographs and to Jane Jones who prepared the map and the diagrams. Dr John Goodridge offered valuable advice on aspects of this topic during the research stage.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Tarn, J. N., 1973. *Five Per Cent Philanthropy: An account of housing in urban areas between 1840-1914*, Cambridge, Chs. 2 and 3.
2. More than three quarters of the land in Tavistock was under the direct control of the dukes of Bedford. They began selling their interests in West Devon in 1883 and the process was completed in 1912 when the remaining large properties in the town centre were released for sale to the town council.
3. See for example Bedford, His Grace the Duke of., 1849. On labourers Cottages, *Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society*, 10, 185-95. James, Rev. Canon., 1862. Cottages for the labouring poor, *The Builder*, June 7, pp. 411-2.
4. The author is especially grateful to the staff of the Devon Record Office (D.R.O.) for their patient assistance during his research in the Bedford papers.
5. Goodridge, J. C., 1964. Devon Great Consols: A study of Victorian mining enterprise, *Rep. Trans. Devon. Ass. Adm. Sci.*, 96, p 228.
6. Graham, Malcolm, 1970. *Tavistock 1825-1875: The development of a nineteenth century town*, Unpubl. M.A. Thesis in English Local History. See also D.R.O. L/1258 Letters: 40 Wilson 27 Jan. 1830.
7. Graham, M., 1970. *op. cit.* p. 40.
8. *Tavistock Monthly Advertiser*, 4 June 1847, p. 45. The editorial asserted that members of the Sanitary Committee 'did at one time indulge the hope that energetic measures would at once be taken to build at least a large proportion of the cottages which were proved absolutely necessary to the health, the comfort, and the intellectual and moral improvement of the population of the town. Thus far the expectation has been disappointed'.

9. D.R.O. L/1258 Letters: 46 Benson to Haedy 30 April 1836.
10. D.R.O. L/1258 Letters: 49 Haedy to Benson 22 Feb. 1840.
11. See for example D.R.O. L/1258 Letters: 60 Benson to Haedy 19 May 1851; 13 Oct. 1851; Letters C: 64 Benson to Haedy 22 Nov. 1855.
12. The cottages at Mana Butts, Tavistock were completed in 1842.
13. D.R.O. L/1258 Letters: 53 Benson to Haedy 29 March 1844.
14. D.R.O. L/1258 Letters: 65c Benson to Haedy 23 Dec. 1856.
15. Bedford, His Grace the Duke of., *op. cit.*
16. *Tavistock Monthly Advertiser*, 4 June 1847, p. 45.
17. *Tavistock Gazette*, 4 Sept. 1857.
18. D.R.O. L/1258 Letters: 60c Benson to Haedy 18 Oct. 1851.
19. D.R.O. L/1258 Letters: 60c Benson to Haedy 14 Oct. 1851.
20. D.R.O. L/1258 Letters: 62c Benson to Haedy 24 May 1853.
21. Minutes of Evidence taken before the Commissioners appointed to enquire into the condition of mines in Great Britain (P.P. 1864, XXIV Part 2). Evidence taken at Tavistock, 27 May 1863. Minutes 18924-18953.
22. *Tavistock Gazette*, 21 July 1871 'Labourers Dwellings'.
23. See D.R.O. L/1258 ADD 8 Mr Benson's Journals, 1854-5; also D.R.O. L/1258 Letters: 61 Benson to Haedy 12 July 1852; 30 Oct. 1851.
24. D.R.O. L/1258 Letters: 59 Benson to Haedy 16 July 1850. The Woodranger's Cottage plans were submitted for approval. The cost was estimated at £300-350. Such cottages were therefore not the same as the ordinary model cottages.
25. *Tavistock Gazette*, 18 Nov. 1859 'Improvements in Tavistock'.
26. White, W., 1878-9. *History, Gazetteer and Directory of the County of Devon*, Sheffield & London, p. 754.
27. P.R.O. Census Enumerators Books, *Tavistock* H.O. 107/1883/2E.
28. Pencil marks on the original letters suggest that some passages were carefully edited out before the copyists prepared a version to be sent to the Duke.
29. D.R.O. L/1258 Letters: 60c Benson to Haedy, 30 Oct. 1851 and 18 Nov. 1851.
30. D.R.O. L/1258 Letters: 55 Benson to Haedy, 4 March 1846.
31. D.R.O. L/1258 ADD 8 Jones to Haedy. The exact date does not appear on the documents but it was sometime in 1849. The site of the Westbridge cottages was considered by some residents to be unhealthy. It was low lying and had been used in the past as a rubbish dump. Strongest objections came from a local doctor called Pearse. See D.R.O. L/1258 Buildings: 8 Jones to Haedy, 30 July 1849. A few months after their occupation the residents of Westbridge complained of their taps running dry. They were accused of wasting water and supplies were rationed to just a few hours per day. When this remedy failed to have any effect the mains pipe was cut through and found to be clogged with an 'ochry deposit'. All the pipes had to be replaced. See D.R.O. L/1258 Letters: 60c Benson to Haedy, 30 June 1851.
32. *Tavistock Gazette*, 7 Dec. 1865. 'The New Cottages'.
33. D.R.O. L/1258 Letters: 61 Benson to Haedy, 12 Oct. 1852.
34. Westbridge and Dolvin Road cottages housed no tenants in 1851 who appeared to depart from this rule. Not all of them were mining families, however, thirteen Westbridge households were headed by agricultural labourers while there were 4 masons, 3 tailors, 2 blacksmiths, a ropemaker, a carpenter, a gardener, a wheelwright and a brewer. Two families were on parish relief although in both cases at least one member had an occupation. There were very few co-resident lodgers. On average there were 6.4 persons per cottage at Westbridge and 5.1 in Dolvin Road. See P.R.O. Census Enumerators Books, *Tavistock* H.O. 107/1883/2E.
35. Graham, M., 1970. *op. cit.*
36. D.R.O. L/1258 Letters: 62 Benson to Haedy, 8 Jan. 1853.
37. D.R.O. L/1258 ADD 8 Haedy to Jones, 3 July 1849.
38. *ibid.*
39. D.R.O. L/1258 Letters: 60c Benson to Haedy, 24 July 1851.
40. D.R.O. L/1258 Letters: 61c Benson to Haedy, 20 July 1852. This last minute alteration to the design of the Wheal Maria cottages at the insistence of the Duke has given them a somewhat peculiar exterior. Doors to each dwelling are



(b) Detail of Westbridge Cottages. Notice the rubble-stone wall (white-washed by present owner), granite porch and sills, and the ducal crest cast in concrete and set above the bedroom window.



(a) Detail of the Dolvin Road Cottages. They were begun in 1845 and completed in 1848. Note the locally made brick and granite sills.

Figure 6

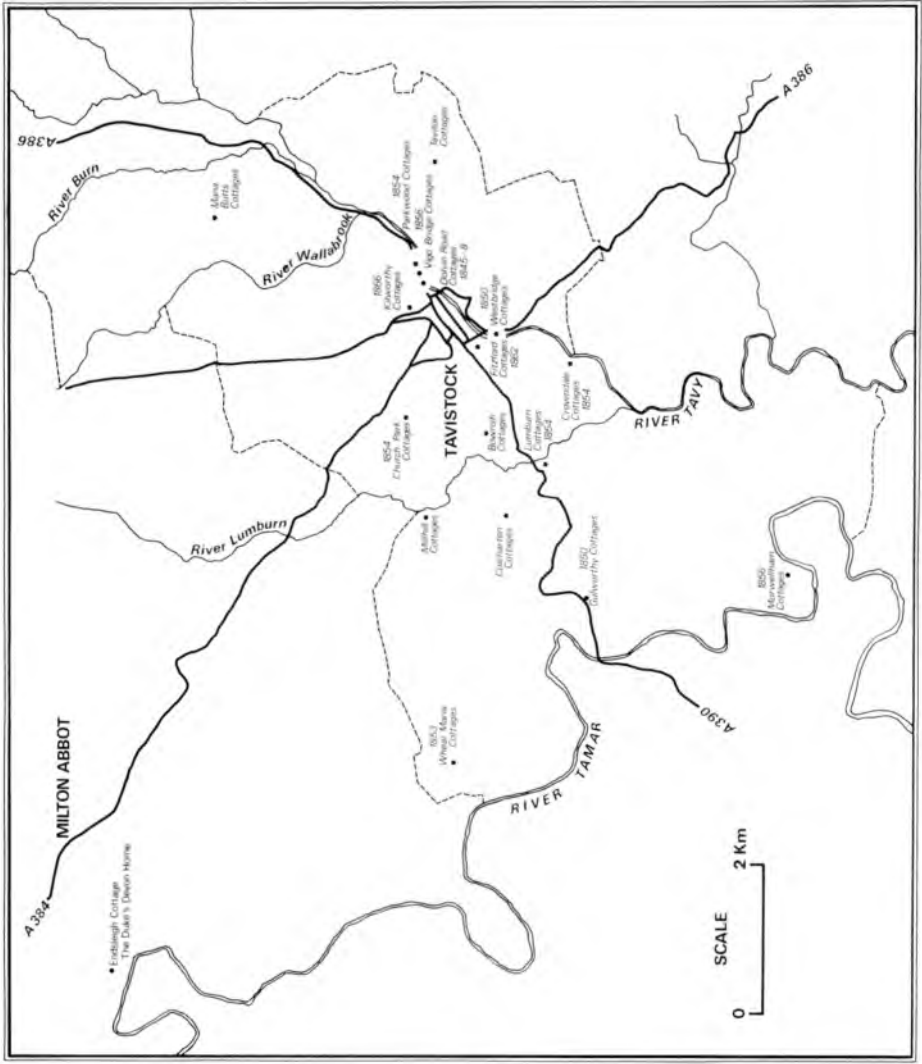


Figure 1

positioned in the end wall of each pair of cottages. An access lane runs in front of the cottages (and there are long gardens to the rear). The outbuildings added later were placed on the other side of the lane to the cottages in clear view of passers by. The usual place was the rear garden.

41. D.R.O. L/1258 Letters: 88 Jones to Haedy, 6 March 1849.
42. *ibid.*
43. *ibid.*
44. D.R.O. L/1258 Letters: 60c Benson to Haedy, 24 July 1851.
45. D.R.O. L/1258 Letters: 60c Benson to Haedy, 11 July 1851. Mr Thomas Morris of Devon Great Consols tried to link any involvement with workers' accommodation to a new lease for the company to allow them to 'prosecute their new discoveries with spirit'.
46. D.R.O. L/1258 Letters: 60c Benson to Haedy, 16 May 1851, postscript.
47. D.R.O. L/1258 Letters: 60c Benson to Haedy, 19 June 1851. Benson wondered whether the Estate should 'build cottages close to the mines to save miners the long journey to work and therefore command higher rents but risk the disadvantage of their being too far from schools and places of worship'.
48. D.R.O. L/1258 Letters: 60c Benson to Haedy, 8 July 1851.
49. D.R.O. L/1258 Letters: 60c Benson to Haedy, 19 June 1851, enclosure.
50. D.R.O. L/1258 Letters: 60c Benson to Haedy, 14 Oct. 1851. The Duke insisted on the more expensive red pine, duchess slates, piped water and separate outbuildings for the water closets.
51. D.R.O. L/1258 Letters: 60c Benson to Haedy 13 Oct. 1851, 24 Oct. 1851.
52. *Plymouth Herald*, 14 Jan. 1854.
53. D.R.O. L/1258 Letters: 63c Benson to Haedy, 14 Jan. 1854.
54. D.R.O. L/1258 Letters: 63c Benson to Haedy, 21 March 1854.
55. By 1875 the Duke was granting 90 year leases which were considerably more attractive to speculative builders who were able to raise enough capital to erect housing. Bedford's own cottage building was, in any case, virtually over. The average cost had climbed to £250 by the 1880s and the return had fallen from around 3% per annum to less than ½%.
56. D.R.O. L/1258 Letters: 60c Benson to Haedy, 24 Oct. 1851.
57. D.R.O. L/1258 Letters: 60c Benson to Haedy, 11 Nov. 1851; also 16 Dec. 1851.
58. D.R.O. L/1258 Letters: 61 Benson to Haedy, 12 July 1852.
59. *Tavistock Gazette*, 21 July 1871.
60. D.R.O. L/1258 ADD 8 Mr Benson's Journals, 1854-5.
61. See for example D.R.O. L/1258 Letters: 60c Benson to Haedy, 9 April 1851, 'Improvements to Higher Back Street'.
62. D.R.O. L/1258 Letters: 60c Benson to Haedy, 14 Oct. 1851.
63. Graham, M., 1970. *op. cit.*
64. *Tavistock Gazette*, 31 August 1883. The dukes of Bedford involved in the West Devon Estate were:
 

Francis	(7th Duke)	born 1788	died 1861
William	(8th Duke)	born 1809	died 1872
Hastings	(9th Duke)	born 1819	died 1891
Sackville	(10th Duke)	born 1852	died 1893
Herbrand	(11th Duke)	born 1858	died 1914
65. D.R.O. L/1258 Letters: 8 Buildings Theophilus Jones, 2 Aug. 1849.
66. D.R.O. L/1258 Letters: 60c Benson to Haedy, 24 July 1851.
67. *Tavistock Gazette*, 31 Aug. 1883.
68. See Gaudie, E., 1974. *Cruel Habitations: A History of Working Class Housing, 1780-1918*, London, pp. 46-8. But see also: Burnett, J., 1978. *A Social History of Housing*, London, esp. pp. 47-53; and Tarn, J. N., 1971. *Working Class Housing in Nineteenth Century Britain*, Architectural Association Paper No. 7., esp. pp. 1-10.