

Housing and Health: A Journey Through Film

24 Mar 2025 | Lucinda Broadbent, media co-op | 5 min read

With Glasgow celebrating its 850th birthday, this co-curated collaboration between media co-op, National Library of Scotland Moving Image Archive and GCPH explored Glasgow's housing and its impact on health through a series of films ranging from the 1940s to the 2020s. We asked the event's chair and media co-op Director Lucinda Broadbent to share her reflections on the screening and following discussion in the blog below.

Flickering black-and-white images of Castlemilk as a greenfield site, the first mechanical diggers moving in. A male voice with a clipped 1940s intonation booms *"People everywhere are clamouring for houses. The chaos left by the second World War is gradually being overcome."* Cut to a building site in Balornock: guys in cloth caps wielding pick-axes, a boy climbing a ladder with a pile of roof tiles on his head. *"Brick upon brick, houses and yet more houses are being built"* continues the voiceover. *"Dreary tenements are being replaced by bright modern flats... Substantial results have been obtained. Let Glasgow Flourish!"*



Films

Watching [Glasgow Corporation's 1946 film "Progress Report"](#) stirs up conflicting feelings. Pride at the optimistic aspirations for public housing. Anger and sadness at the housing crisis eighty years on. And a nagging question: among all the shots of gleaming new housing schemes, where are the people?

We see men on building sites, men drawing architectural plans, barely any women... and not a single resident on screen talking about what they want from their home, what sort of community they want to live in. How can Glasgow – or anywhere – flourish, if people don't have power over their own destiny?

'Housing and Health: A journey through film' celebrated the city's 850th birthday by taking a packed audience on a whistle-stop housing journey, through films made in the 1940s, 60s, 70s, 80s and up to 2023. The thought-provoking event was a collaboration between three organisations: [Glasgow Centre for](#)

[Population Health](#), the [National Library of Scotland Moving Image Archive](#) and film-makers [media co-op](#). Each film brought a new perspective. [If Only We Had the Space](#) gives a nostalgic glimpse into home improvement in the 1970s, when it was a startling innovation to have a toilet inside your flat instead of shared privy on the close stair.

[“Would you like to live here?”](#) is the hard-hitting question posed by a tenant in a film made in 1985, lifting the lid on conditions at the Fernhill scheme in Springburn, and the Tenants Association battles against the odds to improve their homes.

Animation [Closures and Beginnings](#) explores one woman’s experience of the impact of deindustrialisation and privatisation; but she ends on a high note: *“We’ve got history here. We’ve got hope. We’re not helpless. We know what we need. Try asking us.”*

74-year-old Alice in Greenock stars in [Sense of Place](#), mobilising neighbours to take control of wasteland to create a community garden in 2013. But what does it mean that Alice’s community group had to out-compete other worthwhile projects to get funding? [Lights Out](#) traces the dying days of the Gallowgate twin towers in 2016. Bittersweet stories, from a tenant’s 35 years of happy family life in her high flat, to the neglect and decline that ended in demolition.

Discussion

After watching the films, an invited panel gave their reflections on the films and audience members were invited to participate.

“Film is such a good tool to show the human aspect of housing” said Professor Johnny Roger from the Glasgow School of Art. *“Film brings it alive. From the ‘build poverty out of the landscape’ ambition of the 1940s, to the real-life results of throwing people on the scrapheap in the 1980s.”*

“The Scottish Government’s recent Housing Bill talks about tenants and landlords, but doesn’t mention Housing Co-ops, where the tenant is the landlord” said Louise Scott from workers co-operative media co-op. *“When communities own and control housing, instead of developers siphoning off profits, it works. Just ask the tenant-owners at [Hawthorn Housing Co-op](#) in Possilpark.”*

“The post-war pride in Glasgow’s council housing is lost now”, said Tilly Mason of the [Living Rent](#) campaign. *“A tenant with lung cancer, bringing up two kids in a flat with black mould, had to get neighbours together and march on their landlord to get re-housed. And a private landlord demanded a rent rise when their tenant put up a shelf. There’s no accountability. We need to take collective action.”*

Today’s housing injustice *“is the result of policy choices: it was predictable and was predicted”*, said Professor Chik Collins from GCPH. He told a chilling story of discovering papers in the archives where civil servants in the 1970’s struggled to find a show-house *“of which we are not ashamed”*.

This link between public health and political decisions was also starkly highlighted by GCPH and media co-op’s three-minute animation [Changing life expectancy and why it matters](#), which was shown in the Moving Image Archive library space.

By the end of the ‘Housing and Health’ cinematic journey, the picture seemed clear to me: the goal of decent affordable housing for a healthy life needs radical changes in ownership.

You can see a huge range of fascinating archive movies, all for free, at the [National Library of Scotland Moving Image Archive](#) at Kelvin Hall. Most of the films from the event available online here:

[Progress Report](#) (1946)

[Mungos Medals](#) (1961)

[If Only We Had the Space](#) (1974)

[Would you like to live here?”](#) (1985)

[Lights Out](#) (2016)

[Closures and Beginnings](#) (2023)

Sense of Place (2013)

Changing life expectancy and why it matters (2023)

*(Banner and last image: stills from Chris Leslie's Lights Out;
animation still from 'Closures and Beginnings')*