

HOUSING ESTATE HOUSING

Prior to the advent of local authority housing, after 1919, the style of rural housing, from the top of the social hierarchy down (with the possible exception of church or state employees), was set by the local landowner. This has left us not only with a rich legacy of buildings, and one which provides much evidence of social status and social hierarchies during the 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries. It was the estate which provided housing for its employees, its tenants and, in turn, their employees.



Indoor servants were housed within the '*big hoose*', but in locations which emphasised their lowly status – in garrets and basements, outwith the owner's family's social spaces on the principal floors. In this case, **Geanies House, Ross & Cromarty**, they were housed in a separate wing (left).

© Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland via SCRAN

At one stage removed, within the grounds, might be housing for grooms (above the stables) or gardeners (adjacent to the walled gardens which they maintained). Both occupied a comparatively lowly status. Elderly, semi-retired employees might be housed in the small gate-houses which guarded the entrances to the parkland around the mansion.

The hierarchy of housing outwith the park dyke started with the factor, the laird's '*doer*' in all matters landward. The house provided for him was superior to that of other estate employees and generally within reach of the mansion. This was the home of the notorious **Patrick Sellar**, factor to the Sutherland estate at **Syre, Strathnaver, Sutherland**. The factor might also have responsibility for



© Neil Shaw via SCRAN

running the home farm – a kind of hobby farm for landowners but also, on occasion, a place to carry out agricultural experimentation.

Next down from the factor were the tenant farmers. Their status, and the houses which they occupied varies in scale and sophistication according to the fertility and scale of the farms which they rented. In places such as East Lothian or the Merse, they might be little short of minor mansion houses themselves. At the other extreme, in the crofting north west, vernacular housing, of a primitive kind, might be a matter for the occupants to attend to.



Interest in the accommodation of farm servants came comparatively late, from the 1830s and '40s onwards. But once the quality of one's farm servants' accommodation became a matter of honour or prestige, the single storey, single roomed huts were swept aside in favour of better-built two- or even three-roomed

cottages, set in rows or even pairs of **cottages**. These are at **Hedderwick, East Lothian**. Housing for shepherds, slightly superior in their status, was correspondingly better appointed.

Between the lowly farm servants and the (sometimes) grand tenants were people such as gamekeepers, charged with fostering something for the landowner and his peers to shoot at, and occupying a home in keeping with his intermediate status. This house, at **Cluanach, Islay**, was the **home of the estate's under keeper**. On a par with him were the millers, blacksmiths, joiners and other estate tradesmen.



Beyond these direct employees, the landowner might also have a part in the housing provided for ministers and *dominies* (schoolmasters), especially where the parish had a single, dominant *heritor* (landowner). This **was the estate school and schoolmaster's house at the Glen, Peebles-shire.**



Despite the decline of so many estates, the housing once provided for its employees survives – not least because, even in a depopulating countryside, they still have a use to serve, long after the *big hoose* itself has fallen into ruin, become a hotel or been subdivided for joint occupation.

To find out more:

Fenton, A. and Walker, B. *The Rural Architecture of Scotland*. Edinburgh, 1981.

Questions**Estate Housing – THEN and NOW**

1. Within large country houses in the 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries, social hierarchy can be seen by the placement of living quarters. **Where do you think the following residents would have stayed?**
 - (a) The Owner and his family?
 - (b) Indoor servants?
 - (c) Outdoor servants; grooms, gardeners?

2. Another estate employee was the factor. **What was his job? Was he of higher or lower social position than the other servants and employees?**

3. **Tenant farmers were below the factor in the scale of the social hierarchy. Do you expect their houses to be big? impressive? small? basic?**

- 4.. Looking at buildings can provide us with lots of information and clues as to who lived there, what they did, when they were alive. The can also reveal evidence of social status and (within those of the 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries) a tight social heirarchy. **Can you say the same of buildings built *now*? Has anything really changed from back *then*?**

Answers

1. (a) The Owner and his family would have occupied the main floors of the house.
 - (b) Indoor servants would have lived within the 'big hoose', but in places 'appropriate' to their status; attics, basements, anywhere out-with the owner's living spaces.
 - (c) Outdoor servants would have stayed outside the house, grooms would have stayed in the stables with the horses, gardeners near the gardens they tended. Once again, 'appropriate' to their position.
2. A factor controlled all matters to do with the land of the estate. His house was superior to that of other estate employees and generally within reach of the mansion. The factor might also have responsibility for running the home farm.
 3. The size of these houses depends upon the status of the individual tenant farmer. Some may have been of a larger scale, some much less grand.
4. (*Own responses*)