The philanthropic Sutton Model Dwellings Trust was built just before the First World War. It covered four and a half acres and contained fourteen blocks of red-brick dwellings (figure 1). When completed in 1913 it housed 2,200 people.

Figure 1: Birds-eye view of the Sutton Estate or ‘Chelsea Model Dwellings’ drawing of 1911

The founder of the trust was William Richard Sutton (1833-1900), who made his fortune by establishing a long-distance parcel carrying service. At the time of his death in 1900, the firm had 600 branches. He was also a shareholder in Sutton, Carden and Co. a major brewer, bottler and distiller and merchant of wines, tea, coffee and tobacco. He also built offices and warehouses in Finsbury and the City. During his lifetime Sutton had shown little active interest in charitable giving or held any public office and seemed without deep religious affiliations. But on his death this entirely self-made man with little formal education, left almost the whole of his fortune of almost £2m (today the equivalent of £100m), to establish a trust to build flats and houses for the poor.

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1 The charitable trust was at first known as Sutton Model Dwellings Trust, but in 1927 changed its name to the Sutton Dwellings Trust and in 1973 adopted the name William Sutton Trust. Today it forms part of Affinity Sutton formed in 2006
in London and other ‘populous places’ in England. The flats were to be let at low rents and no profits were to be made in the running of the Trust.

This endowment meant that the trust was by far the wealthiest philanthropic housing society in Britain. Its initial assets were four times that of its nearest rival, the Peabody Trust and ten times larger than the Guinness Trust. This had direct consequences for how the organisation operated and on the type of housing provision it could afford.

Owing to legal difficulties over the interpretation of Sutton's will and the administration of his estate, the first dwellings in Bethnal Green were not built until 1909. The next London scheme was built on a two acre site at the corner of City Road and Old Street, Shoreditch in 1911. In 1910 the Trust bought a triangular site in Chelsea centred on Marlborough Square on the west side of the former Chelsea Common, which had been built over earlier in the 19th century. It was bounded by Leader Street (later Ixworth Place), Cale Street and College Street (Elystan Street).

Figures 2 & 3: OS Map of 1865 showing the houses on the site that were demolished for the new estate at Chelsea and a block plan of the proposed Chelsea Estate

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3 P. Garside, The Conduct of Philanthropy. William Sutton Trust 1900-2000 (2000) The twice married Sutton died without children of his own and he disinherited the step-children and other family members and his will was challenged in the courts, but eventually proved

The site, purchased from Piza Barnet, cost £85,000 and was covered with small run-down cottages and houses which were cleared to build the new estate of model dwellings (see OS map of 1865). The crowded houses were replaced by the largest estate ever built at that date by any of the four major housing trusts in London. The fourteen red-brick blocks of model dwellings, designed by E.C.P. Monson, contained 674 dwellings and in 1913 housed about 2,200 people. The blocks were five storeys in height. The architect E.C.P. Monson had previously designed the Sutton Model Dwellings at Shoreditch in 1911 which comprised 9 blocks with 284 flats.

The scheme was situated in a very densely populated part of Chelsea where poverty levels were high. In 1899, when Charles Booth’s investigators visited while compiling their Poverty Survey of London, the area comprised two

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6 The next largest was that of the Guinness Trust in Pages Walk Bermondsey which had 457 tenements
7 See Appendix One for further details about Monson
storey cottages that were ‘rather rough and dirty’ and the grass had disappeared from Marlborough Square. It was an area that desperately needed working class housing and the Sutton Trust could afford to purchase land for development at market rates, unlike many of the other philanthropic societies. Therefore the Sutton Model Dwellings Trust had a free choice as to where it could build and was not reliant on local authorities or the London County Council (LCC) donating land. Other philanthropic societies were forced to accept any piece of land donated by local landowners or boroughs. The choice of Chelsea as an early location for the Sutton Model Dwellings was also influenced by LCC guidelines that showed suitable neighbourhoods for erection of dwellings. Chelsea was identified as an area where overcrowding occurred and when leases fell in, working class accommodation was cleared for other uses. In addition, one of the Masters in Chancery (where Sutton’s will was disputed and who overlooked the Trust until 1927) suggested that Chelsea might be a suitable place for building a scheme.

The estate was featured in the 1913 edition of *The Modern Building Record* showing the importance of the development at the time to contemporary architects and those interested in new architecture. The feature stated that the 675 separate ‘Suites of Rooms’ varied in size from one-roomed to four-roomed tenements. All provided a Scullery-Bathroom with a Cornes’ Model Cottager Combination, a separate W.C. and ‘usual offices’ and it was stated that each flat ‘is absolutely self-contained’. Few working class flats of the time were and none of the dwellings at Chelsea (even one room flats) shared toilets or sculleries with others (see plans below). Sharing such facilities was still very common in the tenements provided by local authorities and other model dwelling companies. But even in the Sutton Model Dwellings there were no separate bathrooms until after World War One. Instead there was a

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8 Booth B362, pp 198-9 [www.booth.lse.ac.uk](http://www.booth.lse.ac.uk)
11 In 1901 Haighton & Cornes patented a combined range and domestic boiler that became very popular and was manufactured in their Vulcan Foundry in Nelson
12 *The Modern Building Record*, 1913, p.126
fixed bath in the scullery with a flap over. The total cost of the scheme (including the land and the buildings) was £279,000.\textsuperscript{13}

In general the flats were quite small, with two thirds of the flats on the estate comprising just one or two rooms. There were 115 flats with one room, 331 containing two rooms, and 228 with three rooms. Drying rooms and sheds were also provided.\textsuperscript{14}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure5.png}
\caption{Sample plans of the flats as built in Chelsea in 1913 in \textit{The Modern Building Record}}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{13} ibid
The rents were relatively cheap (from 2s 6d per week for a bed-sitting room to 8s per week for a flat with 3 rooms) and among the tenants were many single women in service jobs on low incomes and young families with just a few children. It was specified in Sutton’s will that the trust should ‘break even rather than show any return’ and ‘provide good housing at rents within their means’. Prior to 1919 a quarter of Sutton tenants had incomes of less than £1 per week.

By 1914 it was estimated that 25% of the working-class population of Chelsea lived in purpose-built model or industrial dwellings. As well as the Sutton Model Dwellings Trust with 2,200 residents, the Borough Council housed 1,580 and other trusts such as Peabody, Samuel Lewis and Guinness together housed a further 3,200. Small houses and alleys were also cleared on the north-west side of Leader Street (later Ixworth Place), where eight blocks of model dwellings were built in 1913 by the Samuel Lewis Housing Trust and completed after the First World War, housing a further 1,390 people (see OS map of 1913). Few borough councils built any public housing.

17 Ibid, p. 24
18 Chelsea Borough Council, Annual Report of Medical Officer of Health, 1912 &1914
between 1890 and 1913 (less than 2,000 dwellings). Chelsea was the most prolific and by 1914 the council had built 13 blocks on 4 estates with 522 flats.\textsuperscript{19}

When the Sutton Estate in Chelsea was built there were also thirty-four lock-up shops with basements, provided to cater for residents’ everyday needs.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure1.png}
\caption{Figures 7 & 8: The new lock-up shops at junction of Elystan and Cale Streets c.1912 – before most were occupied and the shops prospering in the mid-20\textsuperscript{th} century}
\end{figure}

ECP Monson (1872-1941) was the architect of four of the Sutton Model Dwellings Trust’s first six estates – Shoreditch, Chelsea, Rotherhithe and Birmingham. It may not have been a coincidence that Monson was the husband of William Sutton’s niece, Marie Louise but as the Trust was subjected to High Court direction it cannot merely have been nepotism. He developed a neo-Georgian style for the blocks of flats in the London area. The Trust required their estates ‘to reserve open spaces in and about the Dwellings for playgrounds or places of rest’.20

Monson – an active member of the National Towns and Housing Planning Council, a member of the Royal Sanitary Institute and a member of the Town Planning Institute was well aware of contemporary designs in the Garden City Movement and his designs and layout for the Sutton Model Dwellings Trust at Alum Rock, Birmingham started in 1915, reflect those principles.21 However, at Chelsea the estate layout struggles with the geometry and shape of site created by Ixworth Place and Cale Street; the result is an awkward and cramped series of courts and spaces between the buildings. Despite the aspirations of the client and designer and though better than what it replaced, the spatial quality of the estate was always compromised by the number of dwellings that were imposed on the site and the consequent cramming of accommodation.

21 RIBA Library ECP Monson; Biography File
The contemporary reception of The Sutton Model Dwellings Trust and its estates was mixed. Sutton’s will was disputed not just by his family, but by the London County Council and other large landlords who were worried that these large, cheap and desirable dwellings would lead to lower rents, monopolize housing for the poor and in some areas disrupt the structure of local housing markets. For over three decades efforts were made to limit the Trust’s activities, resulting in Chancery directing the trustees in many ways until the end of the 1920s. Despite Sutton specifying that profits were not to be made from rents, the Treasury Solicitor insisted in 1906 that there should be a return of 2 ½ percent.

The proposed scheme in Chelsea designed by Monson for the Trust was criticised by the LCC for architectural and housing quality reasons. In the *Daily News* of 1 April 1911, it was reported that the Housing Committee of the Council condemned the ‘block dwellings’ proposed at Chelsea as perpetuating the back-to-back system and not allowing enough ventilation and
stated that as ‘this large amount of money had been left for the housing of the poor it was a very great pity that it should not be spent in a manner which would conduce to the best housing conditions’.\textsuperscript{22}

After the end of World War One, the 1919, 1923 and 1924 Housing Acts established in law the ways in which central government and local authorities would work together to build working-class housing. Thus the role of the Sutton Model Dwellings Trust had been modified to become non-threatening to these groups and in 1927 it was released from Chancery. It reconstituted itself and became known as the Sutton Dwellings Trust, dropping the ‘Model’ which was in the minds of many firmly associated with the previous century’s style of philanthropy, which began with the establishment in 1841 of the Metropolitan Association for Improving Dwellings for the Industrial Classes.

The Trustees had installed improvements to their dwellings before the end of the 1930s. Open fires and back boilers had replaced kitchen ranges and there was electric light instead of gaslight.\textsuperscript{23} By the time of the Second World War there were still 674 flats on the Chelsea Estate, with a separate building containing a Superintendent’s office with a flat above.\textsuperscript{24} In September 1940 a high explosive bomb fell on Block ‘O’ which resulted in considerable damage. Two people were killed and some were injured but most had gone to the shelters below the flats. Damage was done to other blocks and in 1941, 535 of flats were slightly damaged by anti-aircraft shells. By 1944, over £20,000 had been claimed from the War Damage Committee for damage to the estate by the architect Victor Wilkins of York buildings, Adelphi.\textsuperscript{25} At one point in August 1944, over 200 windows had been broken and many shop windows blown out. In 1949 a comprehensive programme for modernising and refurbishing all the older dwellings within the estate of the Sutton Trust was undertaken and this included works in Chelsea.

\textsuperscript{22} LMA Acc 2983/239 – H. Butcher & I. Butcher, \textit{The Sutton Housing Trust: Its foundation & History} (1982), p.23

\textsuperscript{23} \textit{Ibid}, p.40

\textsuperscript{24} LMA/ACC 2983/223

\textsuperscript{25} LMA/ACC 2983/223
Various further alterations have occurred more recently. These include the replacement of all windows with uPVC, the insertion of lifts, various roof extensions (to accommodate lift motor rooms, for example), the blocking up of window and door openings, the creation of new enclosed lobbies, the laying of tarmac for vehicular access, the insertion of gardens, play spaces and bins stores into the constrained spaces within the block, and various internal alterations to improve dwellings standards.
Appendix One
E C P Monson (1872-1941)

Office: Finsbury Pavement House, 120 Moorgate
He was in practice with his son and brother at the time of his death. He studied at King's College and won Bronze Medal in Architecture in 1892, a Diocesan Surveyor for London. He worked for his father and started his own practice in 1904

‘He has been prominent in building matters generally and always taken a great interest in all that pertains to the Housing of the Working Classes and his work has mainly lain with Town councils and Local Authorities’

Works included:

St Martin’s Church, Acton
Dwellings for the Sutton Trust at City Road, Chelsea, Rotherhithe and estate development at Birmingham for about 200 houses
Municipal Buildings for Islington and Bethnal green Estate development at Tottenham for Borough Council Estates in Islington, Finsbury, Bethnal Green and Stepney Glory Mill, Woburn Green

[Source: RIBA Library, Biography File]
Appendix Two

List of Contractors

CONTRACTOR ALBERT MONK.

AsPHALTE (Rock)—Salter, Edwards & Co., Ltd.
BLINDS (Outside and Window)—G. Messent.
CONSTRUCTIONAL STEEL AND IRONWORK—J. A. King & Co.
Door, Window and Casement Fittings—Carter & Aynsley, Ltd.
FENCING AND GATES—Bayliss, Jones & Bayliss, Ltd.
Flooring (Re-Inforced and Fire-Proof)—A. King & Co.
Flooring—Johnson’s Paving & Construction Co.
Gas Fittings—Gas Light & Coke Co.
GLAZED BRICKS—Shaw’s Glazed Brick Co., Ltd.
GRANITE WORK—Ferrier & Co., Ltd.
GRATING AND CHIMNEYPIECE—Cornes & Haighton.
JoINTING AND Mouldings—The Eagle Steam Joinery Works.
LAUNDRY ENGINEERING—Tullis, Ltd.
NAME PLATES AND SIGNS—Willing & Co., Ltd.
ORNAMENTAL IRONWORK—R. H. & J. Pearson, Ltd.
PARTITIONS (Patent “Mack”)—J. A. King & Co.
PLASTER (“SIRAPnz”)-Supplier by the Gypsum Mines, Ltd.
PLUMBING—J. Knight & Son.
RANGES—Cornes & Haighton.
SANITARY FITTINGS—W. E. Farrer, Ltd.
STONE CARVINGS; STONEWORK—Abney Masonry—United Stone Firms., Ltd.
TERRA-COTTA AND FAIENCE—Shaw’s Glazed Brick Co., Ltd.
UNDERLINING—Willesden Paper and Canvas Works, Ltd.
Archives and Libraries Consulted

London Metropolitan Archives
RIBA Library
Senate House Library
LSE Booth Papers online