

Private terraced houses on the Old Kent Road opposite Camelot Street Estate, London, 1970 from 'Manplan 8: Housing'. Photo by Tony Ray-Jones.

This black and white photograph is taken from a slightly raised viewpoint, as if standing on the street looking down into the gardens of two neighbouring houses. It captures a moment of conversation between the respective residents. The left-hand house occupies about two-thirds of the image, with the fence between the two properties running from the houses towards us. Shrubs on either side and a washing line follow the line of the fence. The washing is pushed up above head-height by a pole halfway along its length. A low brick wall runs from left to right across the lower part of the photograph, dividing the street from the garden, with a gap in the wall for the entrance. Another washing line follows the line of the wall, the sheets and clothes pushed to one side like a curtain.

Standing in the right-hand garden, a woman in her thirties with neat shoulder-length hair, wearing a blouse and skirt, leans forward towards the dividing fence, holding onto it with one hand, her other hand on her hip. She seems to be recounting something important to the five people in the left-hand garden. Most prominent of these, standing in the centre of her garden, is a sturdy middle-aged woman wearing a print overall, one hand on her hip, her elbow towards us, the other hand curled up at her breastbone in a gesture of attention. There's a bucket at her feet. Her face is brightly lit by sunshine and has a soft, compassionate look. Further back, against the house wall, a bare-chested man in glasses stands

behind the open door of a small shed. The door is made of chicken wire and he is gripping it with his fingers, like a prisoner looking out from his cell. The shed is tall and narrow, built against the house – it might perhaps be a pigeon loft. Closer to us and standing by the fence are a young woman in a print minidress, her head hidden from us by laundry. Her stance, with her hand on her hip, echoes that of the older woman. Beside her is a young man with fashionable collar-length hair in shirt and trousers, holding a child on his hip. The child grips the man with one hand, the other reaching out towards the neighbour.

The part of the right-hand garden that's visible has a concrete path, trimmed grass and a swing set. In contrast, the left-hand garden is cluttered with signs of activity – as well as the two washing lines, there is a set of shelves against the wall of the house that holds miscellaneous flowerpots, and the legs of an upturned table sticking up in a corner. There's a flowerbed with a mug of tea resting on the edge and a broom leaning on it. Although the woman on the right seems unremarkable and her face is in shadow, everything in the scene – both the lines of washing and the attention of her neighbours - seems to be directed towards her.