

Geographical and Environmental Factors *Tony Warnes*

D. R. Phillips and J. A. Vincent, Private residential accommodation for the elderly: geographical aspects of developments in Devon. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* New Series, 11 (1986), 155–173.

The article begins with a review of the diversity of institutional residential accommodation for elderly people in Britain but then focuses on the rapid growth, by a factor of 2.5 between 1975 and 1984, of private residential homes. In South West England the number of places in some 700 private residential homes was estimated in 1984 at about 10,000, around one fifth of the national total. The majority of these places were in Devon where 'fears of exploitation, low standards of care by untrained staff and management' were widely voiced but often in ignorance of the facts of the situation.

The aims of the research were to describe the distribution and entrepreneurial character of these proliferating homes. A random sample of one in four of the approximately 450 homes in Devon was conducted and information collected on their size, occupancy, the origins of the residents and proprietors, the employment generated by the homes and the expressed plans of the owners. Private sector residential homes in Devon are heavily concentrated in the southern coastal resorts, particularly Exmouth, Teignmouth, Torquay and Brixham, and in Plymouth and Exeter. The modal size of homes was ten registered beds and ten beds normally filled: four in five normally accommodated no more than twenty people. Only in Teignbridge and Torbay were a substantial number of larger homes, of more than 25 beds, found although they contributed a large proportion of all beds. 61 per cent of homes reported that they had no vacancies.

A question about the previous address of the five most recently admitted residents showed that around 82 per cent were from within ten miles. Phillips and Vincent conclude that, 'homes cannot be said to be directly attracting outsiders either to the county or to specific locations within it. However, the knowledge that residential homes will be available if and when needed may well be a factor which encourages the initial retirement migration to the county'.

The article also contains information on how the residents became aware of the existence of the home, the previous use of the building, and the background and experience of the proprietors. The survey showed that there were low levels of formal 'care' qualifications among the proprietors, that in most cases they had had only short-term

experience of residential care, and that among the proprietors there was a strong representation of those with previous experience of self-employment, often in property management and development or in the tourist trade. 74 per cent of the homes had a married couple as the joint owners, 43 per cent had some help from family members and nearly one half had no full-time staff. On the other hand virtually all homes employed part-time staff, with a mean complement of seven. The survey suggests that some 3,000 part-time staff are employed throughout Devon in private residential homes for the elderly population.

On the basis of evidence both about the high turnover of proprietors and which suggested that as many as one quarter only planned to remain in the business for a short time, and in the light of the homes' high dependence on fees paid by the Department of Health and Social Security, the authors conclude that the future of the private residential sector is by no means soundly based. They suggest that an underfunded public sector and a largely undirected and potentially unstable private sector do not provide a sound basis for this aspect of the care of the nation's elderly. The article is accompanied by six tables and five maps, reinforcing its principal value as a detailed local account of a rapidly developing sector of British residential care for elderly people.

Policy Responses in Australia

Tony Warnes

Graeme Hugo, Population aging in Australia: implications for social and economic policy. Papers of the East-West Population Institute (Honolulu, Hawaii 96848) No. 96, April 1986, 47 pp., 26 tables, 5 figures.

This paper arises from the research and teaching programme on the nature and policy implications of ageing in Australia at the School of Social Sciences of Flinders University. Although Australia's population is in transition between the youthful structure characteristic of developing countries and the aged structure characteristic of Europe, in recent years the rate of increase in the nation's elderly population has been steeper than in almost all other developed countries. Australia's 1980s experience of immigration, fertility and mortality have resulted in an unprecedentedly rapid increase of not only the number of older Australians but also their proportion of the total population. Social security programmes for the aged in Australia were extended and improved dramatically in the late 1970s during a period of growth of the young and working population.

After briefly reviewing the recent demographic ageing of Australia's