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# The Development of the Residential Suburb in Britain 1850 -1970

## The Origins of Modern 'Suburbia'

Throughout the history of civilisation, there have always been residential areas forming the major basis of urban settlements, but as the size, nature and function of settlements changed with the coming of industrialisation, so did the character and location of residential areas and the housing typologies that evolved with those changes. This paper attempts a brief analysis of the history of the development and spread of suburbs around the established towns and cities of Britain, from the time that they began rapidly industrialising, early in the 19th. century.

The rapid growth of industries, from the 1780's onward, had created an unprecedented demand for unskilled labour in the expanding towns, which in turn generated the 'mushroom' growth of cheap urban housing for this new working population, coming in from their previous rural employment. This housing for workers was in sharp contrast to the genteel 'Georgian' townhouse terraces epitomised by the examples of planned squares and crescents seen first in London, Bath, Cheltenham and Edinburgh. By the 1840's the resulting areas of congested, 'back-street' high-density housing, offering only basic shelter, with little or no sanitary provisions, were becoming a major public health issue with strong political implications (Burnett 1980 pp.92-4; Olsen in Dyos & Wolff 1978 pp.333-357; Dyos & Reeder in Dyos & Wolff 1978 pp.359-386). In line with this increasing awareness and concern for the quality of residential areas, an impetus grew for new forms of segregated suburban areas, designed to enable escape away from the increasingly congested urban slums of what rapidly became the 'inner city' suburbs of working-class closes, yards and 'back-to-back' tenements.

The new 'rural' suburbs, which primarily originated for the new 'middle-class' of the Victorian era (following on from the 'Georgian' models of the early 1800's), were usually speculative developments built to a common set of design principles and concepts. These design ideas were based partly on a 'rural idyll' deriving from 19th Century society's romantic yearnings, as seen expressed through the 'pure' images of 'honest' gothick toil of the medival agricultural labourer (against the dirt and squalor of 'industrialisation' (akin to the colonial 'noble savage' image prevalent in the concepts of Empire), and partly on the puritanical philanthropy of 'improving' the working person's environment so they would lead 'better' lives. The ideas of prescribed 'improvement' were to grow throughout the ninteenth century, and produced forms of residential layout and house types which were to continue in Britain right up to 1939: a model for urbanised 'country' living quite unlike the more urban oriented forms of residential development previously established by the Georgian developers of the late seventeenth century, that were the more normal model for urban development throughout continental Europe.

Thus in the latter half of the 19th century, a wide variety of suburban developments was generated, with the country's growing prosperity (with the growth of Empire), political influences (philanthropy and moralism), and consequent social

***Housing Housing estates Suburb Great Britain***

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***Razvoj stanovanjskega predmestja v Veliki Britaniji 1850-1970***

***Stanovanja Stanovanjska naselja Predmestja Velika Britanija***

***V zgodovini civilizacije so vedno obstajala stanovanjska območja, ki so bila osnovno tkivo urbanih naselij. Začetek industrializacije je povzročil spremembe v velikosti lastnosti in funkciji naseli. Nato so se spremenile značilnosti stanovanjskih. območij ter njihovega lociranja, spremenila pa se je tudi stanovanjska tipologija, ki se je sočasno razvijala. Prispevek je kratka analiza zgodovine razvoja in rasti predmestij okoli manjših in večjih mest v Veliki Britaniji, ki ju je povzročila nagla industrializacija na začetim 19. stoletja.***

changes, that were occurring throughout Britain in the period up to the First World War.

## Attempting the Utopian Idyll

To give a brief history of planned residential development in the early industrial era in Britain, and hence the origins of the design of suburban housing layouts, it is necessary to commence examination with the early examples of residential estates and housing layouts developed exclusively for that purpose.

Speculative housing estate developments built specifically for the new middle classes had appeared on the outskirts of many of the major industrial cities by the 1840's. If one takes as example Liverpool, a city in rapid growth at that time, from both trade and industrialisation, one can see clearly the change-over in 'suburban' typology, from the classical late 18th Century 'Georgian' urban formality of merchants' housing close to the city centre, in Rodney Street, Hope Street, Catherine Street, Canning Street, and Huskisson Street, through the grand 'boulevard' of early Victoria ıı town- houses on Princes Road, to the planned informality of detached housing around Prince's Park, laid out by Joseph Paxton in 1842 (a year before his better known scheme for Birkenhead Park). In complete contrast were the 'genteel' semi-rural culs-de-sac of Fulwood Park, Grassendale Park, and Cressington Park, laid out at the same time.

Many cities witnessed this shift in character of suburban housing developments for the well-to-do. The 'Avenues' in Hull is another instance, although more formal, as is the late 19th. century development based on Didsbury, bordering Manchester. Many such developments were set up purely as speculative land development ventures, and, to take the example of the competition scheme for the development of Liverpool's Sefton Park, in 1871, (promoted by the City Corporation) which followed the earlier Prince's Park example (created at the behest of Richard Vaughan Yates, a wealthy Liverpool philanthropist), and that in Birkenhead (a municipal park enabled by private finance), it was often the case that large estates of previously undeveloped farmland, usually on a city's outskirts, were subdivided into building plots, linked to the creation of a major community-oriented enterprise, in the form of a large public park. Thus such developments acquired an air of respectability, and upperclass status, to help sales.

In principle, these developments were continuing in the development tradition of the Georgian speculators of Bath, Cheltenham, and, in the north, Edinburgh, but departed from their 'classical' urban formality of terraces of housing around circuses and squares, by creating much more informal layouts of freestanding houses in descrete plots, often in rural or park-land surroundings. Similar examples of 19th century 'estate' developments may be found around many of the then increasingly prosperous northern industrial cities. That the character of these newer speculative ventures did NOT evolve from the Georgian 'urban' townhouse forms of Bath, Cheltenham, and the Edinburgh New Town, is significant. They developed new forms of informal grouped housing schemes in semi-rural environments, with characteristics that were to reach their most effective expression later in the century (Tam in Sutcliffe 1980 p76). The speculative villas of North Oxford, developed in the 1850's, and influenced by Ruskin's 'gothick' architectural and social thinking, were precursors to the much more clearly defined 'romantic' concept behind the well-documented and complete example of Bedford Park (Bolsterli 1977 pp.3-13; Darley 1978 pp. 117-121), a speculative scheme developed for the growing middle class of London. Commenced in 1876, and complete by the early 1880's, this 'park' estate epitomised the basis on which many 'semi-planned' private speculative housing schemes were by then being developed, to form the majority of the growing middleclass suburban areas.

**The Origins of Social Planning**

Of the housing typologies developed during the latter part of the 19th Century, this form of'leafy' residential suburb for the middle-class stands in contrast to the more specialised and self-sustaining industry-related 'workers residential community' schemes, which might be said to have evolved from the 'social' principles of Owen's New Lanark (where the principal of 'cooperative' living for the workers was promoted, with medical services, albeit primitive, and schooling for their children). Examples such as Saltaire (1850 - 63), Bournville (1879- ), and, later, Port Sunlight (1888- ), which, amongst others, were developed primarily under the paternalistic philanthropy of noted 19th. century industrialists (Titus Salt, the Cadburys, the Levers, respectively). In all instances these individuals were looking, with not a little self-interest, for the improvement of the physical health and living conditions of their workforce, and often also to influence and dictate the workers' 'moral welfare' (Bell 1969 pp. 111-213; Burnett 1986 pp.54-96; Darley 1978 pp. 122-147,156-158; Edwards 1981 pp.54-65, 79-82; Pugh 1983 pp. 13-17, 27-31, 36-39) while promoting the benificance of their philanthropy in avoiding the growing slum problems of other industrial centres.

With the rapid increase of random urbanisation relating to the growth of industry during the early 19th. century, there had been a virtually unregulated spread of basic housing for the new populations of industrial workers, with absolutely minimal standards of construction and layout, leading to the creation of massive areas of substandard and insanitary slum housing around many cities. The worst slums had invariably been developed cheek-by-jowl with the sources of industrial employment, with their accompanying pollution (Hall 1982 pp.25-29). Thus most of the cheaper basic housing built before 1875, was to form a legacy of slum housing problems for the next hundred years, that even as it was built was being recognised as such.

The slums were first to be tackled by private charitable trusts (such as the Peabody Trust in London) and philanthropic housing associations, well-established by the turn of the century, but subsequently, at the end of the First World War, as new problems of labour and material shortages forced up the cost of re-placement dwellings, responsibility was transferred, by legislation, to the Local Authorities, who were granted new powers to tackle these problems, following the Report of the Tudor-Walters Committee.

**The Influences on the Spread of the Middle-Class Suburb**

The slums had frequently developed close to the grander houses of the pre-industrial wealthy. The expanding groups of the new managerial and owner classes of British society were now increasingly wealthy, and thus sought new areas for their wealthier residential locations, farther away from the insanitary arid polluted industrial centres. In Britain, the resulting outward movement of this wealthier middle class population from the centres of the more industrially developed towns and cities, was often in a south-westerly direction (wherever the topography was not a hindrance), avoiding the air-bome pollution of the coal-burning industries, carried on the prevailing south-westerly wind. This inevitably established a pattern of location for the newer residential developments which effectively 'leap-frogged' over the closely-laid- out, high-density, insanitary inner suburban slums of the industrial workforce (Burnett 1980 pp.89-92; Dyos & Reeder in Dyos & Wolff 1978 pp.362-3).

These movements of residential population and inner city growth patterns have been theorised in several standard land-use system models, developed successively since Burgess first put forward his simplistic

'concentric ring' theory of urban expansion in 1925. This was to be countered later by Hoyt's 'sectoral' model in 1939. Harris and Ulman then further explored the complexities of-urban growth patterns with their 'multiple nuclei' model of 1945 (Meyer & Huggett 1981 pp. 147- 155), perhaps the most appropriate for English towns and cities.

Thus the outcome of the 'leap-frog' movement was that the new middle classes abandoned the already *existing,* fully-developed central areas of earlier, pre-industrial housing of the former rich land-owners (Burnett 1986 pp. 11-18, 191); as a consequence, these older areas were to change, initially by a decline of upper-class occupancy leading to property subdivision to enable higher densities of working-class households. This often brought a corresponding decline in standards of public health, which in turn supported redevelopment for more commercial uses, as the demand for commercial premises in the centred core of each town grew with the rising population. London is the most easily perceived example of this process, which was to continue in a variety of ways up to the outbreak of the Second World War.

Planning controls had begun to be introduced to halt this growth in the 1930's but it was really the fundamental change in Uie regulatory powers over development, (the removal from land owners, by the State, of the Right to the Development of land, or the Establishment of New Land-Uses) embodied in the 1947 Town & Country Planning Act, that was to have the most dramatic effect in the post-world-war-II period (Cullingworth 1982 pp. 1-7; Sutcliffe 1980 pp.71-94; Jackson 1973 pp. 312-324)

## Two Views of the Problem

To return to the 19th century, the consequent problems of the resultant segregation of housing for the different social classes was being recognised by the mid 1870's. In particular, the plight of the working class, stemming increasingly from the substandard and slum housing (Mayhew 1861), created by unfeeling and greedy industrialists and indiscriminate development speculators, was gradually recognised, and, in some areas, the problems were tackled (Dyos & Reeder in Dyos & Wolff, 1978 pp.372-381); the practical result of this growing awareness was the emergence of two views of the manner in which the problems should be addressed.

On the one hand, as already indicated, several philanthropically inclined industrialists came to the fore, who were prepared to experiment with the provision of 'improved' housing schemes, ostensibly for the benefit of their workforces (Bell 1969 pp. 163-213). This sphere of activity, reinforced by the theories of such writers as John Ruskin (1819-1900), Philip Webb (1831- 1915), William Morris (1834-96), and, of course, the ultimately influential Ebenezer Howard (1850- 1928), took, as a fundamental starting point, the view that the urban residential forms which industrial urbanisation had created in Britain up to that time, were, in the main, irretrievably inappropriate for the well-being of the human condition, either physical or moral. There was a growing feeling that the then current concepts (such as they were) of industrial urban physical structure, geared primarily to entrepreneurial economic endeavour, should be abandoned, and that there should be a complete reversion to forms of residential layout that were based not on urban forms at all, but on an idealised, rather English Renaissance vision from tine pre-industrial era, more akin to the low density, open-spaced, rural settlement patterns of that former agrarian economy, but linked with the ideas of controlled landscape estates stemming from Tudor times. These concepts, running in tandem with the 'Gothic' attitudes of a true 'work ethic' that became prevalent in the later 19th. Century Victorian era, created an 'utopian' branch of thinking on residential layouts, reinforced by visions of Arcadia,

which was to culminate with the 'Garden City' concept

On the other hand, many of those becoming directly concerned with the environmental, physical and medical plight of the urban worker, of necessity took a more pragmatic and technically 'progressive' view of the problems, and felt that the situation could best be improved by a gradual process of new development and redevelopment continually raising, through legislation, the minimum standards of specification for the built physical environment, and the essential physical infrastructure now perceived as necessary for such densities of residential areas. Such standards were to be brought into effect by centralised national legislation, linked together with the Lise of model bye-laws establishing 'good practice' construction and planning, to be applied locally. The introduction, following the 1875 Public Health Act, of codes of practice (under the model bye- laws) for building construction and public heal til and hygiene standards, geared to overcoming the symptoms and results of overcrowded and insanitary conditions, had considerable impact; and compliance was often made mandatory, at least in theory. The effects were not merely to improve the public health aspects, but to markedly change the character, and environmental quality, of what were then peripheral housing estates, in what is now more generally seen as the 'inner suburbs' of our major industrial centres. The main product was the 'bye-law housing' of the post-1875 era, with forms and character quite unlike the high-density Urban Tenement models prevalent throughout the rest of Europe, and indeed in Scotland. This alternative view of the way forward for British residential development could be termed the 'technical/pragmatic' branch of thinking (Burnett 1986 pp. 158-164); this avenue of thought was to have profound, and far-reaching effects, on the perception of designers and engineers responsible for the built residential environment in Britain, which is still holding a commanding influence, right up to the present day.

## The Practical Evidence

As already mentioned, there are four 'utopian' schemes of particular significance, by virtue of their differing characters, the characteristics of the earlier layouts from those which followed: the schemes and developments at Saltaire, near Bradford (1853-63, promoted by Titus Salt for his mill labour force); Bourneville, on the outskirts of Birmingham (initiated 1879, main village proper commenced 1893, started by George Cadbury to house, in part, the workforce of his new chocolate factory); Pori Sunlight on the Wirral (1888, started by W.H.Lever, the first Lord Leverhulme, for the families of the workers in the I^ever Bros, newly relocated soap factory); and New Earswick, north of York (1902, started and run by a trust set up by Joseph Rowntree for the welfare of his workforce) (Burnett 1986 pp. 180-183; Sutcliffe 1980 pp.78- 94).

In the Saltaire scheme, the architects, Lockwood and Mawson, from Bradford, produced a neat but regimented and uninspiringly compact urban form of low-rise development of a type similar- to but pre-dating (by twenty or more years) the housing schemes resulting from the widespread introduction of model bye-laws, after the 1875 Public Health Act. Thus, while Saltaire can be seen to have been both the result of 'utopian' thinking, and a model for the 'technical/pragmatic' approach, and despite the raised standards that it represented for the time, there was little gained in terms of environmental quality other than in public health terms. Certainly, except for a small public park, incorporated into the original scheme, and the open garden areas in front of the alms-houses, there is little or no concession to the fact that the site of Saltaire was originally green fields set in the rural outskirts north of Bradford.

By way of complete contrast, and showing signs of the change in awareness regarding the quality of residential environments, Bournville was, from the start, developed on the lines of a non-urban, low density

suburb, with more than adequate provision of landscaped open space, for public use, as well as large private gardens (with similarities to the Bedford Park model). This conscious philosophy of George Cadbury's was to be maintained throughout its entire development period, until well into the 1960's, despite rising densities after World War II. In the manner of its physical interpretation, Bournville's development can be seen as a pre-emptive model supporting the 'Garden City' concepts of Ebenezer Howard, which he had formulated by the same year that Bournville was commenced, but which were not publish until 1898, ten years later (Fishman 1982 pp.52-63).

New Earswick, planned by Raymond Unwin and Bany Parker at the invitation of Joseph Rowntree, and started in 1902, carried the interpretation of layout ideas and management concepts forward yet again, taking advantage of the now published thinking of Ebenezer Howard (Tomorrow: A Peaceful Path To Real Reform, 1898, republished as Garden Cities of Tomorrow in 1902) which had effectively established him as the father of the Garden City movement. Hie layout principles evident in New Earswick show much of the same 'rural village' character later embodied in Letch- worth, the first full realisation by Howard of a 'Garden City' as such, also designed and laid out by Parker and Unwin, and commenced in 1903. The provision of public open space in New Earswick is designed to reinforce this character, complementing the large amount of private garden space created by the low density. The gardens were initially incorporated, no doubt, to provide adequate space for residents to cultivate their own vegetables, as would have been normal in rural communities at that time, and in keeping with the basic Garden City economic ideal. The green 'pockethandkerchieves' of lawn with their herbaceous borders, now commonly identified with the 'suburban' image of a garden, and very evidently replacing the vegetables in New Earswick today, were a product of the 'aesthetic' approach to garden ing, popularised by William Robinson and Gertrude Jekyll, and the Arts & Crafts movement, in the last quarter of the 19th century, but derived, via the idealised versions of the cottage garden, from examples on the estates of the wealthy classes in Tudor times.

New Earswick was also the example that vindicated Unwin's premise that low density development was, in reality, more economical overall than the more common higher densities that had prevailed in the inner 'bye-law' suburbs (Edwards 1981 p. 87; Scoffham 1984 p.6). Incidentally, a variation of this 'economical' argument reappeared in the mid-1970's in support of the layout ideas embodied in the Cheshire County Council's Residential Roads Design Guide.

Port Sunlight, another of the earliest 'utopian' schemes to take on board the concepts of suburban development inherent in the residential aspects of the Garden City ideal, was conceived in the same vein as Bournville, as a loosely structured, low density housing community for the workers in the Lever Brothers' new 'Sunlight' soap factory, but with a much stronger emphasis on the style and quality of architectural aesthetics to be employed in a corporate manner throughout the development. This 'architectural moralism' was deliberately incorporated to influence the sensibilities of the 'working classes', and 'improve' their lives, with its overt references to the philosophies of Ruskin and Morris and interpretations of the Arts and Crafts movement, intermixed with the Gothic revival influences, to express the undercurrent of the moralising, 19th century Protestant 'work ethic': less thought was given initially to the more relevant aspects of open space provision and its functional value. Subsequently, however, in 1910, a more formal and elaborate 'Beaux Ails' style of layout, with its grand vista public open space, was applied to the second phase by Sir Charles Reilly, complementing and reinforcing the strong architectural character already established in the early buildings, and producing a plan-

ned, open environment on the 'Grand Manner' theme, eventually to incorporate a monumental, classical style art gallery. These open spaces were of little functional value to the residents, however.

## The Decline of the 'Suburban Village' Ideal

From these noteworthy schemes promoted by private philanthropists, and after the building of Letchworth, promoted directly by Howard through his 'First Garden City' company, the influence and evolution of the Garden City concept can be seen to decline into forms of pattern-book layout designs, applied to dormitory suburban developments, to become recognised as 'Garden Suburbs', with little or nothing of the 'self-sufficient community' still retained.

This was largely due to the influences of Raymond Unwin, through his later schemes, especially Hampstead Garden Suburb, and it was the dilution of the original design philosophies to suit the middle- class 'suburban' market for speculative housing, that principally contributed to the loss of the basic social and economic reasoning behind the 'utopian' Garden City concept of Ebenezer Howard, in favour of a simple design oriented imagery, apparently more appropriate to the commercial demands of the times (Scoffham 1984 p.7). The creation of a speculative housing supply for dormitory suburbs, aimed at this market of rather superficial styles, gave added impetus to the 'technical/pragmatic' lobby, and saw the effective decline of the philanthropic support for promoting 'utopian' concepts of suburban community development. The revival of 'Pattern-book' styles was, in turn, a direct throwback to many of the design practices of early Victorian house builders.

The 'technical/pragmatic' approach, having become firmly established following the 1875 Public Health Act, was given a major consolidation with the Housing of the Working Classes Act 1890, the Housing, Town Planning, etc., Act of 1909 and, of major significance, the Housing and Town Planning Act, 1919 (Cullingworth 1982 pp.2-5). The 1919 Act brought into operation the added power of Local Authorities to build housing for rental to the working classes, at subsidised rates. This important change was the beginning of the 'council house' provision established for Local Authorities to cater for the housing need of those 'working class' poor, no longer adequately served by the private builders and investors. The lucrative returns for private landlords from private house building for rent, that had created the boom in 'bye-law' housing in the inner suburbs in the last decades of the 19th. century, virtually disappeared by 1918, due to a number of related factors: the rise in joint-stock companies and 'friendly' societies, prior to 1914, that, with the growing post- world-war-1 'stock market', had created a more flexible way of earning money from investments: the rising cost of house construction to the higher standards demanded by increasingly stringent and comprehensive local bye-laws; the rapid rise in costs of materials for construction, especially at the end of the war; and, as much as any other factor, the loss of the cheap, trained, craftsman workforce, due to the ravages of the 1914-18 war, and the loss of continuity in the apprenticeship system during those war years. As was to occur again, after the second world war, this reduction of the traditional labour force at a critical time for reconstruction, led the government of the time to take an intense, in-depth look at the whole question of housing provision at the bottom end of the market.

By late in the war, it was clearly evident that the very section of the population upon which industry and reconstruction would ultimately depend, was to be the worst effected by these factors. Thus, urgent provision of subsidised housing would be needed, and in order to establish a benchmark to which local authorities should work, both to uphold a basic quality of provision while establishing national mini-

mum standards, and to ensure maximum economy, the government had set up, in 1917, a committee under the chairmanship of Sir John Tudor Walters, M.P. (which included Raymond Unwin among its members). The outcome of the committee's recommendations was to formalise the standards of density, layout, accommodation and construction to be applied to the new 'council housing'; these standards established fundamental basic layout principles for the public sector, for at least the next two decades (despite inroads made by subsequent legislation in the '30's, which effectively reduced the minimum level of these standards). To a large extent, by example, they also set a similar basic level of construction specification, and (to a lesser extent) of public open space provision, for the expanding output of the private speculative builders now serving the growing middleclass suburban housing market, over the same period.

## The Course of Private Development

To recapitulate on the origins of the private sector development of housing 'estates', it is the significance of the ideas first seen in the scheme at Saltaire, combined with Uie speculative principles that fully manifested in the example of Bedford Park (1876) (Burnett 1986 p.206), that established the concept of housing developments as complete communities for the new professional middle class residents (of which an increasing proportion were owner-occupiers), and that were built up to the social ideas embodied in Ebenezer Howard's concept of the 'Garden City'. But these speculative schemes had established the general character and financial basis of much of the middle-class housing of the latter half of the 19th century, and thus Howard was only able to bring his revolutionary theories for a series of complete, balanced, and economically self-sufficient townships, the 'Garden City' ideal, to anything like a full practical implementation in one significant example, Letchworth, effectively completed by 1912. However, after the first world war, the difficulties of land assembly in the right place for such a venture, under the new private open market conditions by then prevailing, contrary to the proclaimed analysis of Alfred Marshall, Howard's main influence in economic theory in the 1880's (Fishman 1982 pp.45-7), were sufficient to effectively 'kill off Howard's second endeavour, at Welwyn Garden City, before that had achieved a self- sufficient capability; Welwyn was thus to remain principally a dormitory suburb town serving London, until after the second world war, when the ideas underlying the Garden City ideal were given a new lease of life, when the post-war Socialist government in Britain set up the New Town programme, and implemented the 'New Town Development Corporations'. Welwyn was to form the focus of one of the eight New Towns in the South-East, acting as self-sustaining satellites, to provide for the expected post-war London overspill, and avoid the relentless advance of suburbia that had occurred in the 1930's. Before this, in the interwar period, Welwyn had effectively become the ideal model for the physical layout characteristics promoted in the 20's and 30's as the 'Garden Suburbs'.

Thus was created, in various degenerated forms, the commonly held image of middle-class suburbia, further promoted by the expanding transport networks of the South-East in the 1930's; the 'Greenline' paradises, the little 'Metropolitan' country residences of John Betjeman's 'Metroland'; the 'Bijou residences of Colindale', explored with some sensitivity by Michael Frayne in his T.V. documentary on the inter-war development of suburban housing speculation south of London (B.B.C. 1979: Three Streets in the Country').

It was the standards of layout and provision of open space of the Garden City schemes, geared directly to the principles of economic self-sufficiency for these proposed town 'units' of 30,000 population, that were the first aspects to be forgotten

in the dilution of Howard's original ideals (Fishman 1982 p.38). The basic principles of low density and large plots had created layouts that were far superior in flexibility and character to the urban 'bye-law'_ housing of the end of the 19th. century, where densities of over 100 houses per hectare were common, when it is seen that both Letchworth and Welwyn were designed to maximum densities of 30 houses per hectare. The spaciousness thus created enabled the introduction of varying incidences of public open space for communal use, combined into the formal layouts that maintained the cohesion of these schemes, without losing the open rural atmosphere, thus avoiding what by this time had been identified by many as the soul-destroying, monotonous character of the rows of bye- law terraced workers housing of the 1880's and 1890's.

In general, however, especially in the Edwardian period, and just before and immediately after the first world war, the visual imagery of the middle-class suburban concept was to be the major feature taken up for this style of development, as epitomised in the Tree', Queen Anne architectural styles evident in Bedford Park, and subsequent schemes, that leant heavily on the vernacular interpretations of the Ails and Crafts movement. The financial and economic theories that were the basic features of the 'alternative' Garden City development concept promoted by Howard and his followers, were increasingly ignored, as irrelevant to 20lh century living. Thus was spawned the 1930's suburban housing estates, usually in expedient locations with ill-thought-out and piece-meal layouts, but displaying a host of neo-vernacular, neo-Gothic or Arts & Crafts based derivatives of architectural style. It is interesting to see that the wheel is coming around in the same manner, yet again, some 60 years later. This architectural plagiarism was to spread throughout private speculative schemes up to 1939, and the public sector designers of the newly established 'council' houses were, in their turn, to come under these derivative influences, which, however, often borrowed from the highest examples; elements of Lutyens neo-vernacular, Voysey's Arts & Crafts, and hints of Port Sunlight Tudorbethan can be .seen up and down Britain, established in the building boom of the 1930's in the south-east, or the local authority expansions of the same period further north.

## The Rise of National Planning Control

The 1930's saw the development in the south-east of faster, 'pollution-free' electric commuter line railways, radiating further and further out from London, together with the rapid growth of car ownership amongst the better-off. This created an insatiable demand for suburban housing at increasing distances into the countryside, and it was only the advent of war in 1939 that put a stop to this headlong development rush, that was actually swallowing up the very countryside, with its open spaces, upon which the speculators were attempting to capitalize (Michael Frayne: Three Streets in the Country'; B.B.C.1979). Because of this increasingly mythical notion that such developments were located in 'the open country', the provision of a reasonable proportion of open space, if any at all, within the new residential developments, occurred more by accident, than by any conscious design policies, and the result was the virtual repetition, in a lower-density suburban manner, of the ad-hoc spread of dormitory housing schemes, with all the ensuing problems of inadequate infra-structure, that had already been seen in the bye-law housing of the 1880's and '90's.

This aspect of unplanned residential development, together with problems to do with unequal land-use resource provision generally, coming on the heals of the effects of the depression, especially in the north, led to government concern in the late 1930's that was to surface in the form of three influential reports prepared just before and during the war years; the Barlow report on the dis-

tribution of indu-stry, the Uthwatt report on Compensation & Betterment (1942), and the Scott report on rural land-uses (1942).

These reports were to be crucial in setting the scene for the complete shake-up in the control of development that was embodied in the 1947 Town & Country Planning Act (Cullingworth 1986 pp.5-23), to be introduced in the wave of social reforms that were established by the first Labour Government, following the Second World War. With this act, the power to plan for all development, on a national basis, passed to the Local Planning Authorities, and a stringent system of Development Control was instigated, that, for the first time, gave those local authorities the power to insist on minimum standards (established nationally) for housing developments, controlling density, space provision for each dwelling, infrastructure layout requirements and public open space provision. Hi us effective control of speculative housing development was introduced, which would help avoid further repeats of the problems of infrastructure commonplace in the 1930's. But with the pressures for reconstruction and a new housing target of300,000 houses annually, far more crucial circumstances existed in the 1950's, that were to completely alter the character of suburban council house estates.

## The 'Modern' View of Suburbia

But to review the design origins of much of the suburban housing development in the interwar period, it is important to identify, within the lower density developments, two distinct 'typology' groups, or philosophies of design of the physical environment, as Scoffham has suggested (Scoffham 1984 p. 2). The first group, that stemming from the Arts & Crafts derivatives of the 19th century philosophies of John Rus- kin, through William Morris, Philip Webb, and W. R. Lethaby (1857- 1931), has already been mentioned. The second group, which is really more evident in the massive suburban developments of local authority housing, that only fully developed in the reconstruction and slum clearance programmes after world war II, has its roots firmly embedded in the deterministic, revolutionary architectural ideologies of the modem movement, as they had developed throughout Europe.

Since the turn of the century, a strong movement for mass housing provision had grown up in central Europe, quite different in character and culture to the thinking on housing that evolved in Britain during the same period. These influences, initially led by the design revolution evident in Vienna before the first world war, subsequently spread through Germany and France, from the 'Secession' movement (primarily led by Otto Wagner's influence), and the evolution of the Art Nouveau exponents, through to the Bauhaus (Walter Gropius and Mies Van Der Rohe) and the International Style (CLAM). The design ideas can be seen to culminate in the work and influence of Le Corbusier, with his concepts of the ideal, regimented worker's' city, built to high density using highrise blocks on stilts, to release the ground for parkland: his Ville 'Radieuse' (1935). This movement was a complete antithesis to the 'garden city' ideas of Howard with their rural community origins, and lent support to a very different view of the future of urban and suburban housing for the twentieth century.

## The European Vision

The evolution of models for mass housing throughout Western Europe during the first half of the 20th century, was strongly linked to the pressures for egalitarian reforms (stemming from such events as the Communist revolution in Russia), and the raising of urban housing standards (principally for public health reasons), of which Vienna holds many seminal examples from that period (Karl Marx Hof is perhaps the best known 'modem' example). The International style that pervades much of the British local

authority urban reconstruction housing of the late 1930's and early 1950's was an amalgam of many diverse influences, some from as far afield as the U.S.A., and Japan; and its protagonists helped bring about, a somewhat hasty abandonment of much of the tried and tested craft traditions with vernacular origins, that had been fundamental to design principles (even in industry) in Britain up until the 1940's.

This was especially so of housing, where, as has been established, the rural character of low density layouts, stemming from country community traditions, had been reiterated in the Garden City layouts and subsequently, the 'garden suburb' developments. But these native models were largely abandoned after the second world war, in favour of the new ideas of high-rise, evoked by imagery of a 'modem' world. These new urban models of blocks of flats, capable of rapid erection, were perceived to be more economical on landuse grounds, were heavily promoted by a construction industry that needed economical means of higher productivity. They also had the tacit support of the modem architecture movement throughout Europe, and were epitomised in the form of Le Corbusier's famous completed housing block example: the Unit d'Habitation in Marseille.

**The Failure of the Future Model**

Le Corbusier's mass housing theories, expressed through the ideas of La Ville Radieuse, only really make sense when related to a very 19th century view of society, with a rigidly hierarchical view of class and social structure; and to explore them in terms of the elements applicable in the post-war British context, it can be seen that his principle idea, that the open space created by the use of such high-rise buildings would be made public, regimented and 'communalised' on a vast scale, is in direct conflict to the 'houses round the village green' community image embodied in the low-density Garden City ideals of Howard's original concept, geared much more to the reinforcement of small-scale 'neighbourhoods', supporting the 'rural idyll' philosophy. It was perhaps these very dissimilarities that enabled the 'modern movement' to gain so much credibility for housing in post-war Britain, in the face of the Garden City model (theoretically much more appropriate), which, as can now be seen, actually came far closer to the perceptions of popular demand, that have resurfaced in the last 20 years. But in the 1950's rush for 'modernistic' progress in town reconstruction, this Garden City model was not seen to provide a suitable morphological form, in the drive to overcome the large-scale rehousing problems of the post-war period. By then, it was the apparent overall cheapness (MHLG 'Density of Residential Areas' 1952 p.52) created by the increase in density allied to greater height, and the speed of erection using prefabricated systems (heavily backed by the construction companies' political lobby) that brought about the abandonment of the older, tried and tested styles of layout, using low- rise, low density designs: the popular 'garden suburb' model, the doyen of the 1930's 'spec.' builder.

**The Flawed Ideal**

In the public sector implementation of the new ideals, it is worth noting that, except for the earliest post-war local authority high-rise schemes (L.C.C.'s Roehampton Lane, in 1950 is the seminal example), it was frequently the case that the original concept of a high provision of open space to numbers of dwellings, created by the low site coverage of high- rise dwelling blocks, crucial to Le Corbusier's concept, was completely lost in most of the British high- rise examples, in the pressure to develop at ever higher densities, in order to save on the high-cost inner city site areas. This, in turn, led to the complete denial of the 'grand public open space' basis of the 'Ville Radieuse', and produced the large number of randomly sited system- built high-rise blocks of the 1950's and '60's, that by the 1980's became totally unacceptable for publically

subsidised mass housing in British terms, both socially and physically. But at the time of their construction, both for the local authorities with urban renewal problems, wishing to rehouse people on _new suburban estates, and for the newly created New Town Development Corporations, these 'instant* factory-system prefabricated solutions provided higher numerical totals of houses, at a rate that was not thought possible under the more traditional means of implementation assumed for the Garden Cities. Even the New Towns, created by statute in the rush of parliamentary socialist idealism immediately after the end of the war, and theoretically taking over the mantle of the Garden City movement, were not long in modifying the details of Howard's original basic 'Utopian' concept, and hence the housing layout design practices, to suit political perceptions of the changed social and economic circumstances of Britain in the 1950's.

By the mid-1960's, the realisation began to emerge that the headlong rush into highrise development (which has never been taken up by private sector developers, except briefly in the '30's in the centre of London) had not solved the housing problem, but had actually exacerbated socially based urban and suburban problems of poorer families. This was brought into abrupt focus with the Ronan Point disaster of 1968 (Scoffham 1984 p.76), which helped to turn attention on the inadequacies of the high-rise concept, as implemented in Britain, both in tire inner areas housing redevelopment schemes, and in the mixed density peripheral suburban estates. The hidden dangers of the virtually absolute command economy, that controlled almost all housing provision in the late 1940's, and governed tire large public sector provision through the 1950's, 1960's, and into the 1970's had become apparent by the late 1970's, and while much of the public sector suburban housing of the 70's had made attempts at satisfying 'public demand' with schemes relying heavily on 'retro-vernacular' traditional images of housing types, the boom in home-ownership had ensured that the speculative builders had got there first and that the country was being covered with suburban estates not dissimilar to schemes first developed for Essex (to try to retain some 'traditional' regional character to new developments in the county) Thus once again we are entering a 'back to the future' period of quasi- traditional styles and inappropriate housing forms in the house-types and layouts being created on our suburban estates. We are left with the question: what have we learnt about housing provisions for the first half of the next century, that will avoid the kind of problems that we inherited from the first half of this'. Certainly we have not developed a clear' view of how to solve the problems of the last fifty years, and are no nearer to a model of appropriate domestic form for the future than were the designers of one hundred years ago.

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