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Abstract

Public housing policy introduced in Britain after the First World War, in the form of state-subsidised housing provision, underwent a significant change in the 1930s, when successive governments focused their attention to central redevelopment of towns, encouraging local authorities to 'build upwards' using blocks of flats, which were still a relatively novel form of building in a nation of suburban dwellers. This article uses contemporary sources to explore the views of representative architects and housing reformers, as well as those of local authority officials and the Town and Country Planning Association, one of the world's oldest environmental pressure groups, and assess the balance of opinion in the so-called houses versus flats controversy of the day. It will suggest that although there was a growing interest in flats in the field of public housing, because of entrenched opinion in favour of houses on the part of the housing professions, the actual achievements on the ground were few and far between. It will also suggest that the debate highlighted the design of flats, which eschewed some core modernist principles for a softer approach, pointing to the development of a distinctly English form of modern architecture.

Keywords: housing policy; slum clearance; garden cities; 'houses versus flats' controversy; architectural modernism; town planning; England

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Introduction

England, alongside the United States of America, has long been seen as a nation of suburban dwellers, with a strong preference among its citizens for houses and gardens away from the grime and overcrowding of the industrial city centres.[1] This tradition was reinforced by the garden city movement from the turn of the twentieth century, which represented the mainstream thinking on housing and town planning in England. Hence public housing policy introduced in the aftermath of the First World War initially concentrated its efforts on augmenting housing provision by building cottages with gardens on suburban housing estates. However, as the problem of urban squalor came to the fore in the 1930s, successive governments of the day tried to refocus their housing policy by implementing programmes of slum clearance under the Housing Acts (1930, 1933, 1935). This necessitated 'building upwards' in the centre of towns and led to a growing interest among those concerned with popular housing provision in blocks of flats, which were still a relatively novel form of building in England at the time.

Against the backdrop of this policy reorientation there ensued a lively debate among the housing professionals on how best to provide accommodation for the working population in urban areas. As Alison Ravetz, an eminent historian of housing and planning, has pointed out, central to the housing debates of the interwar period in England was the so-called houses versus flats controversy:

> Thus throughout the 1930s and 40s there was a heated controversy about the relative merits of flats and cottages. This was the more spirited because it was an extension of the old debate about tenements for the poor and the possibility, or desirability, of suburbanizing the working classes. Dressed up as the modern, labour-saving flat, the new council tenements of the 1930s did gain a lot of support from housing reformers and women's organizations, but eventually the general consensus was that flats were unsuitable for the English (if not British) way of life.[2]

Based largely on contemporary literature from the period, this article revisits the 'houses versus flats' controversy. It explores, in turn, the views and design solutions proffered by housing experts (architects and town planners) and their professional institutions, by the foremost propagandist body in the form of Town and Country Planning Association, and by local authority officials at the forefront of housing operations in their localities. It also tries to show how the protagonists intersected with each other with their various points of view, in order to assess the balance of opinion on this vital issue facing those involved in popular housing provision in England during the 1930s.[3]

Architects and town planners on flats

Technical experts in charge of housing and town planning could have a formative influence on public policy because of their competence on the subject. In this instance, the knowledge and outlook of the traditional professions concerned with the built environment, i.e. architects, civil engineers and surveyors, were informed by the prevailing attitudes of their respective professional institutions, many of which were negative or cautious towards the idea of flats at the time.

First of all, at its root, English architecture of the interwar years remained largely eclectic and historicist in outlook, relying on past styles to dress up buildings. The oft-quoted outburst of Sir Reginald Blomfield against new architecture epitomised the conservative attitude of the English architectural establishment:

> [The new architecture] is essentially Continental in its origin and inspiration, and it claims as a merit that it is cosmopolitan. As an Englishman and proud of his country, I detest and despise cosmopolitanism.[4]

In particular, English architecture had prided itself on the achievements on the domestic front. Influenced by William Morris and the Arts and Crafts movement, these were the houses designed by architects like Philip Webb, Richard Norman Shaw and C.F.A. Voysey. Unpretentious, simple but dignified in style,[5] they provided the model which characterised the cottage building of model industrial villages down to garden suburbs. When the president of the oldest independent school of architecture in Britain spoke out in 1927, he felt that this cherished tradition was under threat from modernism:

> Thus, before the war, instead of England going to America or the Continent for ideas, the whole world was coming here to study how a house should be built and set in the landscape and – whatever our shortcomings in public buildings might have been – we at least had a style in domestic architecture of which any country might be proud.
>
> It is this tradition which "modernism" in architecture has attacked, alleging that all existing traditions are worn out. The apostles of this new creed are therefore attempting to set up new standards which – if they are to be judged by the work actually finished on the Continent – deride every accepted canon of grouping, proportion, sense of structure, relation of solids to voids, and the use of mouldings or ornaments of any kind.[6]

For many in the architectural world, the achievement of English domestic architecture, which would have been associated their minds with the English cottage tradition was not easily to be parted with.

Just as the 1935 Housing Bill was raising the question of the respective merits of houses and flats, the Institution of Municipal and County Engineers (representing local government technical officers) and the Town Planning Institute issued a joint memorandum in favour of houses. The memorandum at the outset admitted the need for a limited provision of flats in some large cities and in certain circumstances such as where the cost of land was high, but it was 'strongly of the opinion that houses are preferable to flats'. There followed a justification for this preference based upon the reasoning which was often echoed in other debates about houses and cottages at this time:

> 2. The strong tradition of home-life, which is a characteristic of the British people and a principal factor in social stability and contentment, is stimulated by the family occupancy of separate and self-contained dwellings, with the privacy and sense of individuality which the smaller house provides in a far greater degree than the flat.
>
> 3. A private garden, however small, is preferable to a share in a communal garden. It is a place where a man can indulge a hobby by growing flowers and vegetables (the latter helping the household budget) and where the family can enjoy air and sunshine without the disturbance and noise which occurs in a communal garden.
>
> 4. It is especially desirable that a family which includes young children should have a private garden where they can play within their mother's easy reach…
>
> 5. The long flights of stairs in blocks of flats have several drawbacks. They are dangerous to the health of expectant mothers and of mothers carrying children…The use of lifts would, of course, help to reduce these difficulties but they would be very costly.
>
> 6. Generally speaking, the accommodation provided by the small house is greater and more convenient than that provided by a flat. Moreover, the house is generally quieter, being free from disturbances due to the audibility between flats.
>
> 7. From the economic point of view flats have nothing to recommend them as compared with houses…they are more costly to erect than houses containing similar accommodation.[7]

At the same time, the memorandum threw doubt upon the claim, often made by the advocates of flats, that 'the majority of tenants, in central areas, to be housed are employed in the immediate vicinity'. It felt that it was better policy for the municipalities to spend money in providing adequate and cheap transport between the outskirts and the central area than 'expending extra money on the erection of flats in the centre of the city'. It also suggested as an alternative to flats, two-storey cottage flats[8] which, 'if properly planned, are generally as satisfactory as small houses.[9]

These were, then, the considered views representing the town planning professions as regards house and flats. Yet some others feared the political consequences of accommodating large sections of the working class in flats. Thus, a speaker at a district meeting of the Institution of Municipal and County Engineers thought that the government's housing policy would foster communism:

> If it were the intention of the present Government to encourage and strengthen Communism, there was a likelihood of success. In those localities where flats predominated whether it be in Austria, Glasgow or the East End of London – there was to be found a spirit of Communism. Perhaps such a possibility was in the mind of the Government.[10]

The Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), the most representative body of the profession, maintained an academic outlook, standing aloof from the competing styles in architecture. It included among its membership, prominent members of the Modern Architectural Research Group (MARS),[11] which was the British chapter of the Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM) and represented the nucleus of architectural modernism, and a small but growing number of official architects (architects in the employ of local authorities and public bodies), alongside traditionalists and more pragmatic exponents of the profession. However, there was little doubt that architects with modernist inclinations made up only a tiny minority. F.R.S. Yorke and Colin Penn, both members of the MARS group, wrote at the time of 'the oldest and most powerful body in the profession' that 'the bulk of its members, as of the profession as a whole, are academic practitioners of one form or another of revivalism, of the coarse "modernistic" style (in vouge for cinemas and by-pass factories)'.[12] Raymond Unwin, one of the foremost architect planners of the day, on taking up the presidency of RIBA in 1933, delivered a swingeing attack on flats in his inaugural address:

> There is a great deal of talk about housing families in vast steel and concrete warehouses, and of the great economy, and increased urban benefits, whatever these may be, to follow from so doing. It may be that the modern family will like living in a few cells in a vast pile of biscuit boxes. I do not know. That has never appealed me as an attractive idea of a home…
>
> If people do want to be housed in big masses in the centre of a town by all means let them be so housed; nor do I want to interfere with the fascinating game of bricks on a large scale which many of our designers are enjoying at the present time; but I do want us to be serious and careful about it…
>
> It costs us in London about £300 per family more for each family we house in a tenement block in the centre than for each family we house in a little cottage on the outskirts of London…We know nothing yet of the conductivity of sound in buildings of that type, when used as dwellings.

> I am wondering if I lived in one of these cells how many gramophones and loud speakers I should have to hear at once…
>
> I have been fortunate in bringing up my small family in a house where the children could run in and out of the garden…There is education, mental, moral and physical in contact with the earth, the weather and growing things – animal and flowers…The difference between tenement and a house is to me not one of degree, it is one of kind. It is the difference between a home in which a family is likely to grow healthily, and a mere house to contain them.[13]

Unwin refuted the charge that all this cottage building was eating up rural land by making the following claims:

> According to the last census returns I calculate that the whole of the families in England and Wales living in houses built to 10 to the acre would require 1,599 square miles. The County of Somerset contains rather more, so you could house the whole of the population of England and Wales in the County of Somerset…
>
> …it is remarkable that houses, each with a garden on the basis of 10 or 12 to the acre, produce far more food than on the average is produced when the land is being farmed.[14]

The RIBA, as a body, did not make any pronouncements on the question of flats, but it was evident that the allegiance of the majority of its members lay elsewhere.

The Town and Country Planning Association as a counter lobby against flats

Raymond Unwin was, of course, a prominent figure in the so-called garden city movement,[15] which provided a vociferous counter lobby against flats. The movement was founded on the publication of Ebenezer Howard's book, *To-morrow: a Peaceful Path to Real Reform* in 1898. As is well known, the crux of his reformist idea was the development of self-contained towns of limited size (a maximum population of 32,000), with ample greenery and all the necessary services and industries. With his garden cities, Howard sought to realise the happy marriage of town and country, 'in which all the advantages of the most energetic and active town life, with all the beauty of and delight of the country, may be secured in perfect combination'.[16] When a town reached its maximum size, satellite towns of similar character would be established at a distance. In the following year the Garden Cities Association (renamed the Garden Cities and Town-Planning Association in 1909, and from 1941 known as the Town and Country Planning Association – TCPA), one of the world's oldest environmental pressure groups, was founded with the express purpose of setting up garden cities. The idea was later defined in the following terms:

> A Garden City is a town designed for healthy living and industry: of a size that makes possible a full measure of social life, but not larger; surrounded by a rural belt; the whole of the land being in public ownership, or held in trust for the community.[17]

Letchworth (begun 1903) and Welwyn (from 1920)[18] were the only two garden cities, in the proper sense of the term, to be established, but the idea and these exemplars attracted worldwide attention and had an enormous influence on modern town planning.

Unwin, who was deeply involved in the planning of Letchworth, was a pragmatist with a very strong reformist strain. His overriding concern was to provide a desirable residential environment within the means of the ordinary family. And to realise his belief in the desirability of low-density housing, he sought economy in layout and construction of houses: cutting down on road construction by the ingenious use of cul-de-sacs and greens; and emphasizing simplicity in design and standardisation of components. Both these techniques would help offset the high cost of land involved in a low-density scheme.[19] Unwin also took the crucial step of advocating garden (satellite) suburbs, attached to, but separated from an established city, as a more practicable way of housing development on garden city lines.[20]

The TCPA itself stayed faithful to the ideal of garden cities, and also took to the advocacy of town planning as a legitimate extension of its work. Through most of the interwar years, the Association remained a small and impecunious body with a membership hovering around the 500 mark. Unwin chided the purists in the garden city movement for their narrow scope:

> Is it not possible that our movement has exhibited, beyond the date when it was necessary, too much desire to keep the garden city movement a purist movement free from the contamination of town expansion, with the result that we have somewhat lost influence which we should be exerting in this matter?[21]

The movement also seems to have suffered from its image problem. So Geroge Hicks, Secretary of the Amalgamated Union of Building Trade Workers, raised his doubts as to the class nature of the movement:

> I seem to detect in this movement towards garden cities, not so much a movement of the people, as a movement of a certain class of people – a certain section of the middle class. Garden cities are becoming, as it were, a practical ideal of bourgeois villadom; a rest haven or happy valley of the higher paid strata of workers, professional workers, civil servants, and so on.[22]

In turn, a middle-class observer like George Orwell, seemed to detect, rightly or wrongly, some crankish elements in the movement:

> If only the sandals and the pistachio-coloured shirts could be put in a pile and burnt, and every vegetarian, teetotaller, and creeping Jesus sent home to Welwyn Garden City to do his yoga exercise quietly![23]

Nonetheless, as an active propagandist body, the TCPA tried to create a broad-based movement embracing all sections of the society and assiduously cultivated a network of support for its cause. For instance, it had on its Council M.P.s from all the main parties as well as eminent town planners and housing reformers of the day.[24] The TCPA, apart from defending the integrity of garden cities, first encouraged the framework of regional planning, whose procedure could be used to find sites for future satellite towns. It also started to look to the government for the adoption of the garden city policy as the means of realising decentralisation, which became one of the planks of the TCPA. Its advantages were admittedly to be great:

> It brings the workers close to their work; it makes possible the provision of comfortable houses and gardens, with facilities for recreation; it saves countless hours in travelling from home to workshop and country house; it relieves, in consequence, much of the congestion of traffic.[25]

Although the TCPA failed to achieve a third garden city, it bestowed the title 'semi-garden city' to Wythenshawe,[26] a municipal satellite suburb, 'laid out on garden city principles' with some industries, built outside Manchester and designed by Barry Parker, Unwin's architectural partner, and saw it as a part realisation of the movement's ideal.[27]

The TCPA gradually extended its scope of propaganda to argue a case for national planning. By the middle of the 1930s, a broad North-South divide in economy and consequently in social conditions was becoming increasingly clear. The regions with declining, old staple industries (coal, steel, shipbuilding, cotton) suffered high unemployment and the loss of rateable value, which deprived the local authorities of the resources to cope with the higher burden of relief and the provision of essential services. While on the other hand, in the South and the Home Counties, where the new industries (electrical appliances, chemical, automobile, aircraft) flourished, the local authorities found themselves unable to cater for the massive influx of industries and population, leading to further outward growth of towns in a haphazard manner.[28] The primary concern of the TCPA was for the problem of uncontrolled growth of towns, but in the emerging climate of a wider debate about national policies and a national plan, this was linked to the question of the national distribution of industry and population. Thus Frederic Osborn, Secretary of the TCPA and one of the most militant lobbyists of garden cities, wrote:

> What we stand for in this journal is the control of the size of towns, and equally the preservation of the countryside from scattered and ribbon building, through the guidance of the location of factories and business premises under a national plan. Decentralisation of industry and population from congested areas into smaller towns and new towns designed with all the resources of modern technique, and surrounded by a permanent country belt, would be practicable under such a plan.[29]

The TCPA's opposition to the flats stemmed, in the first instance, from its adherence to garden city principles, which the Association tried to impart to the provision of houses for the working-class people:

> …whether new housing schemes were undertaken by private or public enterprise, we favoured open development in suburban and rural areas…[30]

And in the circumstances of the 1930s, the TCPA took the view that the government's encouragement of the central redevelopment of towns acted as a barrier to decentralisation:

> To build up on the site of former slums huge phalansteries on the pattern of Vienna, Berlin and Leipzig…will keep the people in our overcrowded towns and make the removal of industries to the new centres impossible.[31]

Significantly, in the new statement of policy issued in 1937, the TCPA added a clause opposing flats:

> 7. To point out that high flats and tenements, and other developments that increase or maintain high density in congested areas, while they seem to be forced on large towns by existing conditions, accentuate rather than solve the problems of slums and transport, while providing an environment entirely unsuited to family life.[32]

Henceforth, the TCPA's opposition to flats became an integral part of its campaign for the decentralisation of industry and population into the new towns.

Local authorities and the building of flats

Local authorities, which were directly responsible for the construction and management of council housing, displayed a range of attitudes towards the building of flats. Their bottom line was that flats were costly and therefore an extra burden on the rates. Association of Municipal Corporation (AMC), the main body representing the interests of local authorities, was one of the major organisations consulted by the government in its preparation for the 1935 Housing Bill. The government's initial intention was to restrict its subsidy to central rehousing in flats. This came up against the opposition of the AMC which argued

that ‘it was by no means always necessary to rehouse centrally’ and that the proposal ‘amounted to an encouragement to local authorities to incur unnecessary expenditure’.[33] The AMC, in principle, was ‘not favourably inclined to rebuilding on the site because of the high costs’.[34] The local authority representatives also feared that their effort at suburban housebuilding from the 1920s might be undermined. This was because ‘tenants of suburban estates without amenities’ would, in the event of large-scale central redevelopment, ‘certainly try to get back into the centre of towns with shops and amusements’.[35] It was felt that making the central areas more attractive to live in would exacerbate the overcrowding problem. Of course, there were those more committed to the conventional form of housing development. Alderman Miles E. Mitchell, chairman of the housing committee of the Manchester City Council, was one of them:

> I am strongly of the opinion that proper and effective housing of the people, especially in Manchester, can best be achieved by the provision of self-contained house with a garden for each family. Family life, as I understand it, can only be fully attained where each family is given a separate house in pleasing surroundings and with proper and effective control regarding the number of houses to be erected upon a given area of land.[36]

And understandably he was strongly against ‘housing their people in masses one upon the other’. As chairman of the AMC at the time, Mitchell pressed for the subsidy to be made available when rehousing was carried out in suburban cottages.[37]

The case of Birmingham illustrated the difficulty of accepting flats in a city with a long tradition of low-density suburban housing.[38] As some European countries had a greater experience of building flats, Birmingham was one of the cities that sent continental delegations in the early 1930s to study their housing schemes.[39] By then there was sufficient agreement on the Conservative Unionist-governed City Council about the need to provide a large number of accommodation units in the central areas. There was also a growing awareness that the reserves of building land within the boundaries would dry up. Furthermore, the city’s sprawling suburbs had come in for criticism. Notwithstanding, all parties were divided and a majority was in opposition when the continental delegation’s proposal to erect ‘a model colony of flats’ consisting of 500 to 1,000 dwellings was discussed by the City Council. In the end, the matter, together with the minority recommendation for small blocks of flats was further referred to its Estates Committee for a detailed report as to layout and cost. Many members, both Unionist and Labour, condemned flat as ‘barracks’ and ‘institutions’, arguing that ‘Birmingham people preferred single houses with their own bits of gardens’. For the majority of delegation members, as for others, who took a more realistic view of the situation in the central areas, the flats were the only ‘practicable’ solutions that met

the need of the people. And it was essential to build large blocks of flats so that all the necessary amenities could be provided to make them attractive and convenient.[40] The Borough Labour Party in Birmingham contained several vociferous opponents of flats, and the majority of rank-and-file members were reported to be against them. One Labour alderman, who was on the housing delegation, was at pains to point out that their objections was misplaced, as 'it was an objection to flats as they were known in Birmingham, which could not be compared with the flats on the Continent'.[41]

The report of the Estates Committee, however, rejected the large blocks of flats with amenities recommended by the majority of the delegation as too expensive. The minority proposal for small blocks of flats was also turned down. Instead, the report recommended small houses and 'maisonettes' (an euphemism for two-storey cottage flats) to be used for rehousing in the central areas. The comparison of costs (all exclusive of land) showed that the estimated cost per flat in large blocks with amenities, assuming two- and three-bedroom flats were built in equal proportion, worked out at £479; two- and three-bedroom dwellings in cottage flats could be constructed at an average cost of £274 and £348 per unit respectively; and the cost of small houses was estimated to be £333 for two-bedroom units and £340 for three-bedroom units.[42] The City Engineer and Surveyor later articulated the overriding considerations of the Council at the time:

> …from a financial point of view there is little advantage in it. The higher cost of constructing flats more than counterbalances the higher cost per dwelling for land for houses. For accommodation equivalent to various types of houses and flatted cottages, flats gave little, if any, advantages as regards rents, even with the increased amount of subsidy.[43]

Cottage flats were clearly a compromise solution reflecting the division of opinion on the Council, but the idea of a model estate of flats was kept alive in Birmingham. Later in the decade, with 'the growing rehousing problem, persuasion from a pro-flat Minister of Health and a further shift of middle-class opinion away from the suburban ideal',[44] the Birmingham City Council gradually came to accept flats in principle. Also influential in this policy reorientation was the presence of the new City Engineer and Surveyor, Herbert Manzoni, whose chief ambition was to redevelop Birmingham's slums on modern lines.

Despite the existence of considerable resistance to flats among the professions and local politicians, and of a counter lobby in the form of the TCPA, a certain amount of flat building by local authorities did take place especially in the 1930s, mainly in London and Liverpool, both traditional centres of flats.[45] Some other cities, such as Birmingham, Leeds and Manchester, also built flats for their slum clearance schemes (see table below).

Number of local authority dwellings (houses and flats) for which tenders or estimates were approved by the Ministry of Health, 1930-1939 (England and Wales)

Year ending 31st March	Ordinary non-parlour houses	Dwellings in buildings of 3 or more storeys (flats)
1930-31	43,335	628
1931-32	54,066	1,593
1932-33	42,047	1,297
1933-34	38,761	870
1934-35	36,482	2,870
1935-36	61,220	4,990
1936-37	34,145	5,468
1937-38	32,615	4,851
1938-39	30,030	5,352

Source: Compiled from *Annual Reports of the Ministry of Health*, 1930-1939 (London: HMSO, 1931-1940)

In general, these flats either took the form of neo-Georgian blocks or were in 'modernistic' style. The neo-Georgian blocks, more common in London and Liverpool, were characterised by 'front facades with high, small-paned windows and rear elevations dominated by the access balconies and staircase turrets'. A modernistic block was one which tried achieve something of a modern style by picking up 'some of the accidental attributes, rather than essentials that were based on a more adventurous and honest use of modern materials'.[46] The London County Council (LCC) thus described one of its blocks (the Oaklands estate in Clapham), completed in 1936:

> The external elevation exhibits the modern tendency towards a horizontal effect, which is emphasised by the flat roof, external balconies and alternating bands of coloured brickwork. In keeping with the horizontal effect produced by these features, wide windows in steel frame have been introduced and these give a maximum amount of sunlight.[47]

In terms of housing standards achieved, many of the local authority flats built in the 1930s incorporated some of the features adopted in modernist housing schemes on the Continent, like the staircase access, private balconies, better fittings and dust chutes. Overall dwelling sizes were increased and larger estates were equipped with communal facilities. Kennet House (Manchester), a scheme of 181 flats, contained a washhouse, community hall and playgrounds in addition to the four shops.[48] The most ambitious of all the local authority scheme in the 1930s was the Quarry Hill Flats

in Leeds. The scheme consisted of 938 dwellings built on a 26-acre site within half a mile of the city centre and planned as a self-contained community. For the main block, the perimeter layout on the Viennese model made famous by the Karl Marx Hof was adopted on a vast scale, with a fortress-like, curving façade extending to a great length around the periphery of the site. The height varied from two to eight storeys and units of four storeys and over were provided with lifts. A novel type of water-borne refuse disposal system was installed in every dwelling, and the scheme included a communal laundry, playgrounds, ornamental gardens and shops.[49] For its construction, the new Housing Director (who doubled as City Architect), R.A.H. Livett, opted to use an early form of prefabrication called the Mopin system, which had been developed in France. With the extensive use of pre-cast concrete slabs produced in a site factory, the system required a minimum amount of skilled labour, which Livett felt was in short supply, and also promised great economies in building costs, out of which it was hoped to provide many extras on the estate. In the event, the novel construction method led to teething problems, especially in organizing the site factory and in coordinating production with the actual erection. Consequently, the contract dragged out over years, to which the completion of community buildings and grounds fell victim, and the promised savings did not materialise. Nonetheless, the cost per dwelling with the lifts and the new refuse system was still not far above the national average, justifying the use of a modern building system in economic terms.[50]

Official architects and English approaches to modernism

R.A.H. Livett, along with Lancelot Keay (Housing Director, Liverpool), was one of the few who took a positive stance on the question of flats in the interwar period. The majority of architects working for local authorities regarded flats at best as an unfortunate necessity. Livett spoke of his decision to use flats in redevelopment schemes in the following terms:

> We claim that in Leeds we are ahead of other cities in the standard set up for inner ring development. I fully appreciate that there is still a prejudice towards flats and that if flats are to be a success it is important that amenities, comparable with those of a cottage must be provided and the maximum amount of open space must be available.
>
> It is mainly because of the latter that I so strongly support vertical and not horizontal development.[51]

Keay was equally confident of advantages of flats:

> It is because I am confident that it is possible to replace the slums and to rehouse the overcrowded families within the districts they at present occupy by the process of redevelopment that I suggest there need be no anxiety in the minds of those who associate another housing drive by the local authorities with a further absorption of agricultural land…The tenant is saved the cost of transport, which is really an added rent charge, and avoids the serious waste of time which travelling to and from some outlying district involves, and the community avoids additional transport difficulties in the already congested traffic roads. Light and air, and ample space for recreation, can be provided in the redevelopment area, and existing amenity buildings, services, etc., will continue in use and the duplication of these services will be avoided.[52]

One might have expected some meaningful interactions to have taken place between the minority of official architects favourably disposed to flats and the modernists, especially since some of the local authority housing schemes displayed modernist influences. But the reality was rather more complex. This was probably due in part to the fact that the architectural establishment of the day, represented by RIBA, still regarded official architecture as somewhat disreputable, which involved a great deal of committee work, compromises and alterations, leading to unenterprising works of architecture.[53] Frederick Gibberd, a MARS member, for instance, was an exponent of this point of view and continued to champion the idea of the artist-architect.[54] Maxwell Fry, on the other hand, paid tribute to the achievements in Liverpool under Keay. He described their architecture as 'an adventure' and saw it as a fruit of the group working method, whereby the chief architect had got together a team of people who experimented with new ideas and collectively carried out the building programme of large official bodies. But *The Modern Flat*, an influential visual statement of architectural modernism in the 1930s by F.R.S. Yorke and Gibberd, included no example of local authority flats from England.[55] One bone of contention seemed to be the continuing use of the courtyard layout, disapproved of by the modernists, in most of the local authority schemes.[56] When the Birmingham Corporation held an open competition for working-class flats in 1936, to be adopted for one of its slum clearance schemes, the winning design was a scheme employing a modified form of the courtyard layout.[57] The Architects' and Technicians' Organisation, a progressive body representing those in the technical professions and building trades, promptly wrote in to give its opinion, and criticised, among other things, 'The provision of closed courts, with the consequent tendency towards shaded angles and the accentuation of noise from children playing in them'. It was

certainly not one of the more ambitious designs and had other undesirable features such as the balcony access, small private balconies and inadequate provision of cupboards.[58]

However, there were also indications that the neo-Georgian blocks and 'modernistic' flats were actively endorsed by influential schools of architecture, in place of a more modern solution, exemplified in this case by the choice of layout design. Thus, Charles Reilly, the doyen of the Liverpool School of Architecture, derided the more logical German approach, in turn extolling the virtues of flat schemes in Liverpool and Manchester:

> …we shall soon be placing Liverpool and Manchester before Vienna for this class of work. Admittedly these buildings are not conceived nor laid out with the mathematical precision to get the maximum sun, as if one lived by sunlight alone, that a German architect would strive for. He would place his thin blocks of flats marching across the town, one behind the other, like a regiment of gaunt grenadiers. That is not our way, nor would its regularity appeal to us, however many trees are planted in between the blocks. We have enough of that sort of repetition left over by the nineteenth-century bye-law streets. Keay's great groups, while providing an abundance of light and air, give a sense of communal life comparable to the grat court of Trinity, Cambridge. That is an element, to my thinking, worth a little sacrifice of the maximum sunlight, for with it goes, in his hands, inspiring architectural shapes as well.[59]

Indeed, Keay's own views on the implications of using reinforced concrete seemed to concur in this English approach to the planning of flats. Referring to the competition for reinforced concrete flats for the working class initiated by the Cement Marketing Company in 1936,[60] he was reported to have said:

> …it seemed to him that many of the competitors missed one of the essential points about reinforced concrete. It was a material which could be made to flow in this or that direction, to help and not hinder planning; yet so many of the competitors followed traditional forms of planning, and even adopted type plans which had appeared from time to time in technical journals and in reports.[61]

In 1934, an exhibition was held by the RIBA, in honour of Walter Gropius, who was in brief exile in England before moving on to the United States. He, of course, did much to popularise the advantages of parallel blocks. On the opening of the exhibition, the *Journal of the Royal Institute British Architects* had this to say:

> We could do with a smattering of the Athenian quality of appreciative curiosity, and even if it is neither desirable, nor to be expected that all England should go wildly enthusiastic about a

> manner of building and design which is clearly foreign to the desires of a great part of the architects and the public in this country, it is none the less our clear duty to be intelligently aware of what is going on and to do honour to such an outstanding educationalist and architect as Walter Gropius.[62]

The widely held view, then, was that modern architecture as it developed on the Continent and applied to housing, to flat building in particular, was somehow too rigid and had a cold, scientific outlook, which felt uncomfortable to English tastes. It certainly seemed unfair to equate any uniformity or regularity seen in continental schemes with the legacy of bye-law housing, but in contrast with the modernist principles, the English approach appeared to lay more stress on individuality and a sense of balance in the planning of flats. F.R. Yerbury, an architectural photographer and one time Secretary of the Architectural Association, who did much to familiarise English architects with the new developments abroad, was compelled to make a comparison, when he said that the English attitude was 'to build housing round the people rather than force the people into preconceived ideas about housing'.[63] This was precisely the practice followed in the laying out of a cottage estate, as preached by Raymond Unwin:

> The designer must become, by the exercising of his intelligence and imagination, so conscious of the life of the people – both the family life in the dwellings, and their communal life in the estate – that he can conceive of arrangements and relations which will take the fullest advantage of all the opportunities which the site affords, to create an environment likely to promote healthy and pleasant living, active social life, and convenient working conditions.[64]

'Houses versus flats' controversy

As we have seen, the debate about 'the relative merits of flats and cottages' itself, was fought out on a number of fronts: that of tradition and custom, on social and economic grounds. Those in favour of flats had an uphill battle on their hands, as they had to counter some of more extreme charges made against them. Thus, there were implicit suggestions that flat living stunted the growth of children and produced an inferior race.[65] To which Lancelot Keay would give his rhetorical retort:

> …is it less possible to raise an A1 community in a properly planned township of flats than in a garden city or suburb? Is there any doubt that the rising generation in the great continental cities of Europe will not be as fit physically and morally as the children of Wythenshawe and Dagenham and Norris Green?[66]

Criticism of flats based on prejudice and misconception was evident among the public and the professions alike. In 1935, at the height of the debate, *The Listener*, a weekly magazine published by the BBC, carried out a small sample questionnaire to find out how well-informed average listeners were about current affairs. One of the questions asked them if they would like to live in a flat or a house and to state the reason. The overwhelming response was for houses and against flats. Privacy, comfort, health and one's own garden were representative answers given for the respondents' preference. These were, after all, the staple arguments for a house. But the way in which some respondents described their dislike of flats showed how much their views were coloured by the negative images of out-of-date block dwellings and shared tenements: '…no one else to worry you by trampling on the stairs an'all'; 'Always smell of soapsuds in a flat'; 'Foul air rises up staircases in flat'; or '…there are too many restrictions in a flat'.[67]

In the same year, alarmed at the apparent encouragement given to flat building in the new Housing Act, a number of architects, including Louis de Soissons and George Grey Wornum, wrote a joint letter to *The Times*, to criticize 'the tenement, even of to-day', urging the advantages of cottage estates. Dismissing 'mere improvements in equipment', they alleged that such shortcomings as the lack of playgrounds and 'unbearably noisy' courtyards in blocks of flats were 'irradicable'.[68] In this instance, the MARS, in reply, argued that high flats spaced apart had precisely the advantage of preserving 'maximum portion of the site for gardens and recreation', and stressed the labour-saving possibilities of centralised services, which could only be economically provided in this form of development. On the question of noisy courtyards, it stated:

> In a properly planned scheme courtyards would be naturally non-existent…the pre-war enclosed-court principle has long since been discredited in favour of parallel blocks separated by wide open spaces.[69]

Sometimes, architects had to contend with and give in to local customs, which stood in the way of the rational planning of flats. Anthony Tripe (one of the architects responsible for the winning design in the Birmingham Flats competition) was quoted as saying thus:

> In the Midlands people still insisted on a coal flue in the living room, partly so that some of their refuse could be burned and partly so that the children could be sent out to collect odd pieces of wood. To avoid a smoky flue on the top floor, he had found that it was necessary to have at least 18 ft. of draw above the top fire place which affected the design of the building considerably.[70]

Likewise, R.A.H. Livett, who expressed his wish to 'see 9 by 9 flue vanish altogether', installed coal fires at Quarry Hill, because 'Yorkshire 'folk' still baked their own bread and wanted coal fires for that purpose'.[71]

On the other side of the divide, for those who favoured cottages, the stock argument drew on the English housing tradition, of having long lived in a self-contained house with its own front door and a patch of land. And in the course of the debate, many argued that a house and garden provided the most suitable environment for family life and hence was socially desirable. Moreover, from the point of view of the convenience and health of the resident, greater privacy and individual open space in the form of a garden that this type of development afforded were important practical advantages, which could be turned against the advocates of flats. Geoffrey Boumphrey, engineer and writer who was in the forefront of popular propaganda for flats, put his side of the case in a radio debate:

> … the flat-dweller can have real privacy and bigger gardens. What privacy is there in the average cottage? You have to put a net curtain before your front windows to stop the passer-by looking in. The garden is overlooked from three sides. Ten to one the bedrooms look on to other people's back gardens. In the properly built flat no window can be overlooked at all… The one trouble is that you cannot have your garden actually round your door… It would be a communal garden there, your own may be two or three hundred yards away; but you will have the balcony, which might be quite enough to absorb the energies of all those who are not really keen gardeners. And by the way, why do town planners assume that everyone is a keen gardener, and that every house is full of babies?[72]

It appeared that he was making some pertinent points, not to be lost on the pro-cottage lobby. On this occasion, Ernest Simon, a Liberal politician who was active for planning in Manchester, responded with a quip about the difficulty of having a domestic row or borrowing a little money in private in a flat. He emphasised the practical advantages of having a private garden: for growing flowers and vegetables; for children's play; and for doing odd jobs around the house.[73]

Simon was also a respected housing reformer, with a keen interest in satellite towns, hence his involvement in establishing Wythenshawe. At the same time, he was well aware of the advances being made in the building of flats and was level-headed enough to see the need for some flats in his own Manchester. Notwithstanding, Simon touched upon a vital aspect in the debate when he expressed the view that,

> With the comparatively restricted amount of space available when working-class flats are being built at a density of forty or fifty to the acre it must always be difficult to secure much privacy; it can never be the same thing as having one's own cottage standing in its own garden.
>
> The position is very similar as regards noise; the trouble is that it is almost impossible to avoid noise with a large number of families living at close quarters… [74]

Interestingly, a similar point was made succinctly by an LCC architect, with regard to the planning of flats:

> You are up against the innate desire of the English working man and his wife to have a place of their own, a self-contained flat, and the LCC flat designing is based upon that principle. You cannot get our folk to take advantage of any communal amenity. [75]

Thus, if it was the garden that was appreciated for its many practical uses, then equally it was a form of communal way of life, 'of families living t close quarters', implied by flats that was an anathema to many people.

The fact remained that the majority of council housing erected in the 1930s were laid out on suburban areas following the garden city principles, although, by then, 'estate layout had become fossilised into large-scale geometric patterns' and houses themselves displayed 'crudely utilitarian styles'.[76] The local authority flats which were built normally formed part of slum clearance schemes in the centre of towns and catered, in the min, for tenants displaced from slums. There was a marked improvement in the standard of accommodation provided in these flats, but they were still seen as a somewhat inferior type of dwelling with locational compensations. The houses versus flats debate and some social survey findings did throw light on the shortcomings of the existing form of housing development.[77] The immediate consequence of this criticism was, understandably, to seek improvements in the quality life on existing estates. The New Estates Community Committee had been formed by the National Council of Social Service with the collaboration of a few other organisations to meet the social needs of ill-planned housing estates. The Committee encouraged the formation and growth of community associations and campaigned for the establishment of community centres on new estates.[78] Likewise, for tenants living on outlying estates, transport departments of some local authorities made special fare concessions.[79]

Alternatives to the dichotomy of houses and flats

Another significant development in the housing debate saw some housing experts starting to argue for alternatives to the dichotomy of houses and flats. Although the case for the rehousing of people

in new towns had vociferous support in the form of the TCPA, this was not thought to be immediately practicable. And with some flat building by the local authorities in the centre of towns, it appeared that the choice increasingly fell into one of two stereotyped categories. Elizabeth Denby, housing consultant, expressed her apprehensions:

> … we have apparently nothing between 12 houses to the acre, which cannot be architecturally treated and which is impossible in the central areas of towns, and blocks of flats which have nothing to offer the people who inhabit them for their leisure hours.[80]

It was felt that there was scope for some intermediate form of planning in public housing. On th one hand, people like Denby and the architect, Arthur Trystan Edwards, attempted to revive the terrace house in its modern form. Trystan Edwards demonstrated that self-contained cottages with gardens in terraces of plain rectangular contour – dubbed 'High Density Cottages' by *The Builder* – could be built economically at a density comparable to that of flats. He contended that this form of development met the wishes of the wage earners themselves, who were to be rehoused.[81] Similarly, Denby recalled 'The rows of terrace cottages built in the Regency days, with a small garden in front and a long one behind' and argued that their popularity called for the redevelopment of central areas 'in this form for the poorer families with young children'.[82] More importantly, however, in the light of subsequent developments, as distinguished a town planner as Patrick Abercrombie started to talk in terms of houses and flats:

> … as regards the building themselves theoretically and even practically it would be possible to re-build cottages in the central areas … and on the other hand there is no reason why flats should not be built on the outskirts.[83]

Elsewhere he was suggesting that there was 'room for both' alluding to the possibility of providing different types of dwellings for different groups in society: house for families and children; and flats for childless couples.[84]

Concluding Comments

During the 1930s the government's policy of central area redevelopment envisaged large-scale clearances of obsolete working-class housing and its replacement by estates of multi-storey housing. Often modernist achievements on the Continent were held up as a model to be followed. However, the expectations were not fulfilled. The main reason for this was the sustained resistance against this type of housing development on the part of local authorities and the housing professions, so that the building of flats was confined to only a few large cities. For all their advocacy of modern flats, the modernists and

like-minded local authority architects only held a marginal position in the debate and the actual practice of public housing. The cost factor also continued to work against them. Even so, the MARS was adamant about the feasibility of modern flats. It maintained that all existing flats were but 'a partial compromise with irrational development' and would point to 'rationalized organization and carefully studied design' , to bring down the building cost of flats.[85] Lastly, in the course of the houses versus flats controversy during the 1930s, the exchanges between professionals and the actual built examples revealed a distinctly English approach to the design of flats, which eschewed a rigorous application of modernist principles and embraced a softer and more flexible notion of modern architecture.[86]

Hopes of those arguing the case for modern flats were pinned on central redevelopment to realise a truly residential quarter on modernist lines. As one MARS member wrote in 1937:

> We have long been given the credit for being good at cottages. Now we have begun to tackle the reconstruction of towns. It is only a beginning. But it is something to think about when those acres of miserable, petty repetition which you see from the train, begin to make you feel that England's industrial towns are beyond all redemption.[87]

These remarks were to remain prophetic, until the impact of the Second World War appeared to open up fresh possibilities of applying new ideas in popular housing provision. But in the 1930s, the majority of local authorities found the redevelopment of the central areas of their towns unattractive, not least because of the social and financial implication of building flats. 'Undoubtedly flats go very much against the grain with an enormous number of people',[88] asserted a Liberal M.P. during the debate on the 1935 Housing Bill. Certainly, the opponents of flats often claimed that houses and not flats met the people's wishes, but there was as yet no serious attempt to find out what the ordinary people really wanted in terms of housing. Again, one had to wait until the Second World War when, for the first time, public opinion was fully brought to bear upon the question of popular housing provision.[89]

Notes and references

[1] Mark Clapson, *Suburban Century: Social Change and Urban Growth in England and the United States* (Oxford: Berg, 2003).

[2] Alison Ravetz, *The Government of Space: Town Planning in Modern Society* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), 50-1.

[3] In more practical terms, we could do well to re-examine the housing debates of the 1930s, in particular the case for high-density housing development involving flats, in the light of the recent revival of this type of housing in metropolitan areas of England, notably London. See, e.g. Richard Baxter and Loretta Lees, 'The rebirth of high-rise living in London: towards a sustainable, inclusive, and livable urban form', in Rob Imrie, Loretta Lees and Mike Raco (eds), *Regenerating London: Governance, sustainability and community in a global city* (London: Routledge, 2009), 151-72.

[4] Reginald Blomfield, 'Is modern architecture on the right track?', *The Listener*, 26 July 1933, 124.

[5] Nikolaus Pevsner, *Pioneers of the Modern Movement from William Morris to Walter Gropius* (London: Faber ,1936), 64-6; Alison Ravetz (with Richard Turkington), *The Place of Home: English domestic environment, 1914-2000* (London: E & FN Spon, 1995), 19.

[6] 'President's Address. Modernism in Architecture' (Gilbert H. Jenkins), *Architectural Association Journal* 43, no.489 (November 1927), 158.

[7] 'Flats and Houses for Working-Class Accommodation', *Journal of the Town Planning Institute* 21, no.6 (April 1935), 163-4.

[8] Also known as the 'Tyneside flat' this was a popular building form in the Tyneside area of North England in the second half of the nineteenth century. This was 's form of two-storey terraced housing where the front doors come in pairs: inside, there is a self-contained flat on each floor'. Robert Ryder, 'Council house building in County Durham, 1900-39: the local implementation of policy', in M.J. Daunton (ed.), *Councillors and tenants: local authority housing in English cities, 1919-1939* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1984), 43.

[9] Ibid., 164.

[10] The National Archives (hereafter TNA): HLG 52/830, 'A joint meeting of the Yorkshire and North Western Districts of the Institution of Municipal and County Engineers Typescript of the discussion', 16 February 1935. The association between the flats as a dwelling type and the communal way of living (as opposed to bourgeois individualism) was made in the early years of the development of Soviet architecture (Anatole Kopp, *Town and Revolution; Soviet Architecture and City Planning, 1917-1935* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1970), 126-55). The idea that high-density development, herding the working-class into flats, would foster communitarian feelings and breed left-wing militancy probably lay behind the conservative criticism of modern architecture in Germany and the apparent emphasis on cottages and rural resettlement in housing policy under the Nazi regime (J.M. Richards, *An Introduction*

to Modern Architecture (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1940), 74; Barbara Miller Lane, *Architecture and Politics in Germany, 1918-1945* (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1985), 136-45, 205-212). In any case, this political dimension of flats does not seem to have unduly worried those in England. None of the M.P.s raised alarm on this count during the debates on the successive Housing Bills (1930, 1933 and 1935).

[11] Louise Campbell, 'The MARS Group, 1933-1939', *Royal Institute of British Architects Transactions* 4, no.2 (1984-5), 69-79.

[12] F.R.S. Yorke and Colin Penn, *A Key to Modern Architecture* (London and Glasgow: Blackie and Son, 1939), 42.

[13] 'The President's Inaugural Address' (Raymond Unwin), *Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects*, 3rd Series, 40, no.16, 8 July 1933, 659-60.

[14] Ibid., 600.

[15] Alison Ravetz, *Remaking Cities: Contradictions of the Recent Urban Environment* (London: Croom Helm, 1980), 27-30.

[16] Ebenezer Howard, *Garden Cities of To-morrow* (New Revised Edition, Eastbourne: Attic Books, 1985), 8-9. The book was first published in 1898 as *To-morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform* and was reprinted in 1902 as *Garden Cities of To-morrow*.

[17] 'Editorial Comments', *Town and Country Planning* 1, no.1 (November 1932), 6.

[18] See Mervyn Miller, *Letchworth: The First Garden City* (Chichester: Phillimore, 1993); Mark Clapson, *Live, Work and Play: A Centenary History of Welwyn Garden City* (Cheltenham; History Press, 2020).

[19] Mark Swenarton, *Homes Fit for Heroes: The Politics and Architecture of Early State Housing in Britain* (London: Heinemann, 1981), 11-26.

[20] Mark Swenarton, *Building the New Jerusalem: Architecture, housing and politics 1900-1930* (Bracknell: HIS BRS Press, 2008), 62-65.

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[23] George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962, originally published 1937), 195.

[24] See, e.g. Garden Cities and Town Planning Association, *Thirty-Ninth Annual Report* (London: Garden Cities and Town Planning Association, 1937).

[25] 'Editorial Comments. The Future of Garden Cirties', *Garden Cities and Town-Planning* 11, no.9 (November 1929), 249.

[26] See Derick Deakin (ed.), *Wythenshawe: The Story of a Garden City* (Chichester: Phillimore, 1989).

[27] 'Editorial Comments. Wythenshawe, A Semi Garden City', *Garden Cities and Town-Planning* 22, no.1 (January 1932), 2.

[28] Stephen V. Ward, *Planning and Urban Change* (London: Paul Chapman, 1994), 71-8.

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[30] 'Editorial Comments. The Need for a Comprehensive Policy', *Town and Country Planning* 2, no.5 (November 1933), 2.

[31] 'A Barrier to Decentralisation', *Town and Country Planning* 2, no.8 (September 1934), 153.

[32] 'Garden Cities and Town Planning Association. New Statement of Policy', *Town and Country Planning* 5, no.19 (June 1937), 110.

[33] TNA: HLG 68/30, 'Notes of Conference. Minister of health and Representatives of the Housing Committee of AMC', 23 March 1934.

[34] TNA: HLG 68/30, 'Notes of Conference. Minister of Health and Representatives of AMC', 27 April 1934.

[35] Quoted in, Patricia Garside, '"Unhealthy Areas": Town planning, eugenics and the slums', *Planning Perspectives* 3, no.1 (January 1988), 38.

[36] *The Times*, 26 November 1934; Miles E. Mitchell, 'Rehousing the People in Great Britain (The City of Manchester)', in International Federation for Housing and Town Planning (IFHTP), *14th International Housing and Town Planning Congress, London 1935. Part I: Papers and General Reports* (London: IFHTP, 1935), 290. On the IFHTP, see Renzo Riboldazzi, 'The IFHTP congresses between the wars: a source for studies on modern town planning', *Town Planning Review* 84, no.2 (March 2013), 159-70.

[37] TNA: HLG68/30, 'Notes of Conference. Minister of Health and Representatives of the Housing Committee of AMC', 26 October 1934.

[38] See Anthony Sutcliffe, 'A Century of Flats in Birmingham 1875-1973', in Anthony Sutcliffe (ed.) *Multi-Storey Living: The British Working-Class Experience* (London: Croom Helm, 1974), 181-206.

[39] *Town Crier*, 27 March 1931; City of Birmingham, *Report of the Estates and Public Works and Town Planning Committees respectively of the Deputation visiting Germany, Czecho-Slovakia and Austria in August, 1930* (Birmingham: Council House, 1930).

[40] *The Town Crier*, 3 April 1931.

[41] *The Town Crier*, 17 April 1931. See also *The Town Crier*, 7 August 1931.

[42] *The Town Crier*, 25 September 1931.

[43] Herbert H. Humphries, 'Rehousing the People of Britain (The City of Birmingham)', in International Federation for Housing and Town Planning, *14th International Housing and Town Planning Congress*, 265.

[44] Sutcliffe, 'A Century of Flats in Birmingham 1875-1973', 196.

[45] Alison Ravetz, 'From Working Class Tenements to Modern Flat: local authorities and multi-storey housing between the wars', in Anthony Sutcliffe (ed.), *Multi-Storey Living: The British Working-Class Experience* (London: Croom Helm, 1974), 122-50.

[46] Ibid., 137-8.

[47] London County Council, *London Housing* (London: London County Council, 1937), 98.

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[51] R.A.H. Livett, 'Housing in Leeds', *Journal of the Town Planning Institute* 25, no.8 (June 1939), 270.

[52] L.H. Keay, 'Housing and the Redevelopment of Central Areas', *Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects*, 3rd Series, 43, no.2, 23 November 1935, 59-60.

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[81] A. Trystan Edwards, 'An Alternative to Tenements – I., II., III., IV.', *The Builder*, 4 February 1938, 11 February 1938, 18 February 1938 and 25 February 1938 respectively.

[82] Denby, 'Rehousing from the Slum Dweller's Point of View', 66. For her design of a staggered row of terrace houses, see 'The All-Europe House. Designed by Elizabeth Denby', *Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects*, 3rd Series, 46, no.16, 26 March 1939, 813-9.

[83] Patrick Abercrombie, 'Slum Clearance and Planning. The Re-Modelling of Towns and Their External Growth', *Town Planning Review* 16, no.3 (June 1935), 203.

[84] 'Can Flats Solve the Housing Problem?', 741. Denby also expressed a similar view in Elizabeth Denby, *Europe Re-housed* (London George Allen and Unwin, 1938), 260-9.

[85] (Letters to the Editor) Cyril Sweet (General Secretary, Modern Architectural Research Group), 'Housing Bill: Flats versus Cottages', *The Times*, 11 March 1935.

[86] For some recent work exploring a more elastic and pluralist notion of modernism in England, see, e.g. Julian Holder, ''Design in Everyday Things': Promoting Modernism in Britain, 1912-1944', in Paul Greenhalgh (ed.), *Modernism in Design* (London: Reaktion Books, 1990), 123-43; John R. Gold, *The Experience of Modernism: Modern architects and the future city, 1928-1953* (London: E & FN Spon, 1997); Peter Richmond, *Marketing Modernism: The Architecture and Influence of Charles Reilly* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2001); Elizabeth Darling, *Re-forming Britian: Narratives of modernity before reconstruction* (London: Routledge, 2007); William Whyte, 'The Englishness of English Architecture: Modernism and the Making of a national International Style, 1927-1957', *Journal of British Studies* 48, no.2 (2009), 441-65; Alexandra Harris, *Romantic Moderns: English Writers, Artists*

and the Imagination from Virginia Woolf to John Piper (London: Thames & Hudson, 2010); Deborah Sugg Ryan, *Ideal Homes, 1918-39: Domestic design and suburban Modernism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018); Christine Hui Lan Manley, *Frederick Gibberd* (Swindon: Historic England 2019).

[87] John Summerson, 'Creative Housing', *The Listener*, 4 April 1937, 225.

[88] Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 5th Series, 297, 30 January 1935, col. 402.

[89] See, e.g. Tatsuya Tsubaki, 'Planners and the Public: British Popular Opinion on Housing during the Second world War', *Contemporary British History* 14, no.1 (Spring 2000), 81-98.