

**The Development of the English  
Semi-detached House: 1750-1950**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The semi-detached house (semi) is the most common dwelling type in England, yet because it is typically suburban and ordinary, very little research into its origins and development has been carried out. This study considers the medieval roots of attached housing, then using sources such as early architectural pattern books, traces the use of semis as rural cottages for the working classes and urban villas for the middle classes. The role of architects in this development is examined, and the way in which the garden city movement later facilitated the transition of the semi into a classless dwelling type. Based on this evidence, the study challenges the view that semis have no heritage or cultural value.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Special thanks go to Finn Jensen who is the only other person I know who shares my passion for semis.

Any errors and omissions are, of course, mine alone.

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 BACKGROUND

This study was prompted by concerns about the relatively low numbers of heritage-listed semi-detached houses (semis) in England and a wide-spread view that semis are not heritage.

All dwellings are a product of the social, political and economic factors prevailing at the time they were constructed and they all have much to reveal about changes in society. If it is deemed to be an important indicator of such development, a dwelling may be officially classified as having heritage significance. For the semi, the assessments of cultural significance (if they exist at all) tend to be narrowly focussed on the aesthetics of architectural form and style, or on age, because the social and historical information is not available. It is a dwelling type which is generally outside the mainstream of architectural historiography. Yet without an understanding of the broader cultural significance of buildings such as semis, there is a risk that the features which give rise to their importance may be lost – through demolition, decay or unsympathetic alterations.

The author of this study is currently researching a PhD at the University of Sydney on the topic *Semi-detached houses as a distinct dwelling type in New South Wales*, for which this study will be an input, to be incorporated by reference. The British colony of NSW (founded in 1788) was developed during the period covered by this study, and its housing stock, including semis, was greatly influenced by English cultural and architectural trends. However, notwithstanding the links between the studies, this dissertation forms a stand-alone body of work which seeks to add to the understanding of the historical and social importance of the English semi. It is hoped that the study can provide an academic starting point for the architectural or social historians who may wish to do further research into the significance and possible conservation of the English semi.

### 1.2 WHY STUDY SEMIS?

There are small and large semis located throughout England. Some have been built recently, and some are centuries old. However the greatest concentrations of semis are in the suburbs which were developed between the wars during the twentieth century. To most English people a semi IS an interwar house in a pair, and is therefore synonymous with suburbia. In England 32% of all dwellings are semis (Department for Communities and Local Government, nd); in London semis make up 15% (Department for Communities and Local Government 2011). This equates to more than 7 million English semis. The European Commission's housing statistics reveal that the UK's "propensity to live in a semi" is 60.9% of

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the population, second only to the Netherlands at 61.4% (Eurostat 2009). Appendix 2 contains additional statistics relating to semis.

Until relatively recently, the study of suburban, common or ordinary buildings has rarely been considered worthy of academic attention. Indeed the noted historian Elizabeth McKellar was advised that “architectural history (is) only concerned with the great buildings of the past” and it was only her “stubborn intellectual perversity” which enabled her to continue her celebrated research into the everyday buildings of post-fire London (McKellar 1999, xi). Research into suburban buildings has been documented and books have been written, yet the authors almost always preface their work with a justification of why they have persevered with such seemingly unimportant studies. Helena Barrett and John Phillips were of the opinion that:

The idea that *any* aspect of suburbia is worthy of closer inspection, let alone its architecture or design, has nearly always been considered unlikely; suburban life has traditionally been a target for vilification, its architecture an object of derision (Barrett and Phillips 1988, 7).

Yet the subject of semis is much broader than just the suburban interwar semi – the semi is found in rural villages, on farms, in industrial towns and in cities as well as in suburbs, and its major historical themes include not just architecture but more importantly, social class.

The presence or absence of various dwelling types in a particular area can be significant indicators of its evolving social or economic conditions. The size and form of a house are generally related to the status and wealth of its occupants, although the nature of this relationship varies from place to place and over time. So an understanding of ordinary housing such as semis, and the people who built them and lived in them, can shed new light onto the evolution of society and the built environment. It can also illuminate cultural diversity by looking at the diversity (or lack of diversity) in building patterns over several centuries.

Peter Guillery introduces his study of small, low status eighteenth century houses in London by arguing that “studying them is one of the relatively few routes into understanding how life was lived” and goes on to note that the artisans (skilled tradespeople) who lived in those urban vernacular houses were not “a slice of the pie not warranting fuss” in the “crucible of modernity” but rather, they made up a very large proportion of the population (Guillery 2004, 1-2).

Matthew Johnson in his recent book challenges the belief that a building is architecture only if it was “designed with some sort of conscious aesthetic effect in mind” and suggests that even ordinary buildings are architecture.

I want to insist on these buildings being ordered, their design being carefully thought through by the builder and owner, and in their own way being just as complex or profound a statement about the world as the greatest Elizabethan house or medieval cathedral (Johnson 2010, 12).

John Burnett suggested twenty years ago that the interwar suburban semi was “the most characteristic expression of English domestic architecture” (Burnett 1986, 250). Roger Silverstone later called suburbia the “soft underbelly of the contemporary” and added:

...the experience of suburbia is central if we are to make sense of our everyday life, at least in the industrialized and industrializing societies (Silverstone 1997, ix).

If even today so many English people choose to live in a semi, whether in the country or in suburbia, newly built or dating from an earlier century, semis are clearly still a major component of contemporary culture – and as such they should be studied.

This research seeks to answer several questions about English semis, including:

- What are the origins of the semi-detached dwelling form?
- How and why has the semi-detached form changed since the eighteenth century?
- What role has the semi played in housing the working classes?
- What role has the semi played in housing the middle classes?
- Why are interwar suburban semis so similar in their floor plans, yet display distinct variations in external appearance between council semis and private semis?
- Why are semis the most common dwelling type in England today? Is this lifestyle dictated by the available housing or did the occupants themselves demand semis to satisfy their housing needs?

### **1.3 PREVIOUS RESEARCH**

This study has been approached not as research into the semi as an example of vernacular or traditional architecture (with all the various connotations of those terms), but as an exploration into the origins and evolution of an ordinary building form which is found in large numbers in England.

Peter Guillery suggests that the interwar semi has been both “feted and ignored” by researchers. He notes that it was analysed in 1981 in *Dunroamin: the suburban semi and its enemies* (Oliver *et al*) but was then forgotten for 25 years (Guillery 2011, 3). Perhaps this was because the book was about “the conflict of values of those who choose to live in the English suburbs, and of those who work in the professional and educational milieu of

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architecture and planning" (Oliver *et al* 1981, 9), people who have traditionally chosen to ignore ordinary housing. It was not until the 2007 release of Finn Jensen's book *The English Semi-detached House* that a comprehensive guide to the English semi became available. When in 1982 Stefan Muthesius produced the first book to focus on the English terraced house, it was considered ground-breaking and remains a well-known classic text, yet curiously Jensen's meticulously researched work has not received wide attention, possibly because of the suburban connotations of the semi.

The serious study of rural cottages is a relatively recent phenomenon in England – M W Barley (1961) prefaced his national research into sixteenth and seventeenth century rural housing with the comment that although at that time archaeologists might seek evidence of small houses, with few exceptions it was the country mansions and village churches which were of most interest to them and the architectural historians. In his opinion the study of the vernacular dwellings of the lower classes could be seen by other academics as "historical slumming" (Barley 1961, xvii), perhaps because it is assumed that such buildings are not "polite" architecture. That is, they are not designed by trained architects.

There are some English authors, however, who saw merit in understanding the importance of cottages from the point of view of social history rather than architectural history. For example, Arthur Raistrick in his study of the smaller buildings in the Yorkshire Dales indicates that "more attention will be paid to the people concerned with making, living in and using them than to architectural merit" (Raistrick 1976, 6). In his study of vernacular houses, Matthew Johnson acknowledges the importance of research into architectural styles, building materials and technology. However, he points out that "houses are about human beings" and "they are artefacts that should be understood as part of the way ordinary people lived and thought" (Johnson 2010, 2). Other researchers make the link between understanding the social history and the conservation of the seemingly overlooked dwelling types.

Understanding the context in which these houses were built – the people who first lived there, their occupations, the services that were, or were not, available, and the fashions that dominated particular periods – gives a greater insight into why they look as they do and, it is hoped, an even greater impetus to the urge to preserve them (Barrett & Phillips 1988, 7).

Recently Peter Guillery expressed the hope that "it will be possible to turn to the materiality and specificity of particular buildings with a fresh view of what sets them apart" (Guillery 2011, 2). This study is an attempt to generate a "fresh view" of the English semi.

## 1.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The author is neither an architect nor an archaeologist. This study will not attempt to analyse the fabric, building materials and techniques, or architectural qualities of extant semis, except in very general terms. These aspects are not unique to semis and have been more than adequately covered by other researchers. The focus is on the social, economic, regulatory and historical factors which influenced the development of semis as a distinct English dwelling type.

Although the semi is found in significant numbers in Britain, the scope of this study is England. It is left to other researchers to investigate the development of semis in Wales, Scotland and Ireland. In addition, this study is concerned primarily with the two hundred years from 1750 to 1950, although the development of semis prior to 1750 is mentioned where it has significance for later periods, and some post-war development is included. There is no attempt in this study to explore the early English (for example Roman or Anglo-Saxon) use of attached housing, although it may be of interest in the complete history of the semi-detached dwelling type.

This is neither an exhaustive survey nor a representative study of English semis, and it does not contain comparative examples outside England. Rather it uses English examples of semis to illustrate specific points. It is left to other researchers and heritage consultants to identify the best semis, the rarest semis, the most representative semis, the semis with the highest heritage significance and the semis most at risk. This study does not tell the stories of the individuals who lived or live in the semis of England, but the stories of some of the buildings themselves - who designed and built them, when they were built, why they were built and the types of people who lived in them.

The scope of this study allows for the development of a general framework in which the semi's place within the English housing stock can be determined. Further studies are required, including detailed local studies, to fully understand the development of semis in specific regions.

While the dissertation does contain examples of floor plans, it does not include a detailed analysis of the interior fittings, functionality or furnishings of the houses. Similarly gardens are outside the scope of this study. However, Barrett and Phillips's book (1987, 184-187) contains a section called *The Semi-detached Garden* for those who wish to pursue this topic.

## 1.5 DEFINITIONS

In this study the following definitions will be used:

- **Dwelling** - a self-contained unit of accommodation. Self-containment is where all the rooms (including kitchen, bathroom and toilet) in a household's accommodation are behind a single door which only that household can use (2001 Census).
- **Semi-detached house (semi)** - one of the two dwellings in a semi-detached building. A semi has a shared party wall on only one side.
- **Semi-detached building** - a building containing two single dwellings which are attached by a shared party wall. Could also be called a pair of semis.

The definitions of other terms may be found in Appendix 5.

The origins of the term “semi-detached” are not clear. The earliest usage by *The Times* was on 7 September 1842 (p2), when a “semi-detached gentleman’s residence” with a coach-house and pleasure grounds was advertised for rent.<sup>1</sup> While further research is required to pinpoint when the term was first used, and who coined it, by the mid nineteenth century it appears to have been used to describe a middle class urban double villa, but not a working class urban or rural double cottage. In 1853 the architect W Tite, in evidence given during the debate surrounding the *Hampstead Junction Railway Bill*, was asked whether some houses were semi-detached cottages. He replied “I should say that semi-detached suggests something better. They are houses built in pairs.” (cited in Murphy 1977, 14). The term semi-detached was later used to describe any dwelling which was one of a pair, large or small.

## 1.6 STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION

Despite the limitations, some rich documentary sources were located during the study, including a range of primary materials. Following the next chapter which describes the semi-detached form, this historical material is presented in chronological chapters. Within each chapter two parallel themes are developed – semis for the working classes and semis for the middle classes. Finally, it is shown how these themes were integrated to create the English semis of the twentieth century.

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<sup>1</sup> Located by searching [www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk](http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk)



## 2.0 SEMI-DETACHED FORMS

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

Most but not all semis have a front garden, and the majority have roof forms, floor plans and facades which are mirror images of each other. All allow for fenestration and ventilation on 3 sides of each dwelling. Because the range of possible floor plans was so limited in relatively small and unsophisticated dwellings such as older semis, any attempts at individuality tended to be displayed on the front facades as decorative architectural styles, or in many cases as “cut down” versions of the fashionable styles developed for more expensive housing. This emphasis on the primary facade sometimes resulted in the use of inferior materials on the sides of semis (and terraces).

The following examples will illustrate the most common of the semi’s forms. More complex examples will be discussed in later chapters.

### 2.2 FORMS

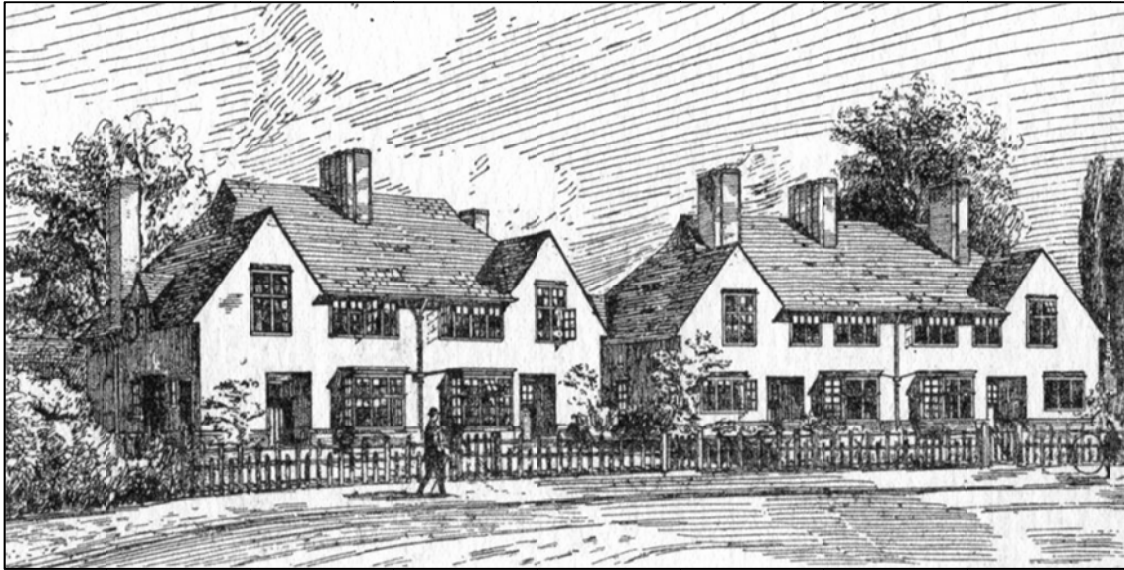
#### 2.2.1 SYMMETRY

The most common form of the semi is the symmetrical pair, with each side a mirror image of the other (Figures 2.1 and 2.2).

**Figure 2-1: Symmetrical English semis, rural**



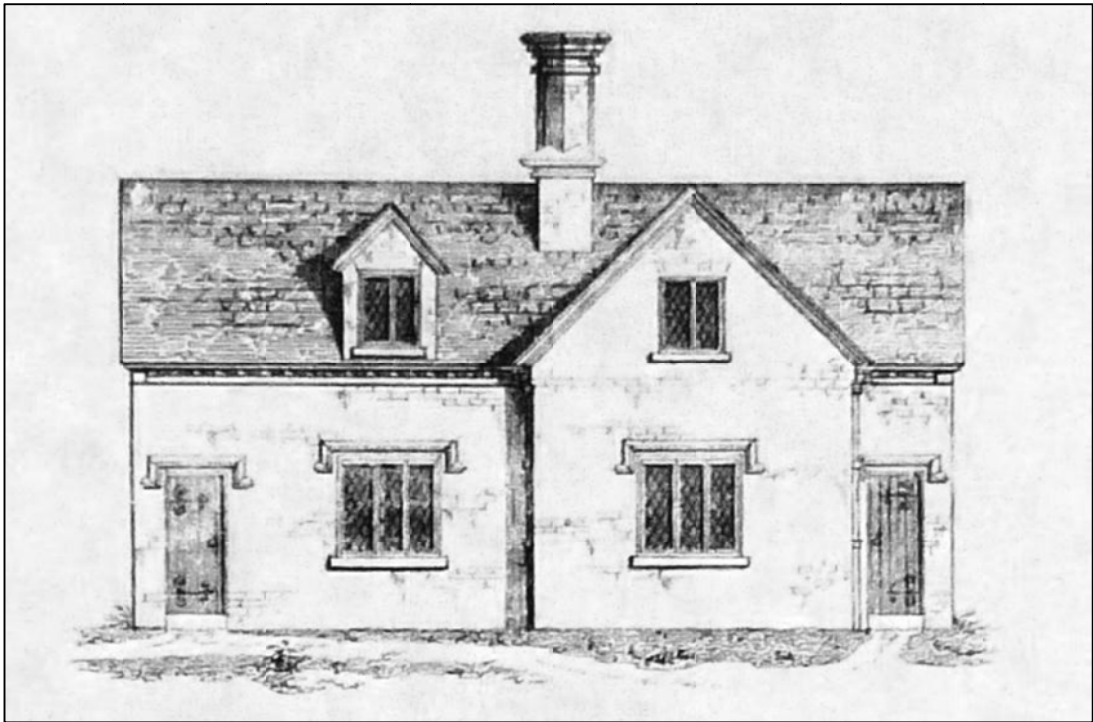
**Silver Street, Masham (Author 2011)**

**Figure 2-2: Symmetrical English semis, city****Hampstead Way, Hampstead Garden Suburb (Unwin and Baillie Scott 1909, 61)**

### 2.2.2 ASYMMETRY

Asymmetrical semis (Figure 2.3) were built when it was important that the building looked like one house, usually for reasons of social status. When the English middle class semi-detached villa first appeared during the eighteenth century (see Section 3.7) it was imperative that the form gave no hint that the building contained two dwellings. These villas were for wealthy tenants to rent, so there was no requirement for individuality. That form continued into the nineteenth century (see Section 4.3) but as the ownership of English semis by their occupiers became more common, gradually the need for some display of individuality became more important. A symmetrical pair which proclaimed that “this half is mine” then became more common.

**Figure 2-3: Asymmetrical English semis**



(Roberts 1853, Design No 5, no page number)

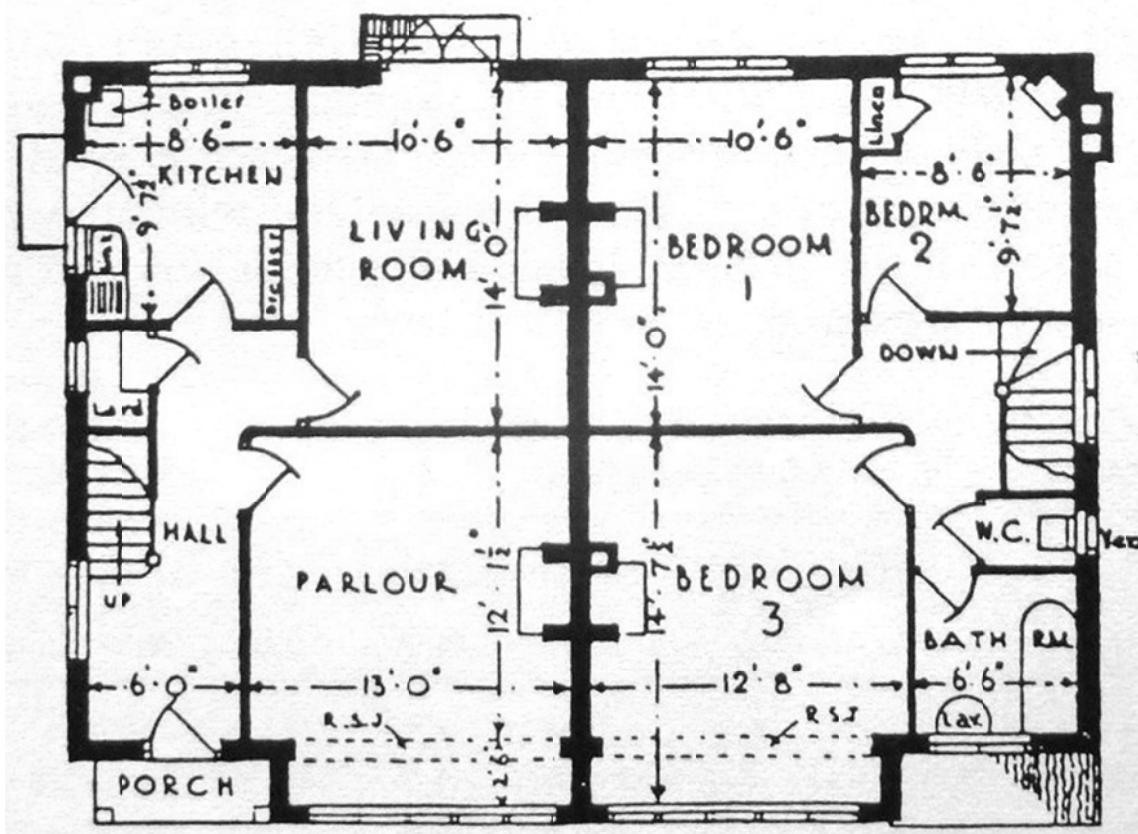


New Earswick (Author 2011)

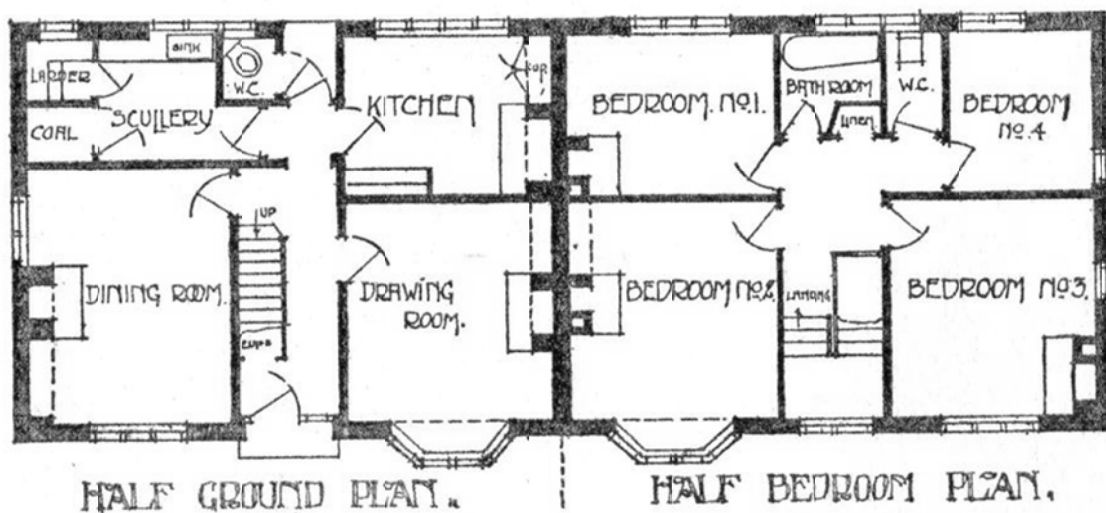
2.2.3 FLOOR PLANS

Most English semis, being two-storeyed, require a space for a staircase. This allows for a kitchen to be located behind a wide entry hall, and facilitates the inclusion of at least three upstairs bedrooms. In effect, this makes most English semis two rooms wide (Figure 2.4).

Figure 2-4: Floor plans



Interwar semis (Brown 1990, 269)



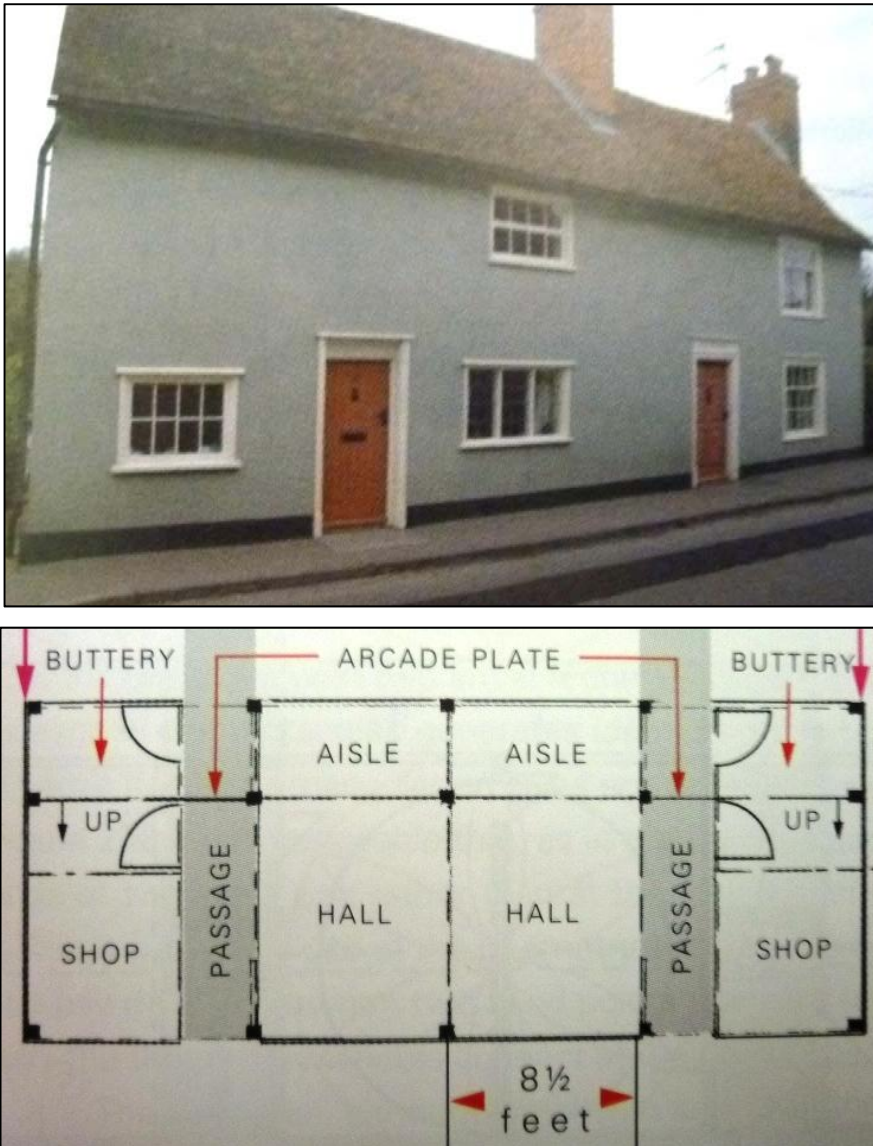
Large middle class semis (Unwin and Bailie Scott 1909, 31)

### 3.0 PRE 1750 AND THE LATE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

There are indications that the semi was not a common dwelling type prior to the seventeenth century. Matthew Johnson suggests that until then “houses designed deliberately to adjoin were rare” (Johnson 2010, 137). Most early examples of attached housing derived from the subdivision of a building into multiple occupancies.

The widespread use of timber in most parts of England was also a factor in the dominance of detached housing until the sixteenth century (Hey 1981, 9-10). Building a pair or a row of attached timber dwellings makes little economic sense – there is a minimal saving in materials to be gained by using a shared timber party wall, although in urban areas there is a saving in land. Most modest rural dwellings were occupied by subsistence farmers who were able to build without being constrained by a shortage of land, so there was no need to build groups of attached dwellings. However, despite the predominance of detached dwellings in rural areas, there are some known examples of timber-framed semis and terraces which pre-date the sixteenth century. Smith (2011) describes four pairs of “unusual” and “rentable” late fourteenth or early fifteenth timber-framed dwellings with attached shops in Nayland, Suffolk (Figure 3.1). The timber-framed semis Rock House Farm and Rock Holme in Staffordshire (demolished in 2003) were built during the fifteenth century (Hislop 2003). For the poorer urban dwellers, rental properties were sometimes constructed by churches and charities; for example Lady Row, a surviving row of c1316 attached two-storey houses, and a row of seven houses in Coney Street, now demolished, both situated within churchyards in York.

**Figure 3-1: Fifteenth century semis in Suffolk**

**A pair of mirror-image, timber-framed dwellings with shops; the photograph shows later alterations. (Smith 2011, Plate 2.9)**

The eighteenth century brought significant changes to English life, including the industrial revolution with its mills and factories, the enclosure of previously common land, the agricultural revolution and mass migration from the countryside to rapidly expanding urban areas. The class system, which had retained a traditional balance between the gentry, middle classes (or middling sorts) and peasants for centuries, also began to change. The working classes, which were generally divided into the labouring class and the skilled workers (artisans), grew both in size and visibility as peasantry declined. The definition of the middling sorts broadened to include those who became wealthy in commercial and industrial pursuits, and this new middle class also grew significantly.

The upheavals during the eighteenth century transformed the medieval rural and urban housing landscapes across England. By the end of that century, attached dwellings were firmly entrenched not only as a housing form suitable for the rural working classes, but also paradoxically as a desirable form of upper middle class housing.

This chapter explores the origins of “attachment”, and the political and social climate in England which encouraged the construction of double cottages and villas.

### 3.2 RURAL DWELLINGS AND THE CONCEPT OF ATTACHMENT

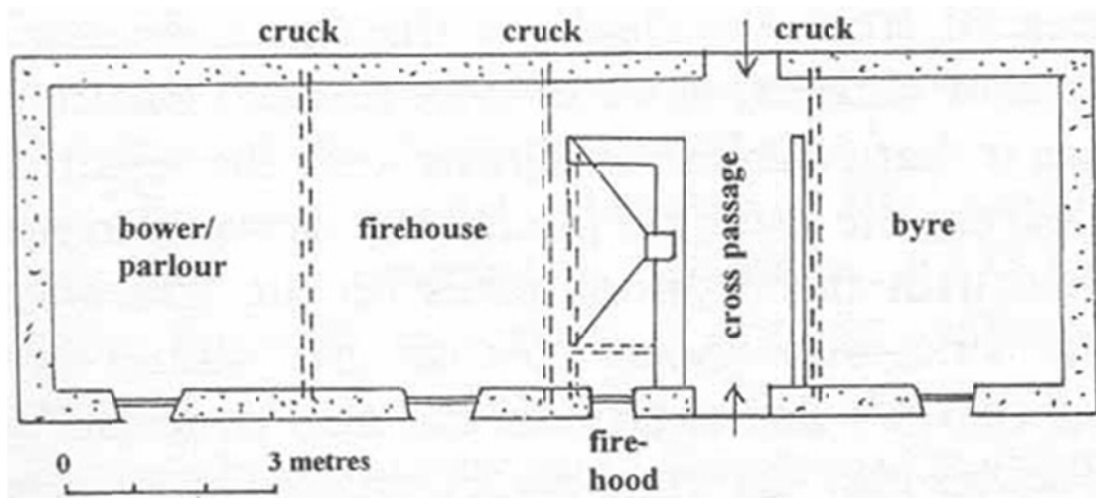
During the medieval period people from the three major social classes almost all lived in multi-purpose buildings which combined dwelling areas and spaces for work, such as commerce or animal husbandry (Holliss 2011, 191). Probate inventories suggest that those without land or with low incomes lived in single-storey one- or two-roomed dwellings, although more commonly labourers lived in their employer’s house or outbuildings (Caffyn 1986, 1,4). Colum Giles states that “the use of good stonework in houses was confined in the Middle Ages to those of superior status” and that “timber (was) adopted widely by the lesser gentry and by the yeomanry”<sup>2</sup> (Giles 1986, 22). The gentry had large manor houses with a central hall, while the peasants with farm animals had a longhouse; a single-storey, open-plan, timber-framed building, open to the roof, which was divided into two areas (bays), partially separated by a cross-passage. One end, the hall, was for people, while the other end contained a byre (barn) for animals. Additional bays could be added longitudinally by using more pairs of curved timber frames (crucks), or extending the box-framed walls, and it was common for longhouses to have an additional, more private bay, accessible from the hall. In both manor houses and peasant dwellings, this private space was known as a “solar” or a “parlour”.

Dwellings across all social classes followed this “tripartite plan”, where a spatial hierarchy was given material form. The meanings and significance of the three graduated spaces in peasant housing – the byre, the open hall and the highest status (most private) bay – could also be read and understood in the hierarchy of spaces in the much larger tripartite buildings of the gentry (Grenville 2008, 109).

During the century after 1530 there was widespread rebuilding of the simple medieval longhouses – the open hall was usually modified by the addition of ceilings, and a brick chimney-stack or firehood replaced the open hearth in the centre of the hall (Johnson 2010). The new ceiling made it possible to use the space above it, thereby effectively creating a two-storey dwelling. The result was a very common sixteenth century rural housing type (Figure 3.2).

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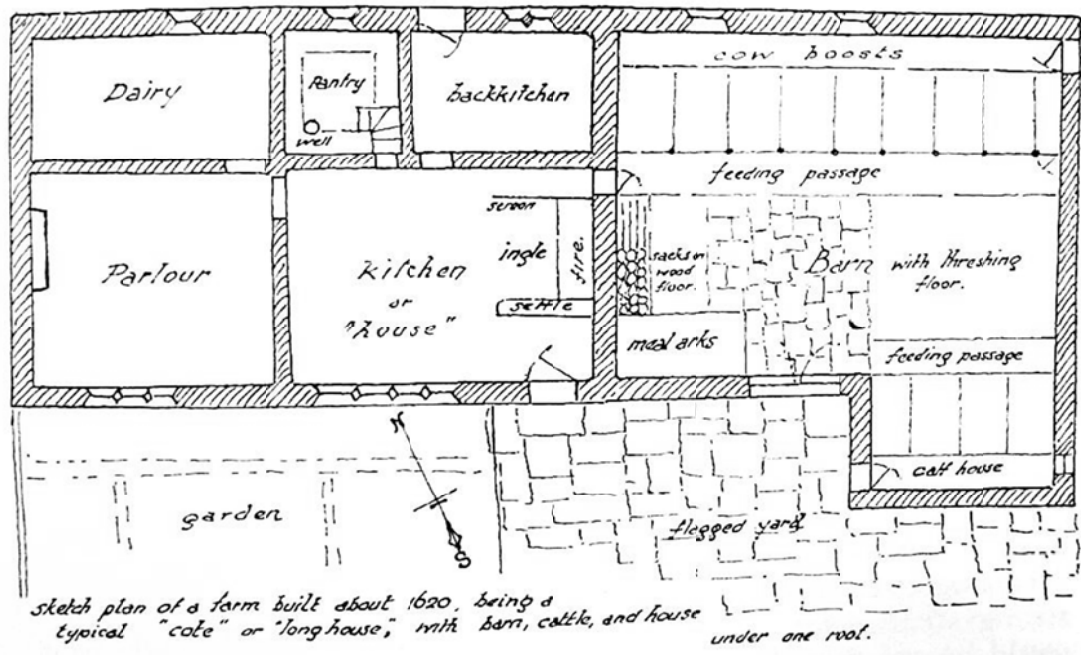
<sup>2</sup> The wealthiest class of peasant.

**Figure 3-2: Timber-framed longhouse with four bays, late sixteenth century****A medieval timber-framed longhouse with an inserted firehood. (Jennings 2002)**

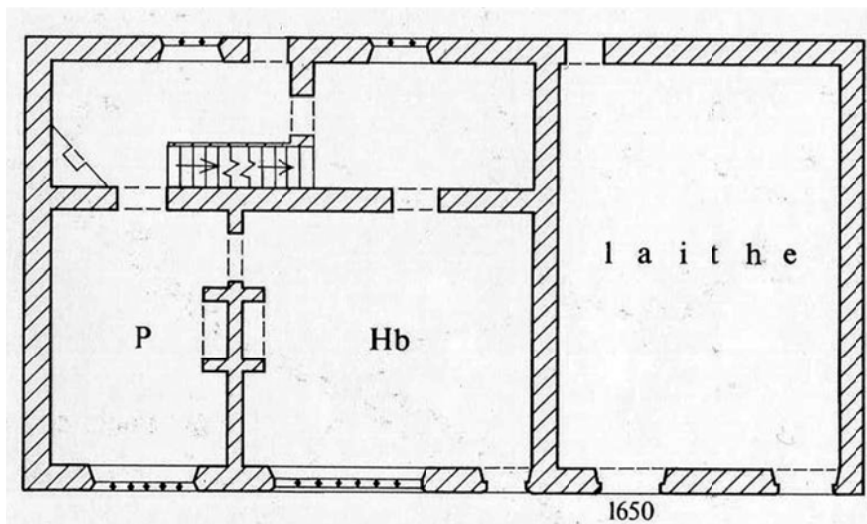
As the population expanded during the sixteenth century, the demand for new peasant dwellings resulted in the construction of many new two-storey stone or timber longhouses, with chimneys and an attached bay for animals. Matthew Johnson suggests that “the form of a house in c.1600 might have been arrived at through a conversion, or through a completely new build; the final form in terms of the pattern and arrangement of space, and of the use of rooms, was in many cases practically identical” (Johnson 2010, 95). Extra bays could be added to the ends as required and service rooms added to the back under an extension of the main roof (Figures 3.3 and 3.4).

**Figure 3-3: Old Middle House, Malham****A seventeenth century two bay stone longhouse, with later bay additions at each end, and an added porch, painted by John Ruskin during the nineteenth century. (Malhamdale Local History Group nd)**



**Figure 3-4: A typical stone longhouse, c1620****A longhouse with the two parts separated by a thick internal stone wall. (Raistrick 1976, 49)**

In the north of England the creation of new, small tenanted farms during the enclosures of the seventeenth century (see Section 3.3), and the resulting need for small farmhouses gave rise to laithe houses, with a dwelling at one end and a combined grain storage and animal space at the other (Giles 1986, 178) (Figure 3.5). A laithe house, unlike a longhouse, has separate entrances to each part. The building of laithe houses persisted into the nineteenth century and some later laitthes were attached to two or more small cottages (Giles 1986, 180).

**Figure 3-5: Laithehouse, c1650****Bankhouse, Warley (Giles 1986, 179)**

Over time there was a gradual separation of the human spaces from the animal spaces. In the longhouses of Dartmoor, this separation of the family living area from the byre began around 1500, but in the north of England the separation gathered pace in the seventeenth century. Initially, separation was achieved by creating a barrier between the byre and the hall, particularly in longhouses which were rebuilt in stone where a solid wall could be constructed (Figure 3.4). There were several advantages to be gained by continuing to provide spaces for people and animals in the same building, including ease of access, thermal benefits and a saving in building materials.

As the wealthier yeoman farmers increased their status and prosperity, their farm animals and grains were housed in separate outbuildings and barns around a farmyard. Some functions, such as the dairy, remained attached to the farmhouse. For example, a sixteenth

century stone longhouse at Upton, Gloucestershire had a separated living space which was a “reflection of a tendency to move animals away from intimate contact with human beings, first in attached but non-connected buildings, and finally in separate buildings” (Rahtz 1969 cited in Grenville 1997, 142). The redundant byres and laithes were then converted to become service rooms for the dwelling, or another “attached” dwelling. The dual-purpose buildings became dual-dwelling buildings. For example, the Malham longhouse shown in Figure 3.3 was converted into two attached dwellings before becoming derelict (Malhamdale Local History Group nd). Similarly the laithe house illustrated in Figure 3.5 was later converted into two attached dwellings. The Old Post Office at Tintagel (Figure 3.6) was originally a medieval longhouse, which had a chimney and fireplace added during the early seventeenth century. The byre was later converted to a dwelling (National Trust nd). The addition of further bays to the original building could create a row of attached dwellings.

**Figure 3-6: The Old Post Office, Tintagel**



(Author 2012)

Matthew Johnson challenges J T Smith’s argument that “pairs of conjoined houses” were created only to house brothers, widowed mothers, or similarly related families in early modern England, although he acknowledges that there are “well-documented examples of pairs of houses adjoining on common properties” (Johnson 2010, 54) (Figure 3.7).

**Figure 3-7: Pair of seventeenth century attached dwellings****Kelmscott, Oxfordshire (Johnson 2010, Plate 6)**

By the end of the seventeenth century the typical rural English village and small landholding contained haphazard collections of new and old, timber and stone dwellings. They included small single-room labourers' cottages, traditional longhouses or laithehouses, and longhouses with the byres converted to service rooms such as kitchens. Many families lived in longhouses where the byre had been converted to another dwelling, thereby making the attached pair of cottages an integral part of rural life.

### **3.3 ENCLOSURE AND EMPARKMENT**

During the eighteenth century, dramatic changes occurred in the traditional villages. These were caused by enclosure<sup>3</sup>, a process of converting common land and open-field systems (where farmers had traditional rights to use strips of land) to a system of enclosed fields with individual owners. Enclosure on a small scale had commenced during the thirteenth century but gathered pace during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, as sheep farming became very profitable. Some landowners enclosed the villagers' strips of land and evicted the subsistence farmers. In extreme cases whole villages were gradually abandoned (for example Wharram Percy). Often causing poverty and homelessness, such enclosures were denounced by the church and the King in the early seventeenth century. However, despite

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<sup>3</sup> The original formal spelling was "inclosure".

the opposition, enclosures continued, albeit on a relatively small scale, until the parliament initiated a second major phase of enclosure. It passed thousands of Inclosure Acts from 1760 until the 1860s. Each Act pertained to a specific location and was supposed to create a large estate on which more efficient and productive farming methods could be used (Overton 1996, 148).

Parliamentary enclosures sometimes provided peasants with access to other land, although this was usually of poor quality. Some of the new landholdings were subdivided into smaller farms which were leased to tenant farmers. However most villagers lost the ability to feed and support themselves because all production on the estates now belonged to the owner of the estate. The result by the mid eighteenth century was large numbers of dispossessed rural people who gravitated to the towns in search of paid employment in the factories and industries which were appearing as the industrial revolution gathered pace.

Enclosure had a dramatic effect on the housing stock within the rural areas of England. As larger farms were created by enclosure some of the small farmhouses and their outbuildings became derelict, although many of the old farmhouses, longhouses and buildings such as stables and storage sheds were converted to provide accommodation for tenant farmers and farm labourers who no longer lived under their employer's roof (Figures 3.8 and 3.9).

**Figure 3-8: Converted farmhouse, mid eighteenth century**

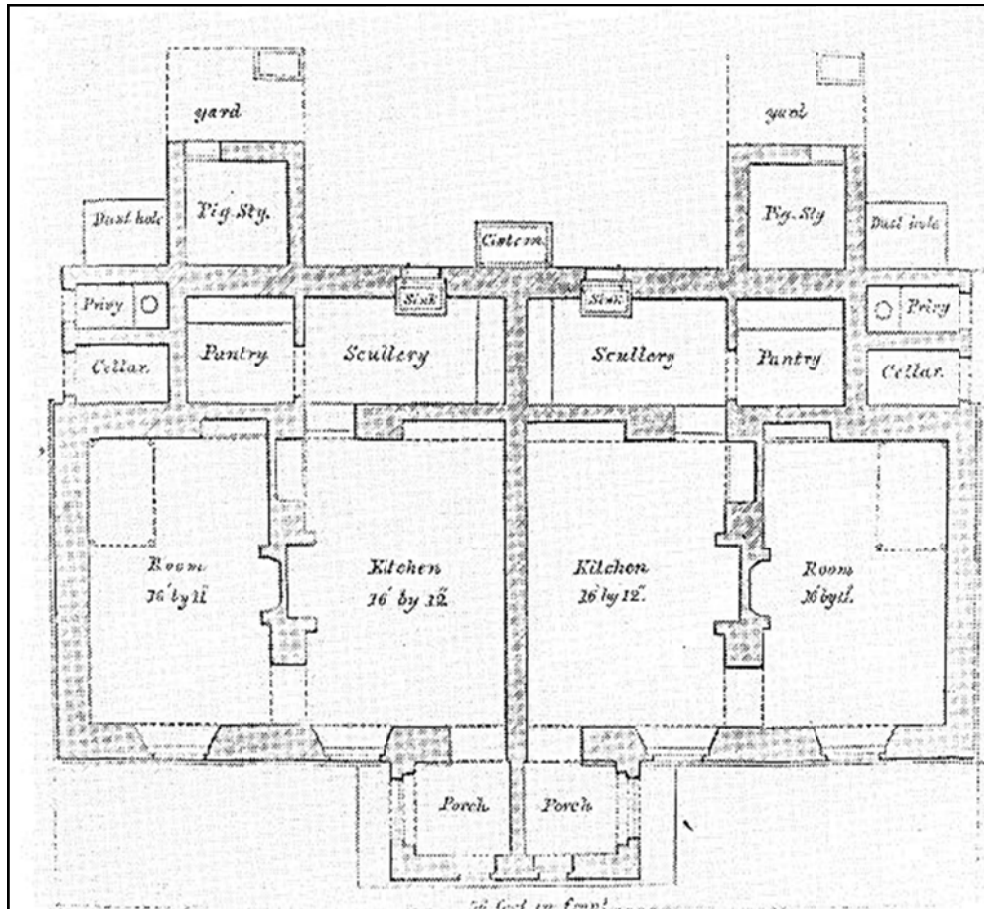


**Nos 17 and 19 Station Road, Cullingsworth. A farmhouse converted to two two-bedroomed semis. (Caffyn 1986, 6)**

**Figure 3-9: Converted barn, mid eighteenth century****Rodwell End, Stansfield. A barn converted to three attached dwellings. (Caffyn 1986, 5)**

Some landowners who acquired an estate as a result of enclosure built dwellings for their labourers, in the form of new villages on the estate. This was the era of the “closed” village, owned by one aristocrat, with cottage occupation (and the use of any attached plots of land) tied to providing labour on his estate. The most economical form for the new cottages was the attached brick or stone dwelling, based on the form of the existing farm buildings, many of which had already been converted to attached dwellings. Where once the spaces for the animals and people had been attached, the same benefits now applied to new, attached cottages for people.

The double farm cottage was built not because land was too scarce for detached houses, but as a means of reducing costs (there was a saving in materials by sharing a wall) and keeping the houses warmer in winter. It was said that “this species of cottage can be built cheaper than two single ones, and, in general, these double cottages are found to be warmer and fully as comfortable as single ones” (Smith 1834, 27). Some double cottages also each included an attached space for animals, providing both additional warmth and lower costs than detached shelters for animals. A comparison of floor plans for longhouses (such as Figure 3.4) and pairs of cottages built for farm labourers (Figure 3.10) shows a marked similarity in layout.

**Figure 3-10: Pair of farm cottages, c1793****Attached two-bay houses with sculleries and pigsties. (Murphy 1977, 17)**

The older villages which escaped enclosure remained “open”. They continued to grow organically, with some people building their own dwellings, while others used professional builders. Some investors built attached dwellings for lease to tenants who had work outside the estates. However, most of the haphazard medieval villages of the past were gradually replaced by new villages, owned by estates, with labourers’ cottages (often in pairs) arranged neatly along the roads. For some of the landowners, their new villages also had elements of philanthropy and paternalism. For example, John Howard when he first went to live at Cardington, Bedfordshire in 1756 found “its peasant inhabitants were wretchedly poor, ignorant, vicious, turbulent, dirty” (Roberts 1853, 18). He demolished the “miserable mud huts” and built some “very superior cottages” nearby (Roberts 1853, 19). In another example, the new cottages (late eighteenth century) on the estate of the Earl of Chichester were “not only conducive to the picturesque beauty of Stanmer Park, but also as evincing a kind consideration for the comfort of their occupants” (Roberts 1853, 19). The Duke of Bedford in a letter to the Earl of Chichester wrote:

Cottage building except to a cottage speculator, who extracts immoderate rents for scanty and defective habitations, is, we all know, a bad investment of money; but this is not the light in which such a subject should be viewed by landlords, from whom it is surely not too much to expect, that while they are building and improving farm-houses, homesteads, and cattle sheds, they will also build and improve dwellings for their labourers, in sufficient number to meet the improved and improving cultivation of the land...and thus raise the social and moral habits of those most valuable members of the community, are among the first duties, and ought to be among the truest pleasures, of every landlord (Roberts 1853, 19).

But for many estate owners one of the most important outcomes of enclosure was the opportunity to create beautiful landscapes around a new mansion. Deer parks and formal grounds were laid out, and where untidy villages spoiled the views they were demolished. A new estate village could then be created on a more favourable site as an integral part of the landscape design. Known as emparking or emparkment, this process created new villages in a setting which was designed to impress visitors to the estates (Darley 2007, 15). One of the first was Chippenham in Cambridgeshire (1712) where Lord Orford built pairs of cottages linked by service buildings. These were single storey with dormers.

Another early emparkment village was built in Norfolk by Sir Robert Walpole, who demolished all but the old village church and built pairs of back-to-back cottages on the approaches to his mansion Houghton Hall (Darley 2007, 22) (Figure 3.11).

**Figure 3-11: Double cottages in New Houghton, Norfolk c1723**



(Galinou 2010, 81)

From the 1760s the prominent architects who had previously only worked on large commissions, began to work with the landscape designers to create emparkment villages.



For example, between 1773 and 1786 Lord Milton demolished the old village of Middleton which was obscuring the view from his new mansion, and worked with Capability Brown and the architect William Chambers to build 20 whitewashed, thatched buildings at Milton Abbas in Dorset. However, despite the beautiful external appearance, each building had only one front door, eight rooms and had to accommodate four families (Karskens 2010, 80). As was the case with many landowners, appearances were more important than the comfort of the employees.

**Figure 3-12: Rows of double cottages, Milton Abbas, c1770s**



**Engraving c1851 (RIBA British Architectural Library Drawings & Archives Collection)**

### **3.4 PATTERN BOOKS, ARCHITECTS AND ARCHITECTURAL STYLES**

The idea of architecture as distinct from the skills of the artisan builder or designer developed during the seventeenth century. The architect was for the upper classes while the artisan builder could be left to work on lesser buildings. Inigo Jones (1573-1652) introduced French and Italian classical ideas into England and after decades of Mannerist and Baroque experimentation, the Palladian style was widely adopted as the dominant elite architectural style in the early eighteenth century, through the influence of aristocrats returning from the Grand Tour and the architects who had accompanied them (Summerson 1953). After centuries of a common tripartite dwelling form for all classes, based around the medieval hall, there was a divergence in dwelling style across the social classes. It was not until the eighteenth century when, in what became known as the neo-classical Georgian style<sup>4</sup>, the styles of the artisan and the architect once again converged. However the distinction between “polite” architecture (designed by an architect) and the buildings constructed without an architect remained.

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<sup>4</sup> The Georgian period is usually taken to be 1714 to 1830.

The invention of the printing press and growing literacy made it possible for the architects and other “experts” to distribute advice on how to build houses. This view of the world included ideas of classical imagery; of the rustic simplicity and values of a simpler life (Johnson 2010, 126). The advice was often provided in the form of pattern books, which originated during the eighteenth century. Several of these early pattern books are discussed below.

The Georgian pattern books contained suggestions, not only for suitable urban villas (see Section 3.7), but on the layouts and buildings for “model” farms and cottages, many of which were being built on the new properties created by enclosures. Sensitivity to class structures ensured that the form and style of such buildings should clearly indicate the status of the occupants, while at the same time confirming the superior taste of the employer or landlord. Labourers who had lost their economic independence through enclosure were mostly housed on those new farms in double cottages (or short terraces), which were standardised and cheap, but which externally could nevertheless display the fashionable Georgian tastes of the master. The rest of the rural labouring and artisan classes lived in earlier village dwellings, many of which themselves had become “Georgian” semis through conversions, subdivisions and additions.

The authors of pattern books for labourers' cottages also sought to improve the morality and virtue of the labourer, by placing neo-classical architecture ("good" architecture) into the landscapes, to address the negative social impacts of enclosure (Maudlin 2010, 13).

There were two types of early pattern book - those by architects which recorded their actual buildings, such as James Gibbs, *Book of Architecture* (1728), and those by draftsmen or architects which contained ideal, but untested designs. The latter were intended to be used in rural areas or for any developments where an architect was either not available or not required (for example, to reduce the costs of a development).

The English architect John Wood the Younger produced what he claimed was the first treatise and pattern book to address the cottage dwelling of the rural labourer (Maudlin 2010, 7). Having seen the "shattered, inconvenient, miserable hovels" of the "poor cottager", he combined the order and regularity of neoclassical design with a program for humanitarian reform, in *A Series of Plans for Cottages or Habitations of the Labourer* (1781). Wood sought to replace the common single-room, vernacular dwelling with an improved cottage. Of his seven principles of cottage design, the fifth was:

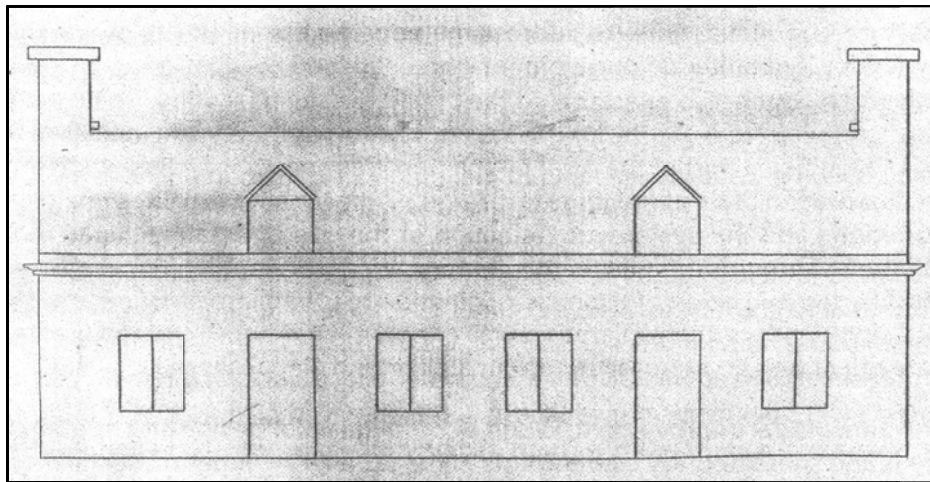
Cottages should always be built in PAIRS [the capitals are Wood's], either at a little distance the one from the other, or close adjoining so as to appear as one building that the inhabitants may be of assistance to each other in case of sickness or any other accident (Wood 1781, iv).

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The term "cottage" at that time implied a mean, poor quality, vernacular dwelling. Many of Wood's "hovels" were undoubtedly attached cottages in converted barns, outbuildings and byres and he hoped to redefine the term with his improved cottages. Importantly, such improvement continued to incorporate the notion of attachment.

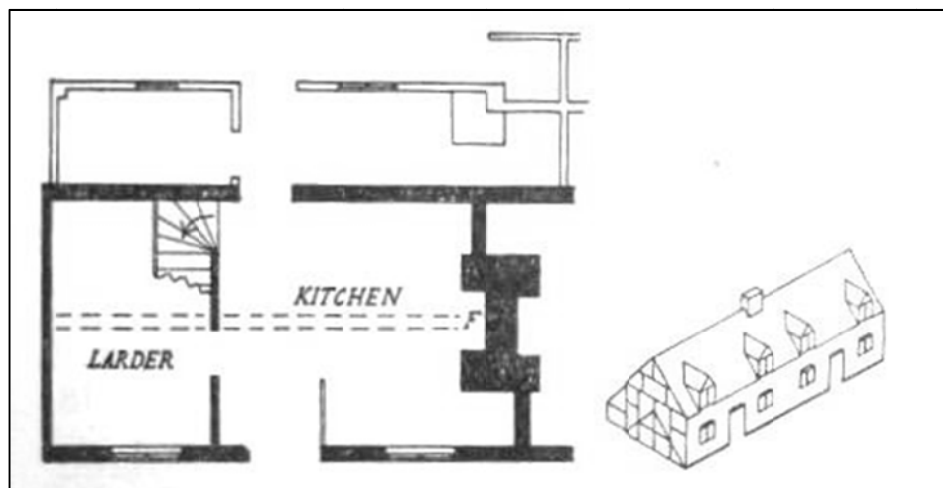
However, despite Wood's claims to have produced the first architectural pattern book suggesting paired cottages for labourers, plans for paired cottages had been published six years before, in Nathaniel Kent's *Hints to Gentlemen of Landed Property* (1775) (Figure 3.13) although Kent was a surveyor rather than an architect. Kent's designs for double cottages had already been used (c1760) at Nuneham Courtenay, a new emparkment village comprising two rows of brick semis; single-storey plus attic rooms with dormers (Figure 3.14).

**Figure 3-13: Design for a pair of attached cottages, 1775**



“Two bricked Cottages of the smallest size” by Nathaniel Kent (Maudlin 2010, 14)

**Figure 3-14: Double cottages for farm labourers, Nuneham Courtenay, c1760**



Double cottages based on designs by Nathaniel Kent. Note that the gable ends use vernacular timber framing. (Barley 1961, 250)

The influence of the pattern books was significant, as the vernacular traditions were gradually replaced with more standard designs, styles and materials.

### 3.5 HOUSING AND INDUSTRY

The rise of rural industries such as textiles, mining and quarrying during the eighteenth century made it necessary to provide suitable accommodation for the workers in those industries. Mills and factories which relied on water supplies from rivers were often located in relatively isolated rural areas. Some existing farm buildings were converted, but most of the accommodation was provided in new cottages close to the factories, mines or mills. If an architect had been involved in the mill or factory design, he was usually responsible for the housing as well, otherwise the pattern books provided sources of suitable designs.

Some employees had workspaces within the cottages themselves. For example, a pair of hand-loom weavers' cottages at Honley was built in 1742 (Figure 3.15). Perhaps under the influence of the pattern books, some early industrial housing included semis. However, the rural factory or mill workers were housed predominantly in two-storey terraces, with a single room on each level of the dwelling. Coal miners tended to be housed in single-storey terraces (Caffyn 1986, 29). When describing the industrial housing of the period, Lucy Caffyn states that:

In building semi-detached houses economies were made in both land and materials. By the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century it had become common practice to build houses in longer rows, so making even greater economies. (Caffyn 1986, 12)

**Figure 3-15: Semis for weavers, Honley, c1742**



**Nos 32 and 33 Oldfield. The large banks of windows on the upper floor are for lighting the weaving looms, set up above the living room and scullery on the ground floor. (Caffyn 1986, 11)**

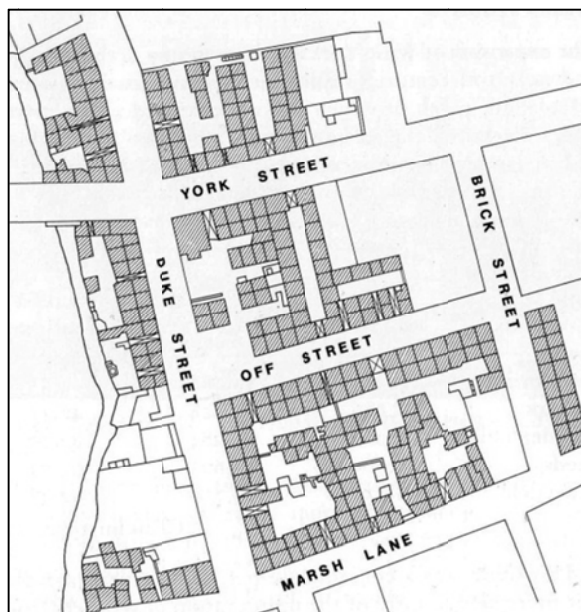
With the ready supply of labour in the cities and towns, only the very large urban industries, or those with specialist employees such as the weavers, needed to build workers' cottages in order to attract employees. It was left to speculators and investors to provide urban housing, which as a consequence was built as cheaply as possible; this translated to terraced housing.

### 3.6 THE WORKING CLASSES IN CITIES AND TOWNS

During the enclosures, most towns experienced considerable growth in their housing stock, to accommodate the influx of displaced labourers. Until the mid-eighteenth century, it was generally possible to create these new dwellings within the existing town boundaries by infilling. And as the wealthier occupants moved to areas on the outskirts of the towns, the dwellings they left behind were subdivided and their back yards developed (Caffyn 1986, 8). As space was at a premium, most new dwellings abutted the old.

In the north of England the back-to-back terrace form was common - not only was there a saving on materials by sharing side walls, but the rear walls and roofs could also be shared. This type of development lent itself to the creation of small yards or courts between the rows (Figure 3.16). It was the yards and courts in working class areas which a hundred years later became a focus for health reforms (see Section 4.2.2) yet, re-invented as the cul-de-sac in the early twentieth century, they once again found favour as an integral part of garden suburb design (see Section 5.3).

**Figure 3-16: Back-to-backs, yards and courts, East Leeds**



Between 1787 and 1803 the speculator Richard Paley built hundreds of back-to-back terraced houses around yards and courts. (Caffyn 1986, 40)

In the City of London, the fire of 1666 interrupted its organic development, when it destroyed around a quarter of the housing stock. Both its increasingly important role as a trading centre and an influx of people from rural areas, had caused significant growth in the City and the surrounding areas and by the early seventeenth century many working class areas were in decline with poorly constructed tenements, lodging houses and subdivided timber houses around courts and alleys.

Unlike the standard wide-fronted form of the rural longhouse, medieval timber houses in London usually had their rooms one behind the other, or above each other, as a result of the narrow street frontages. Although in the country there was no need to attach timber dwellings, in London as in the other city centres, the required high densities made it necessary to abut houses or join them with party walls (Figure 3.17). For example, the speculative housing development at Bartholomew Fair, Smithfield (London), built between 1598 and 1616, included jettied timber artisans' houses in uniform rows (Guillery 2004, 41).

**Figure 3-17: London streetscape, c1559**



Extract from the Copperplate Map (between Shoreditch and London Bridge) (Museum of London, also Whitfield 2006, 32-33).

The concept of the “attachment” of dwellings was therefore firmly established in the urban as well as the rural context, albeit by a different mechanism. Consequently, when new

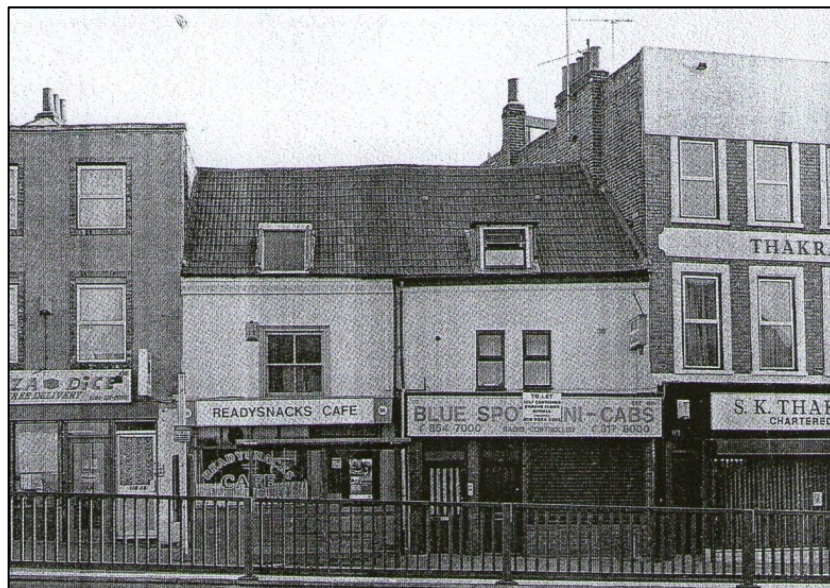
speculative urban estates were developed for the artisan class in London after the fire, they typically consisted of terraces, two or three storeys high, with one room on each level.

Elizabeth McKellar describes the emergence of the new style of brick terraced house in the late seventeenth century rebuilding of London as a “housing type between vernacular and polite” when attempting to explain why its importance has largely been overlooked (McKellar 1999, 155). Such terraces with a “minimalist aesthetic” had been introduced to London in the 1630s (before the fire) but they were to become a blueprint for the post-fire redevelopment of urban housing throughout the city. The popularity of attached housing was facilitated by the *Rebuilding of the City of London Act 1667* which specified that all buildings should be constructed of brick or stone, and have two, three or four storeys. The use of shared brick party walls created considerable savings for the builders.

Status was also formally introduced into housing forms by the Act, which divided house types into classes based on their relative size and value. Only “mansions for people of quality” were allowed four storeys (McKellar 1999, 156-7). In later Building Acts the classes became “rates” with housing for the working classes mostly of the fourth (lowest) rate. Importantly, the Act did not specify a minimum standard for such fourth rate housing (Guillery 2004, 284).

Peter Guillery (2004) analysed eighteenth century artisans’ dwellings, and their antecedents, within several areas of London, noting the paucity of surviving physical and documentary evidence for the housing of the poorer labouring class. His study includes many examples of tenements, terraces and pairs of semis for artisans, for example a timber-framed pair in Woolwich (Figure 3.18).

**Figure 3-18: Early eighteenth century pair of timber-framed houses**



**Nos 111 and 112 Woolwich High Street (Guillery 2004, 214)**

To the east and south of the City, a great deal of poor quality housing was built by and for artisans and labourers working in the docks and local industries such as brewing, and the north east housed workers in the silk industry of Spitalfields (Guillery 2004, 20-21, 143). Where the speculative builders were infilling or building in small developments, a pair of houses would usually be built because they would fit into the space, not because they were for a higher class of occupant. Peter Guillery states that:

Isolated semi-detached pairs of houses were common around eighteenth-century London. Some were high-status buildings, designed for well-to-do commuters and having integrated coach-houses. Others were humbler pairs, built as such simply because two houses would often have been the limit of artisan speculation (Guillery 2004, 187).

For the poorest urban tenants in the cities and towns, even a small terraced cottage was unaffordable; they might live in part of a subdivided house, in a cellar or in a tenement. It was common for more than one family to live in such dwellings and many people remained homeless.

However, despite the poor quality of much of the urban housing, it was generally no worse than the cottages provided in the rural areas. It was the high densities and lack of access and sanitation in the towns and cities which led to the development of working class slums, not the dwelling type.

### **3.7 MIDDLE CLASS HOUSING**

Many historians have tried to define the origins and development of the English middle class. Whatever the differences of opinion, by the sixteenth century, the concept of a “middling sort”, a yeoman farmer or a merchant, between a landless labourer and the gentry, was well established.

During the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries the construction of dwellings moved from being primarily a local, vernacular activity into a mostly commercial industry. Architects and their builders adopted the classical styles in the provision of upper class and upper middle class housing (in both rural and urban areas), while the speculative builder usually worked without an architect (McKellar 1999, 3). The post-fire upper class housing of west London, with its large terraced houses set around green squares, was a deliberate separation of the classes, leaving the poor in the east. The terraces also developed the classical symmetry and elegance which became the defining characteristic of the eighteenth century middle class Georgian terrace, and later the middle class semi.



The move to the Georgian form of dwelling was accompanied by a breakdown in the way of life epitomised by the medieval hall-based dwelling, and in many cases flagged a rise in social status (Johnson 2010, 163). Dwelling forms and styles, particularly in the towns and cities, became “material statements of the social order” (Johnson 2010, 133). One of those architectural forms was the suburban villa.

The term “villa” (originally used by the Romans to describe a large isolated farmhouse, standing in its own fields) was adopted in the early seventeenth century to describe a large detached house, built on the fringes of a city or town, as a semi-rural retreat from the pollution and business activities of the city. These villas were occupied by the upper middle class, who from the sixteenth century onwards had moved away from the city centres to live in proximity to the houses of the elite (McKellar 2011, 50). This trend intensified during the late seventeenth century as transport improved, creating suburbs for wealthy residents.

Pattern books were a key source of suitable designs for middle class villas, for example John Crunden's *Convenient and Ornamental Architecture, Consisting of Original Designs for Plans, Elevations and Sections Beginning with the Farm House and Regularly Ascending to the Most Grand Villa Calculated for Both Town and Country and Suitable to Persons in Every Station of Life* (1767). Despite its title, Crunden's book was aimed at the middle class, and was used extensively in Britain and the USA until well into the nineteenth century, with new editions until 1815 (Long 2002, 23). John Plaw's *Rural Architecture: Consisting of Designs from the Simple Cottage to the More Decorated Villa* (1785) went to six editions and David Laing's *Hints for Dwellings* (1800) was not only influential in England but inspired many landmark buildings in Sydney (Martin 2009, 10).

Matthew Johnson suggests that the writers of pattern books were “commenting implicitly or explicitly on the relationship between the gentry classes and the rest of the community” (Johnson 2010, 176). Yet by the early eighteenth century many of the middling sort were literate, and the pattern books provided a way of obtaining from builders a suitable but aspirational dwelling, which had an English form rather than a local traditional form.

Not all of the suburban dwellings for the well-to-do were detached, despite some contemporary commentators suggesting that country homes should always be detached. For example, Croom's Hill, Greenwich contained a c1721 terrace (McKellar 2011, 60-64). These early deviations from the detached form tended to be where private estates were built around a landmark building. For example, the gated estate around Vanbrugh Castle (1717-26) in Greenwich included “grouped” housing for Vanbrugh's relatives. Three pairs of large semis were built in 1688 in the garden of Dorchester House by William Blake. Known as Nos 1 to 6 of The Grove, the rent to be obtained from them was to help fund the Charity School he had set up in Dorchester House (British History Online nd).

During the eighteenth century double villas became more popular for new suburban dwellings, and many of the older villas were subdivided or extended to form multiple dwellings. The distinguishing features were that any new buildings containing multiple dwellings were designed to appear as one large house (for example, Figure 3.19), and that the dwelling hierarchy maintained the social order – detached representing the highest, followed by semis then terraces.

**Figure 3-19: Semis in Dartmouth Grove, c1776**



**Designed by Thomas Gayfere to appear as one large villa (McKellar 2011, 65)**

In this way, the suburban semi became known as a relatively upmarket dwelling type (while the double cottages of the rural labourers were clearly not) and the term villa could be applied to all suburban detached or semi-detached housing, as long as the building met suitable middle class standards. The unified appearance which gave suburban semis social acceptance and for which the term “villa” was deemed appropriate, was well established before the end of the eighteenth century.

When the speculative builders started producing middle class suburban houses, they focussed on semis and terraces, although these were of a size and quality which made them attractive to relatively wealthy tenants seeking an out of town retreat, and they were not out of place amongst the detached villas. Elizabeth McKellar notes that:

Clearly, suburbanites were happy to occupy houses resulting from this mix-and-match approach to architecture which was the outcome of small irregular plots and an essentially ad hoc development process (McKellar 2011, 64).

The Kingsland Place estate, north of London was developed by speculative builders during the 1770s, with a mix of middle class detached housing, semis and terraces. Peter Guillery describes how the quasi-semi-detached dwelling form was also introduced into the mix to “insinuate greater gentility than a mere terrace, without obliging the waste of frontage that detachment entailed” and to “blur the distinction between isolation and connection” (Guillery 2004, 186). He suggests that it was only after this pioneering development (Figure 3.20), and the Paragons at Blackheath soon afterwards (Figure 3.21) that the quasi-semi-detached form became popular. However, the form did not endure, because it had none of the advantages of true semi-detachment, and was an inefficient use of land compared to a true terrace.

**Figure 3-20: Quasi-semi-detached housing, 1770s**



**Nos 530 to 566 Kingsland Road, Kingsland Place. Previously upper middle class housing with pairs of semis linked by coach-houses. The front gardens were covered by shops during the late nineteenth century (Guillery 2004, 183)**

**Figure 3-21: Quasi-semi-detached houses, c1795****The Paragon, Blackheath, designed by Michael Searles, sketched in 1864. Intended for the upper middle class. (Ideal Homes nd)**

By the end of the century, although the inner cities and towns contained a mix of dwelling types and a mix of social classes, the hierarchy of dwelling type was not clear-cut. The dwellings of the rich were contiguous with those for the workers who supported the wealthy households. However, in the middle class suburbs the dwelling hierarchy was well developed and well understood.

### 3.8 CONCLUSIONS

Peter Guillery attempted to quantify the sizes of the various classes in London at the end of the eighteenth century – upper income 2-3%, middling sort 16-21%, artisans 25% and labourers 50%. He suggests that it was immigration from rural areas during the previous centuries which “sowed the seed for the rise of both London’s working trades and its middling sort”, although he warns that there was considerable ambiguity and mobility between the upper level artisans and the lower level middling sorts (Guillery 2004, 11-13).

In rural areas, the class system was similar, with yeoman farmers, industrialists and merchants growing in numbers and prosperity, while enclosures transformed peasants into employed labourers. Both the gentry and the industrialists found themselves responsible for rehousing labourers and although the urban terraced form provided the minimum requirements, it was the use of semis which could garner admiration from their peers, for their philanthropic deeds and their aesthetic good taste.

Purpose-built housing for the poorest class in cities and towns was rare, except for institutions such as almshouses. The artisans who built homes for themselves or their peers in the towns tended to adhere to their vernacular traditions (Guillery 2004, 297). In rural areas and open villages, new housing was more affordable plus there were existing buildings which could be used or converted. The ready acceptance of pairs of cottages as suitable housing by rural labourers in the closed villages can be attributed to their familiarity with the attached form within the traditional village. The rehousing of peasants who had lost their small subsistence farms was an evolution rather than a revolution. Similarly, the aspiration by the upper middle class for a semi-detached villa in the suburbs was an evolution. The inner city living from which they were escaping involved attachment in terraced houses or abutting dwellings – to be attached on only one side and to have a garden setting indicated a significant rise in social status without a dramatic change in the internal layout of the house.

During the eighteenth century, 80,000 more dwellings had been added to London's housing stock, and despite the growth of other cities, by 1801 it was still ten times larger than Manchester, Birmingham and Liverpool (Guillery 2004, 8). In the 1720s speculative building had almost ceased due to an economic downturn and did not recommence until after 1760, by which time overcrowding was rife and thoughts turned to the "improvement" of the urban environment. As enclosure brought rural areas under control, so the movement of the middle classes started to bring some control to suburban areas. In each case, the type of housing which appeared was a key indicator of progress. This theme of improvement carried over into the nineteenth century, a period during which the semi consolidated its position in the dwelling hierarchy.



## 4.0 NINETEENTH CENTURY

### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

Until the mid-eighteenth century, England still had many pre-industrial characteristics. John Burnett describes these as “a primary dependence on agriculture, low levels of national income and economic growth, a lack of specialisation and of regional integration” (Burnett 1986, 3) although he suggests that the major characteristic was low population growth. However, the English population increased by 50% between 1750 and 1801, and doubled between 1801 and 1851. There was also a huge shift of population from rural areas to cities and towns; the percentage living in rural areas declined from 80% in 1801 to less than 50% in 1851 and this trend continued for the rest of the century. Together with rapid industrial expansion, these factors had transformed both rural and urban areas by the end of the nineteenth century (Burnett 1986, 4,7).

During the eighteenth century the doctrine of *laissez-faire* prevailed - the belief that there was no need for interference, especially by governments, in the structure of society. However, as the industrial revolution progressed much of the earlier housing in cities and towns disappeared under developments such as docks, roads and railways, and that which remained deteriorated rapidly through overcrowding. The differences of income and status within the working classes were magnified (Burnett 1986, 14). As squalid industrial towns proliferated, the philosophy of *laissez-faire* was gradually replaced by a realisation that housing reforms and some interventions were required for working class housing, in particular the dwellings of the artisan class in urban areas and rural tenants. As the vernacular traditions were lost, the ideal housing for artisans became something imposed on them by well-meaning philanthropists and designers of model dwellings who “linked architecture, artisans and morality” (Guillery 2004, 298).

In contrast, the growing middle classes during the nineteenth century were able to grasp the opportunities for advancement created by the industrial revolution, including the ability to move out of the city centres and into the surrounding suburbs. For them the housing became less uniform, with fashionable new suburbs such as the picturesque “genteel vernacular” styles of St John’s Wood and later the domestic revival (Queen Anne) styles of Bedford Park.

This chapter traces the trajectory of the semi up and down the social spectrum during the nineteenth century, including its role in the flourishing pattern books. For the working classes there are three major themes – the philanthropists and their model dwellings for rural labourers, rural industrial workers in model villages, and the urban workers. The emerging middle classes are considered in relation to the development of the suburbs.

## 4.2 HOUSING THE WORKING CLASSES

### 4.2.1 MODEL DWELLINGS

Speculative builders were not very active in rural areas, because labourers could not afford the rentals for new cottages. Some people in open villages continued to build their own dwellings, but most of the building was carried out by estate owners. The early estate villages tended to be set out in rows of houses, reflecting the formal landscaping fashions of the time, but using the traditional vernacular styles of the region. With the spread of the pattern books, advances in building techniques and the availability of new materials, the rural vernacular styles were gradually replaced with standardised cottage designs, even some urban forms such as the terraces (c1760) of the Harewood Estate village (Figure 4.1).

**Figure 4-1: Terraced housing for labourers, Harewood Estate village, c1760**



**Short terraces designed by John Carr, the architect of Harewood House (Leeds City Council 2010, 2).**

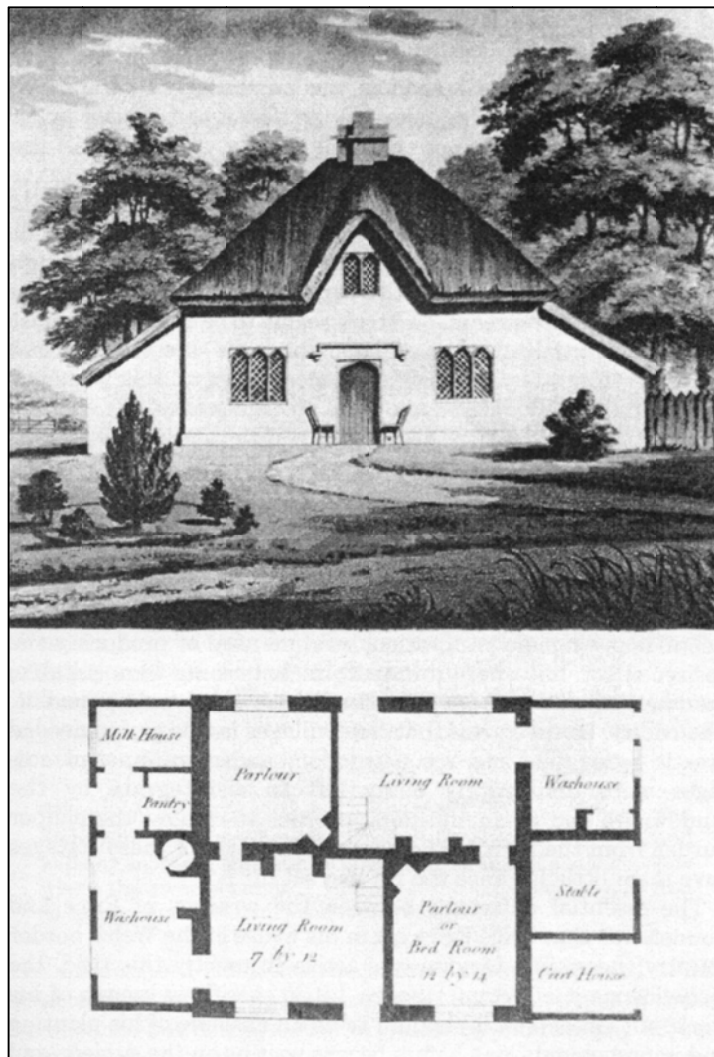
Model dwellings were either a design or a built example which, it was hoped, other builders would copy, so that the occupants of the cottages would obtain lifestyle benefits. At the same time as pattern books were promoting model dwelling designs, interest in the picturesque movement grew. This was an aesthetic ideal of a landscape being in the manner of a painting, such as those composed by landscape artists. As tourists sought out the picturesque, the owners of rural estates wished to create their own picturesque landscapes. Many landowners removed their formal gardens and began constructing parks and gardens with irregular sight lines, classical “ruins” and follies. The villages within those sight lines became part of the picturesque landscapes.



By the early nineteenth century a new estate village was expected to conform to the picturesque in every detail, rather than just be an element in the landscape. Not all of the picturesque buildings were new – at its worst the picturesque movement took aesthetic pleasure from “scenes of rural poverty and the decay of traditional vernacular cottages” (Maudlin 2010, 14) but often old cottages were modified to become picturesque. The important characteristics, whether it was a new village or a remodelled old village, included asymmetry, overhanging eaves, porches, recessed windows and large intricate chimneys (Darley 2007, 47). Trees, shrubs and creepers over the walls were also essential.

Appearance was everything, and some pattern book designs provided only “an obligatory nod in the direction of housing necessities” (Darley 2007, 57). Decorative excess often made the cottages difficult to live in; for example picturesque gables and eaves made for very cramped bedrooms (Figure 4.2). The cottages however, were still an improvement on most of the older rural cottages, and the double cottage remained the most popular form.

**Figure 4-2: Picturesque double cottages, 1795**



**Design from *Ferme Ornée or Rural Improvements* (1795), by John Plaw (Darley 2007, 48)**

One of the most influential books of dwelling designs was published in 1833 by John Claudius Loudon, a prolific writer of architecture and gardening magazines and books. His *Encyclopaedia of Cottage, Farm, and Villa Architecture and Furniture* provided designs in a range of fashionable architectural styles, for both builders and owners. New editions were published for the next 40 years (Long 2002, 36). Continuing the progressive humanitarian agenda commenced by Wood, his principal interest in cottages was "as devices of social formation and agricultural production" (Maudlin 2010, 19). Loudon's publication was divided into three sections (Books 1, 2 and 3) depending on the class of a dwelling's proposed occupant.

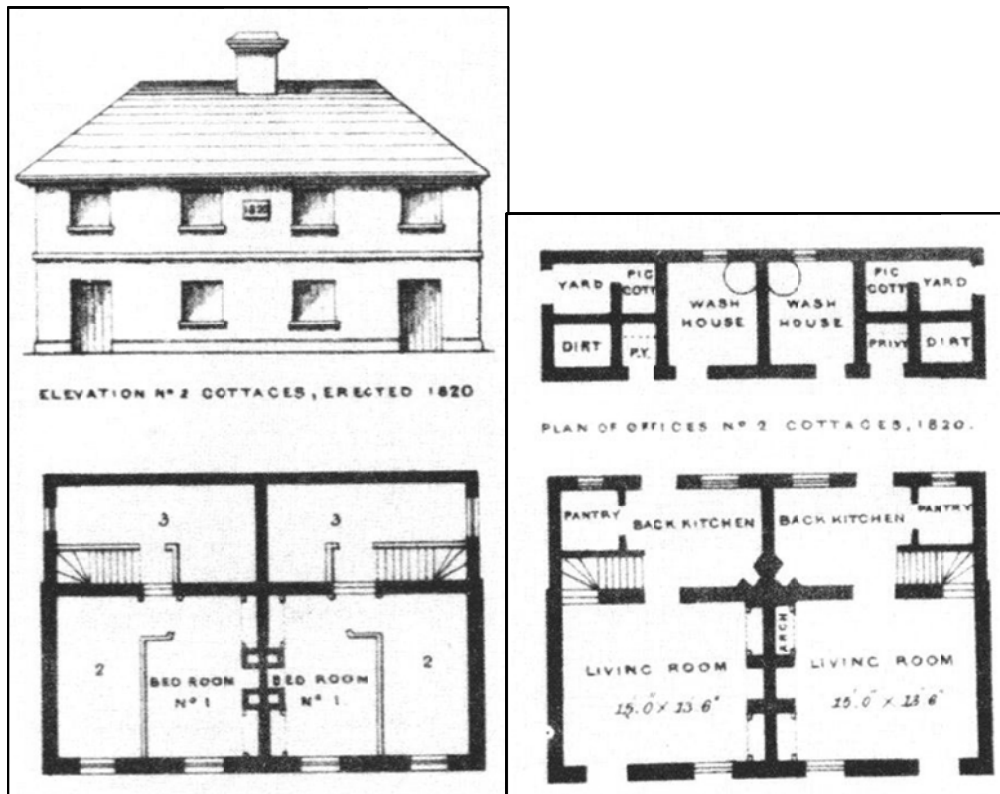
It was not only the pattern books which inspired the picturesque cottage builders. The prominent architect John Nash (1752-1835), with his assistant George Repton, in 1811 designed a village at Blaise Hamlet; a group of houses around a green, for retired employees of Blaise Castle House. Unusually, eight of the cottages are detached, the additional expense and care for the tenants being justified because the owner was a Quaker philanthropist who wished to display his benevolence. The ninth building is a double cottage (Figure 4.3).

**Figure 4-3: Double cottages, Blaise Hamlet, 1811**



([www.flickr.com/photos/majorclanger/3740641952/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/majorclanger/3740641952/) accessed 12 March 2012)

Blaise Hamlet became an exemplar for the picturesque, although for many estate owners their new villages had only the minimum of picturesque styling – enough to satisfy fashionable tastes, but built as cheaply as possible (Figure 4.4).

**Figure 4-4: Estate cottages, Holkham, Norfolk, 1820**

**Built by the Earl of Leicester (Burnett 1986, 50)**

As the industrial revolution increasingly impacted on the working classes in the cities, towns and rural areas, some concerned middle class citizens formed societies to try and improve the living conditions of the labouring classes, both in the developing city slums and in rural areas. A group known as the *Society for Improving the Condition of the Labouring Classes* was formed by Benjamin Wills in 1825 (Curl 1983, 75) and the same year the Secretary to the Society, architect John Hall, published a book of designs for cottages and schools for the "rural poor". In this book Hall notes that the objective of the Society was:

...an increase of comfort and happiness to the labouring classes:- an encouragement towards the attainment of a true independence, which, while it makes them superior to idleness, intemperance, and parochial relief, will tend to lessen their vices, and create a pleasurable observance of all the duties of society. In short, an inducement to preserve health by the exercise of cleanliness, delicacy, and industrious morality. (Hall 1825, 7).

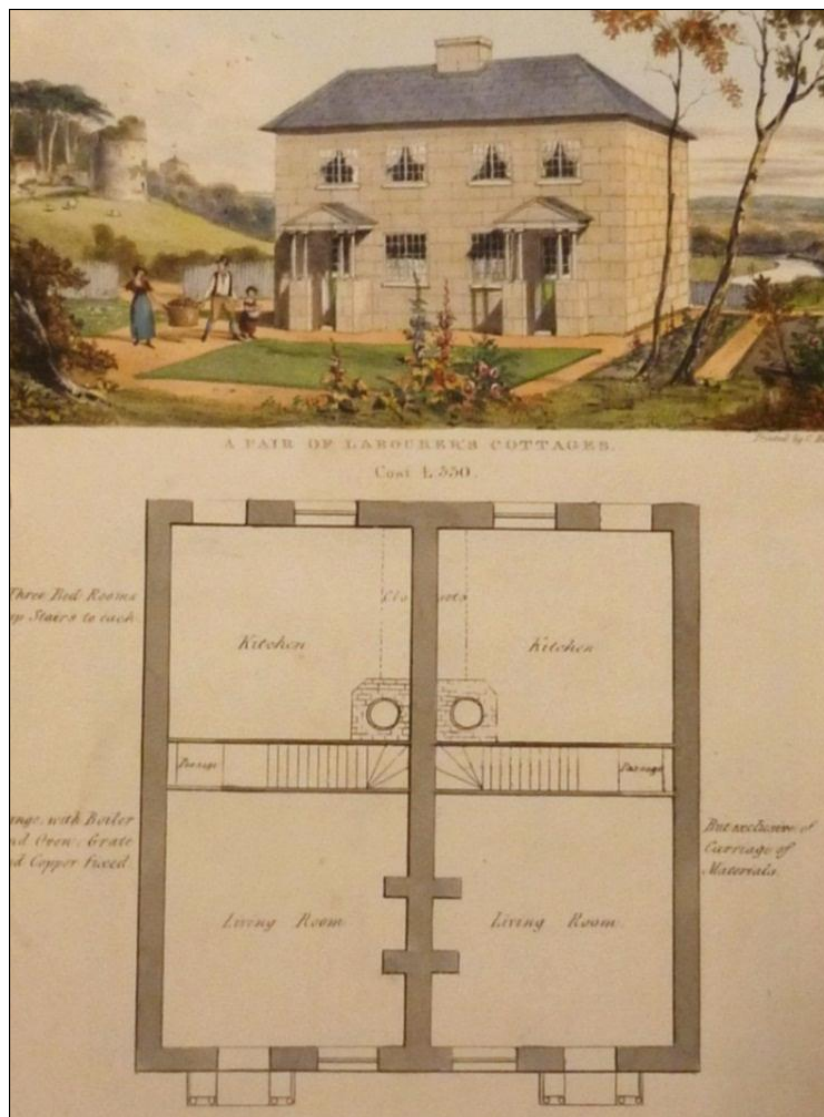
He added that "For Delicacy:- There must be three sleeping rooms, to enable the parents, the boys, and the girls to sleep separate; an arrangement very little known at present". These were worthy ideals which picked up many of the concerns expressed by the architect John Wood the Younger (see Section 3.4). The designs in Hall's book were mostly of pairs

of pisé cottages, which for the period were remarkably spacious (Figure 4.5). Adopting Wood's principle from more than 40 years before, he believed that it was:

best to build them in pairs, not only as respects economy, but for the purpose of vicinity, supplying neighbours to minister to each other in times of sickness &c. &c. (Hall 1825, 8).

Hall went on to specify that each pair of labourers' cottages should be on 2.5 acres of land, to allow for the growing of wheat, fruit and vegetables for consumption and sale. The book was targetted at the "nobility and gentry" in the hope that they would improve the lives of the labourers on their estates - it was also calculated that the landowner would receive a return of 7.5% on his capital.

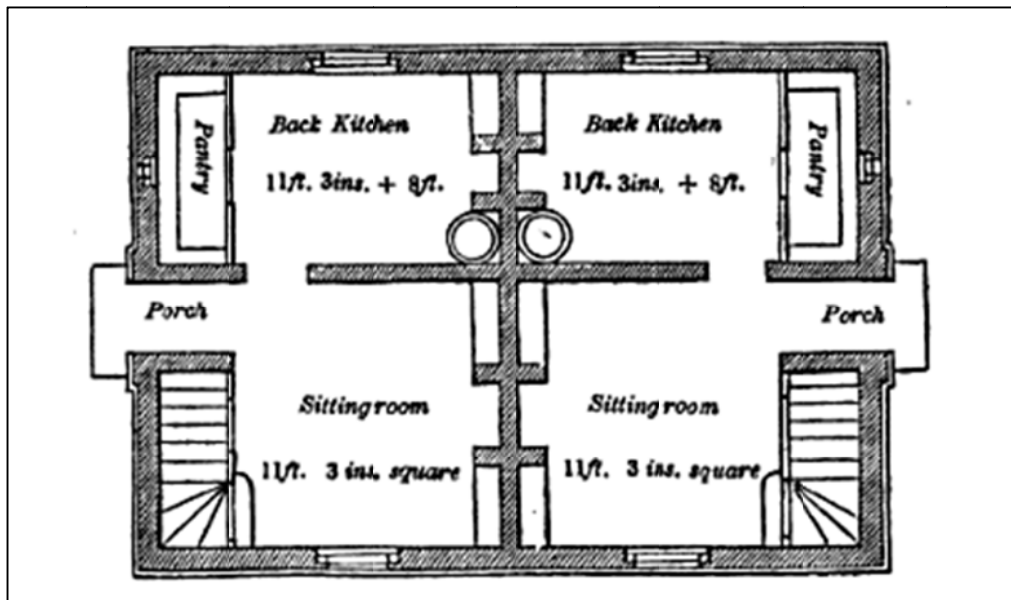
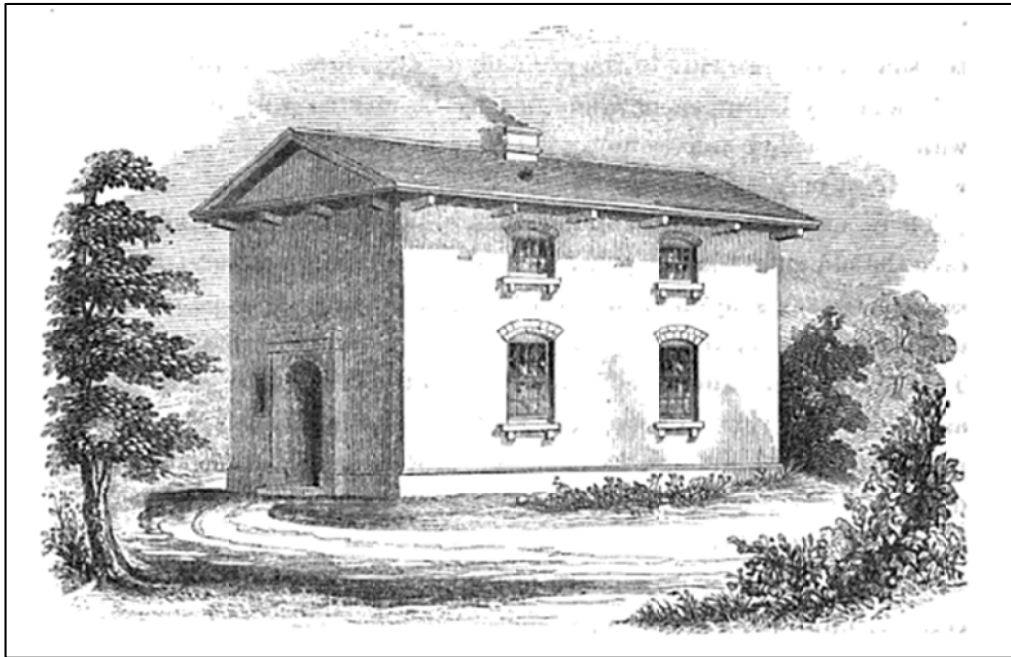
**Figure 4-5: A pair of labourers' cottages, 1825**



The cottages are shown in a picturesque setting. (Hall 1825, Design No 5, no page number)

Perhaps not surprisingly, only one school and none of Hall's ambitious cottage designs were built, and the Society folded. However Wills and several other members in 1827 formed the *Labourer's Friend Society* which that year built six pairs of picturesque cottages at Shooters Hill in Kent (Bardwell 1854, 10) (Figure 4.6). However, this philanthropic society, plus many others which emerged during the century had a very limited impact on rural dwellings. Instead they focussed their attention onto the urban working class (see Section 4.2.2).

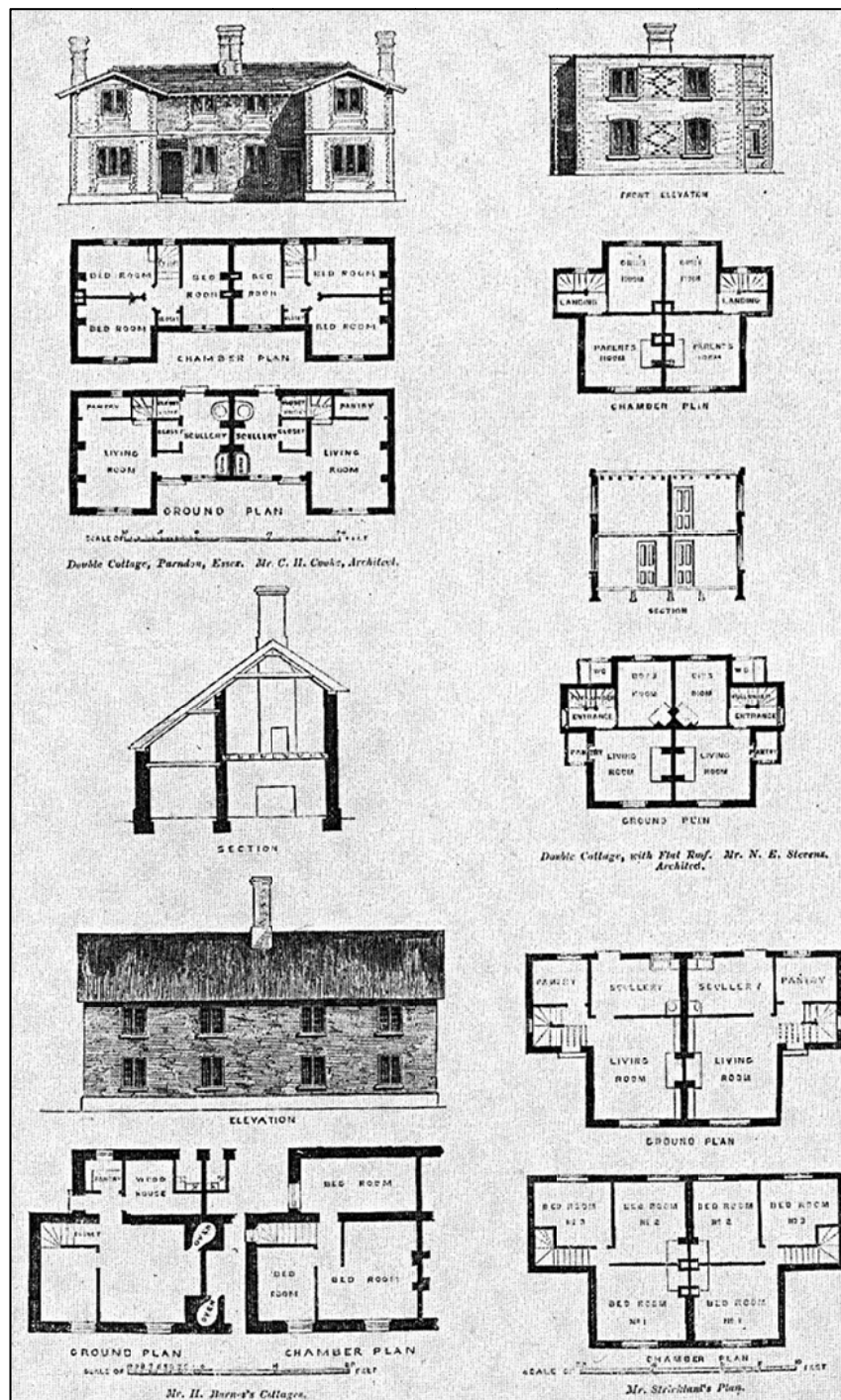
**Figure 4-6: Pair of cottages, Shooters Hill, Kent, 1827**



One of six pairs built by the Labourer's Friend Society (Bardwell 1854, 13, 15)

In 1845 the Enclosures Commission was established to lend capital to estate owners in return for building labourers' cottages to specified minimum standards. Other methods for trying to improve the standards included design competitions, with the results published in journals such as *The Builder* (Caffyn 1986, 85). Frequently the winning model designs were for semis (Figure 4.7).

Figure 4-7: Designs for labourers' cottages, 1860



*The Builder* (in Caffyn 1986, 85)

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As the century progressed there was a move away from the picturesque cottage, to a more functional cottage which could use mass produced materials such as bricks and slate.

#### 4.2.2 TOWNS AND CITIES

Some of the enormous urban population increase was a natural increase, but the major impact was from rural workers moving to the urban areas. This created a huge demand for housing – for example it was estimated that the number of dwellings in Leeds increased sevenfold between 1774 and 1839 (Caffyn 1986, 39). In London 30,000 new houses were built during the early part of the century, especially in areas where the new docks were displacing old houses and attracting more labourers (Guillery 2004, 290).

City centres which had previously been inhabited by a mix of the prosperous middle class and the workers who supported them, became enclaves of the working classes as the middle classes moved to the suburbs; their old houses were subdivided, and the spaces around them were infilled. The working classes mostly lived in cellars, tenements and lodging houses in subdivided buildings, or in purpose-built dwellings such as back-to-backs (in the north of England), terraced houses, or houses with workshops attached. Building in brick was expensive, resulting in rows and rows of very small dwellings, mostly fourth rate. Together with the overcrowded and decayed older houses, and infilling, this created what the middle class soon called slums.<sup>5</sup> As the vernacular traditions waned, artisans' housing became uniform and monotonous, albeit not as slum-like as the labourers' housing.

By 1830 the poverty and living conditions of the growing urban underclass could no longer be ignored. Welfare payments, if available at all, were funded by local taxes in each town and there were increasing concerns amongst the middle and upper classes that their taxes were encouraging the poor to be lazy and workshy. A new Poor Law was introduced in 1834, which required the poor to enter a workhouse before they could receive assistance. Working class discontent was threatening the status quo. Politicians feared civil unrest, and outbreaks of cholera and typhoid also highlighted the health problems resulting from substandard housing. In 1842 Edwin Chadwick reported to the Poor Law Board on the sanitary conditions and planning laws (if any) within towns and a Royal Commission on the Health of Towns reported in 1845, noting in particular the poor standard of terraced housing and back-to-backs. Gradually a program of government reforms in housing and public health was introduced.

Until the 1840s there was only limited centralised planning control in England, and this tended to focus on fire prevention. London's *Metropolitan Building Act 1844* continued this narrow approach. Most parishes had some regulations but they were neither coordinated nor

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<sup>5</sup> The first use of the term was in 1812 (Guillery 2004, 290).

always adhered to. Elements of philanthropy and social responsibility had also begun to appear in the political sphere, although it was the increasing incidence of disease and epidemics which affected both rich and poor which eventually prompted the central government to act. The *Towns Improvement Clauses Act 1847* empowered local authorities to make byelaws on issues including health and safety, sanitation, drainage, structural stability and fire safety. The *Public Health Act 1848* applied outside London and London's *Metropolitan Board of Works* was created in 1855.

At the same time, the philanthropists turned from the housing of rural labourers dispossessed by enclosure to the urban working classes. This "new kind of social responsibility" has been described as the "essence of early Victorian thought" (Tarn 1973, 15). Their concerns extended to the moral hazards supposedly caused by the substandard housing.

Various societies were founded during the 1840s and 1850s as a result of Chadwick's report and the Royal Commission's findings, including the *Suffolk Society for Bettering the Condition of the Labouring Classes* (1844), the *Hereford Cottage Association* (1846) and the *General Society for Improving the Dwellings of the Working Classes* (1852) (Tarn 1973, 4, 24). Some of these groups did little more than discuss issues; however in 1847 the *Birkenhead Dock Company* built some workmen's model dwellings – two blocks of architect-designed tenements – which were claimed to be the first of their type in England (Tarn 1973, 5).

The *Labourer's Friend Society*, which had been formed in 1827 (see previous Section) published a journal *The Labourer's Friend* in which they set out the principles of cottage building and provided model designs. They suggested that in such designs:

...every approach to the appearance of a 'cockney villa' on the one hand, and of the alms-house on the other, should be carefully avoided; that it should have a distinctive character, so that everyone, on seeing them anywhere, should be able at once to say 'That is a Labourers' Friend Society's Cottage' (Bardwell 1854, 10).

Bardwell goes on to state that the designs were "a model for millions" including the colonies in Canada and Australia, and that "plans for that purpose were, I believe, sent out". However, he adds that "the means of the Society were limited, and not at all commensurate with the ideas of its members" (Bardwell 1854, 11).

Nevertheless the scope of the Society expanded in 1844 when, as a result of the various reports on the housing conditions of the urban working classes, it was reconstituted as the *Society for Improving the Condition of the Labouring Classes*, adopting the name of Wills's earlier society. The reconstituted Society had powerful backers and patrons, including Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, and its Honorary Architect was the highly regarded Henry Roberts (*The Labourer's Friend*, June 1844, 1). Roberts was by then virtually retired and his



involvement was more charitable than professional (Burnett 1986, 26). The Society embarked on a program of raising funds from investors to build model dwellings for urban workers to “show the way” in how workers should be housed. There was also to be a return on investment for the backers. However, unlike some later organisations, it was in effect a philanthropic society, because its dividend, set at a maximum of 4%, was not an attractive investment at that time.

All of the Society’s published designs were by Roberts, as well as the designs for the model dwellings which were actually constructed.

The first model dwellings were commenced in 1844 by the Society, but despite the earlier designs by Hall, they were not semis but two long rows of two storey terraces and flats at Pentonville near Bagnigge Wells (Roberts 1853, 6). These were followed by model lodging houses for single men and in 1850, a large tenement block for families in Bloomsbury (Figure 4.8). This illustrated the stark contrast between the Society’s ideal of a spacious semi for a labourer, and the requirement for a philanthropic society to house as many people as possible on limited land in the city, at an affordable rent.

**Figure 4-8: Block of tenements, 1850**



**Model houses for families, in Streatham Street, Bloomsbury, built by the Society for Improving the Condition of the Labouring Classes (Roberts 1853, 49).**

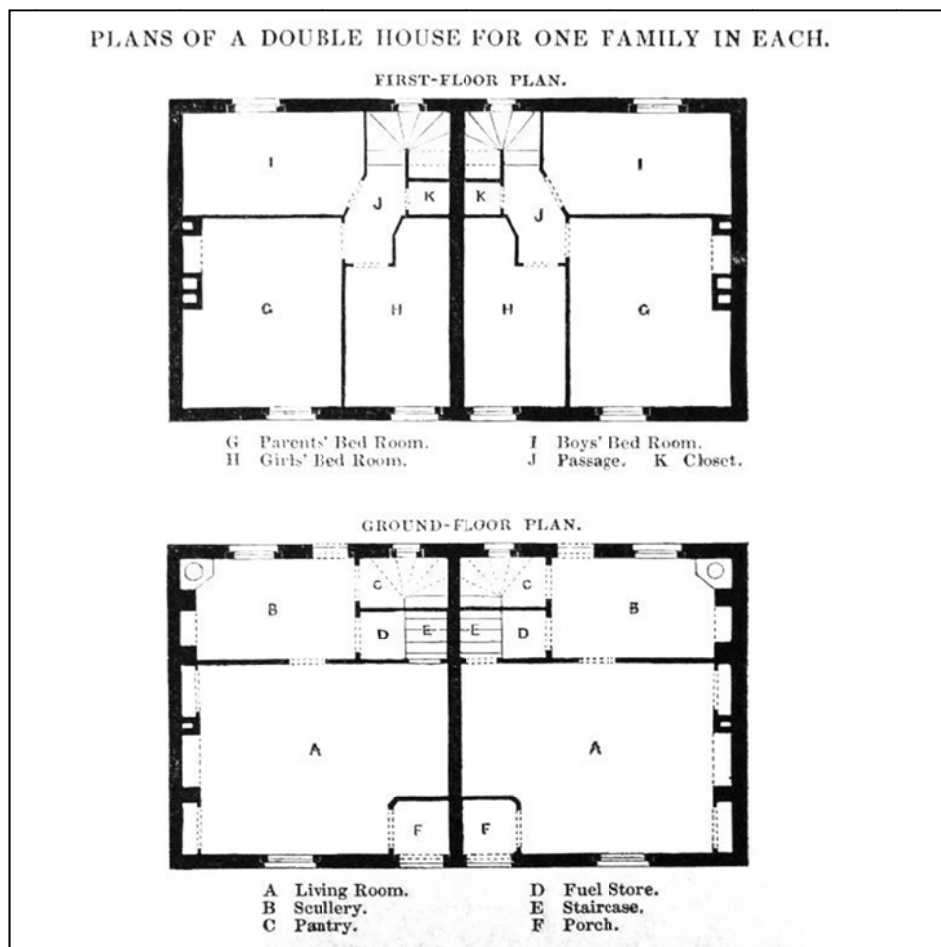
Despite the Society’s desire to assist the very poor, the rents charged for the tenements in reality were affordable only for the “artisan and journeyman class” (*The Labourer’s Friend*, June 1850, cited in Tam 1973, 20). The Society, funded and supported by Prince Albert, built

a prototype of Model Houses for Families for the Great Exhibition of 1851. This received world-wide acclaim and firmly established the standard of having three bedrooms in a family home – one for the parents and one for the children of each sex.

In 1850 the Society released *The Dwellings of the Labouring Classes*, written by Roberts. Although the Society's actual model dwellings were terraces and large tenement blocks in the city, Robert's book of designs contained plans and elevations for model houses adapted for towns as well as agricultural and manufacturing districts (Figures 4.9 and 4.10). He included semis for both towns and rural areas:

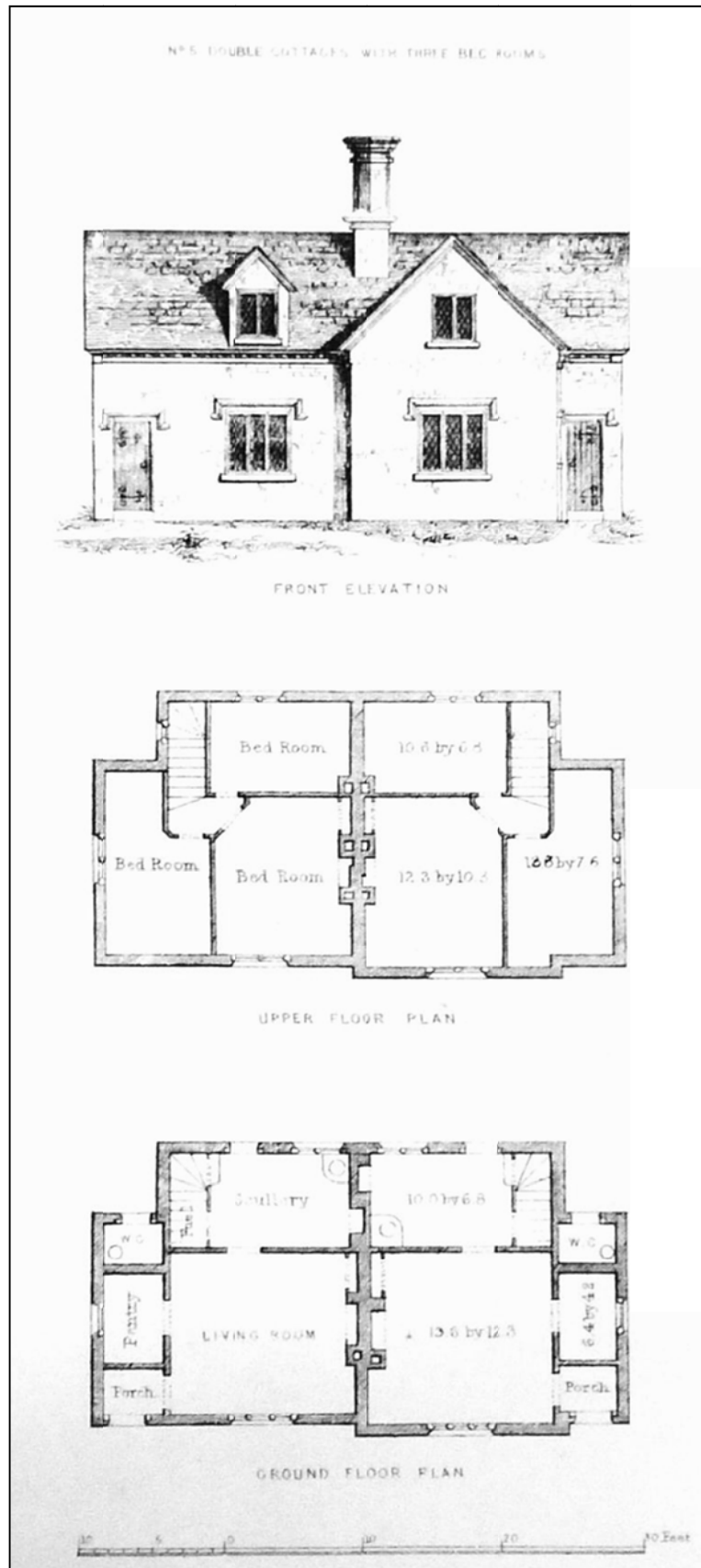
On the ground of economy, as well as for other reasons which it is unnecessary to detail, the dwellings generally are designed in pairs, care being taken to prevent, as far as possible, the interface of adjoining families with each other, by placing the entrance doors at the opposite extremities of the cottages, whilst, by carrying up the chimney-stack in the centre, the greatest possible amount of warmth is obtained from the flues (Roberts 1853, 21).

**Figure 4-9: Design for a double house, 1850**



Design by Henry Roberts for *Workmen's Dwellings in Towns*, to be built in pairs or in a row. (Roberts 1853, 42)

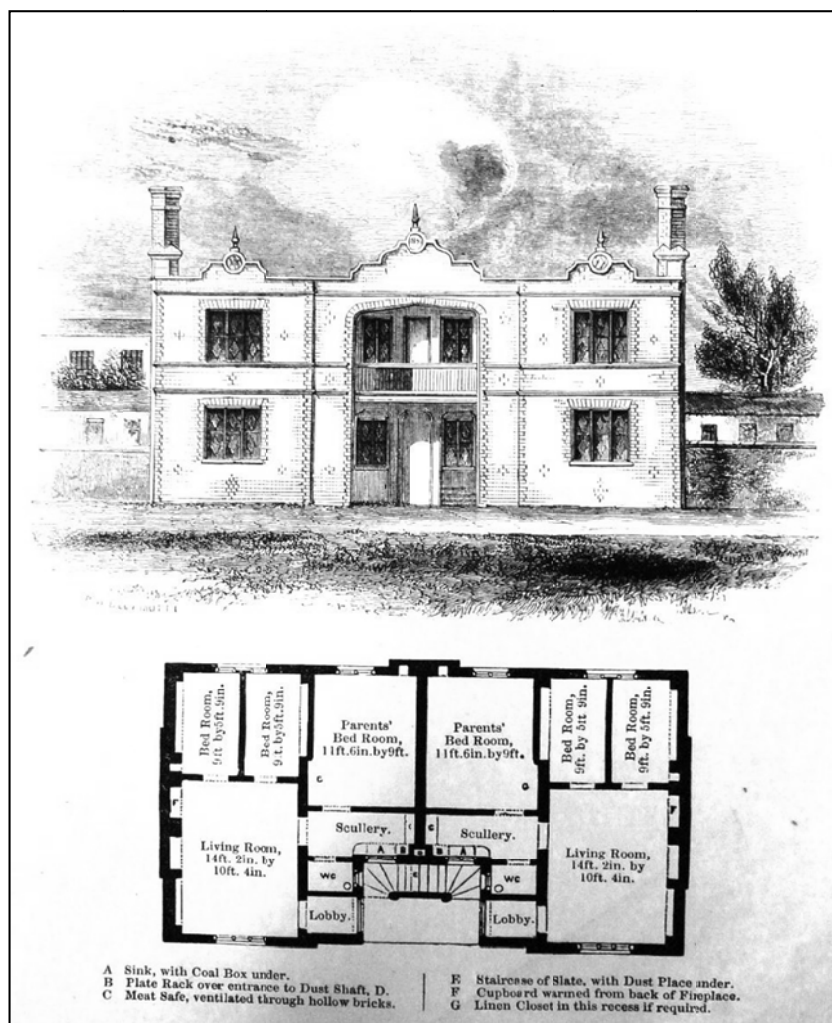
Figure 4-10: Double cottages with three bedrooms, 1850



(Roberts 1853, Design No 5, no page number)

Some of Roberts' designs for "double houses" were a hybrid, with two tenements on each floor and a central staircase. Also known as "cottage flats" this form was thought to retain the benefits of a semi, as well as providing accommodation for double the number of families. The 1853 edition of Roberts' book documented the 1851 Great Exhibition cottages which were of this hybrid type (Figure 4.11).

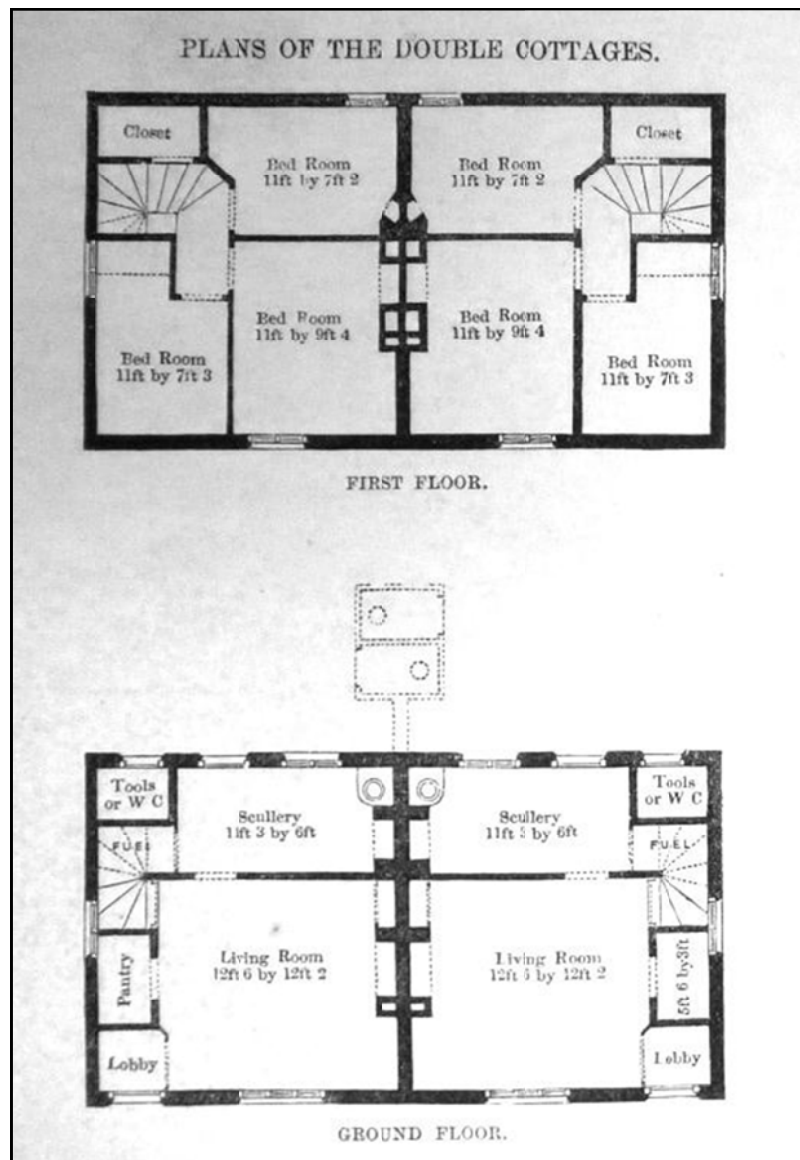
**Figure 4-11: Model houses for four families, erected for the Great Exhibition, 1851**



A building with four tenements, constructed by the Society for Improving the Condition of the Labouring Classes. This design was widely copied, including its use in attached rows (Roberts 1853, 58)

Several offshoots of the Society in regional areas developed model dwellings for towns, including Henry Robert's 1852 group of cottages, including semis, for the *Windsor Royal Society for Improving the Condition of the Working Classes* (Figure 4.12) and a group of semis in Tunbridge Wells (1847) (Curl 1983, 108-109).

Figure 4-12: Cottages for the working classes, Windsor, 1852



The row of cottages contains short terraces mixed with pairs of semis. (Roberts 1853, 61, 64)

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The Society's last model dwelling was constructed in 1862 at Hull, although the Society survived until 1965 when it was taken over by the *Peabody Trust*.

While some neighbours of the new style of dwelling for labourers were concerned about being in the vicinity of "a sort of nondescript pile of pauper buildings" (Roberts 1853, 6) the idea of having a minimum standard of dwelling for even the poorest in the community had become widely accepted as an ideal, even though the reality was far from that.

Meanwhile a second influential society had been incorporated by Royal Charter in 1845. The *Metropolitan Association for Improving the Dwellings of the Industrious Classes* was founded by Rev Henry Taylor, with the dual aims of providing housing for the poor and generating a commercial return on investment for the backers. Unlike the *Society for Improving the Condition of the Labouring Classes* which concentrated on providing model dwellings for others to copy, this organisation had a commercial focus. Its Charter provided for limited liability and a maximum dividend of 5%, with any excess funds reinvested in the business. It was the dual philanthropic and commercial aspects which gave rise to the "5% philanthropy" tag for such groups.

The Association mostly built tenement blocks for families, and lodging houses for single people. It had become clear that semis, although an ideal for workers, might be possible in rural areas where the cost of land was low, but in urban areas, only high density terraces and increasingly, tenement blocks, could provide the required returns on investment. However, in 1854 the Association acquired five double cottages in Queens Place, Dockhead (*The Labourer's Friend Society*, 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Report, cited Tarn 1973, 25). In 1866 the Association built Alexander Cottages, at Beckenham in Kent, on land provided by the Duke of Westminster. The development initially comprised 16 pairs of semis and two years later there were 164 semis (Tarn 1973, 27). Despite their success (a return of 7%) the Association then turned its focus back to the city and tenement block buildings.

By the late 1860s Lord Shaftesbury's theory that "a good dwelling improved the occupant" was being questioned, while the housing schemes were struggling to provide commercial returns (Tarn 1973, 26). Many commentators came to the view that education was the way out of poverty, not charity or better housing. And while the philanthropic societies were having some impact on workers' housing as well as public opinion, speculative builders continued to build substandard workers' housing, unfettered by regulation.

With the expansion of the railways during the 1850s some writers saw cheap fares as a way of moving the poor to semis in the suburbs. James Hole in *Homes of the Working Classes* suggested that:

A better plan for relieving the crowded seats of population would be the erection of 'model' villages outside our large towns and on the main lines of railway, so that the workmen might be brought to and from their work each day at almost nominal cost. There the artisan might enjoy the blessed gifts of sunlight and pure air, open space for his children to play in, and a cottage garden to find him pleasant and profitable employment for a spare hour (Hole 1866).

However, little interest was shown in such impractical ideas until they were later taken up by the garden city movement. The expansion of the railways also had the side effect of worsening the housing problems, as slum areas were demolished without a strategy for rehousing the displaced people.

During the 1860s, as the activities of the earlier philanthropic societies declined, two other organisations were founded – the *Peabody Trust* (1862) and the *Improved Industrial Dwellings Company* (1863). The business models for both were to house the artisan class, rather than the poorer labourers, in large tenement blocks. A 5% return on investment was also expected, although the Trust had been endowed with a large sum. Many of their developments were described as "grim" and "harsh" leading to a "cult of super-urbanism", a phenomenon which Tarn (1973, 55) believes "lies at the root of the subsequent violent reaction in favour of very low density, which became the objective of the working classes and inspired the founders of the first garden cities at the end of the century". The *Artizans', Labourers' and General Dwellings Company* (1867) concentrated on terraced housing in the suburbs, again for the artisan class only. The introduction of trams for the working classes facilitated this suburban development. The work of these companies was also enhanced after 1866 when the Housing Act made it possible for them to borrow government funds for housing.

The *Public Health Act* was amended in 1858 and again in 1866 and 1872. However, it remained relatively ineffectual until 1875, when after a decade of reports and commissions looking at the sanitation and health of the country, it was massively overhauled. Section 157 allowed local councils to make byelaws for street layout, the construction of buildings and for sanitary requirements. The Act did not apply to London and its adoption by local councils was optional. The Local Government Board in 1877 prepared a set of model building byelaws which in time became the standard throughout England. They mandated a minimum width, a front setback and a rear garden for each dwelling, thereby preventing the worst excesses of the speculative builder. Byelaws also prevented housing being built around limited-access roads, courts and yards.

To ensure compliance with the byelaws, most local authorities insisted on building plans being submitted for approval. Yet as byelaws began to take effect, the speculative builders

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used the guidelines not as minimums, but as maximums, and the “byelaw house” and “byelaw street” of terraces or semis became common (Figure 4.13).

**Figure 4-13: Byelaw housing**



**Terraces, Bournbrook, Birmingham, c1890 (Creese 1966, 82)**



**Semis, Sylvan Avenue, London, 1906 (Jackson 1991, 11)**

After 1875, groups such as the *Peabody Trust* concentrated on developing land on which slums had been cleared, once again rehousing the people in large tenement blocks. In Manchester a company was set up in 1882 to build semis at Holt Town, Ancoats but this type of development was rare.



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At the turn of the century the tenements with shared lavatories and sculleries had mostly gone out of favour and self-contained flats were being built. The importance of the philanthropic housing trusts and societies had declined, the speculative builders were concentrating on the suburban byelaw expansion and local authorities were gradually accepting some responsibility for housing the working class (see next Section). Ironically, by the early twentieth century, some architects believed that the byelaws were too stringent, thereby discouraging the building of cottages and creating overcrowding (Caffyn 1986, 127).

#### 4.2.3 PUBLIC HOUSING

While the council house is widely assumed to be a product of the twentieth century, it actually had its origins fifty years before, when it was becoming more obvious that neither private enterprise nor the philanthropic societies could provide adequate housing for the most disadvantaged sections of the community. The *Labouring Classes Lodging Act 1851* gave local councils the ability to acquire or build lodging houses. Although optional and rarely used, it was one of the earliest attempts at government intervention in housing. In 1866, following an outbreak of cholera, the *Sanitary Act* defined overcrowding as a “nuisance”. This Act applied to all types of dwellings and enabled local councils across England to deal with overcrowding, again with negligible effect because there was still a widespread view that poverty was caused by the poor themselves.

Nevertheless, the relationships between disease, poverty, crime and slums were causing an increasingly political problem for the government. The *Artisans’ and Labourers’ Dwellings Act 1868* gave local authorities the power to order the repair or demolition of substandard dwellings, at the owner’s expense, although vested interests made it mostly impotent. The notable exception to this lack of action on working class housing was Liverpool Council, which in 1869 built St Martin’s Cottages, four storey blocks of tenements (demolished in 1977) which the council claims in a plaque opposite the site to be the “first council houses in Europe”.

Local government powers were further strengthened in the *Artisans’ and Labourers’ Dwellings Improvement Act 1875*, which allowed councils to force the acquisition and demolition of slum areas, and to have the site redeveloped with working class housing. Despite this Act, like its predecessors, being optional and largely ignored due to the expense of paying adequate compensation to slum landlords, together with the *Public Health Act 1875* it did provide an initial framework for slum clearances and council building codes.

The nineteenth century Acts also codified the class structures within housing. There was a clear and unambiguous differentiation between the lowest classes (the labourers) and the skilled workers (the artisans), although they could both be placed under the umbrella of “working classes”. Housing solutions for the artisans, who could afford to pay higher rents

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than the labourers, had been provided in a small way by the philanthropic societies and by some speculative builders, while the labourers continued to face overcrowding and increasingly squalid living conditions. Housing for the middle classes was outside the scope of government attention.

In the early 1880s a debate about the direct role, if any, which governments should have in the housing of the working classes was ignited by the Conservative Party leader Lord Salisbury, following riots in Trafalgar Square. A Royal Commission on housing the working classes was set up in 1884, with its major focus on the problem of overcrowding, in both urban and rural areas. The resulting *Housing of the Working Classes Act 1885* gave local authorities increased powers to force landlords to improve the quality of housing, but only on the basis of health issues, and there was still no mandate for the councils themselves to provide housing.

The *Housing of the Working Classes Act 1890* rationalised the previous legislation and set out clear guidelines for acceptable standards of housing. For the first time local councils were empowered to use funds generated by rates, or to borrow funds from the central government, both to clear and redevelop slums, and to build new dwellings to add to the stock of housing.

London County Council (LCC) was formed in 1889. The *Public Health (London) Act 1891* brought London under the same controls as had applied in the regions since 1875, and the *London Building Act 1894* (amended in 1898) provided London with a range of new building controls, some of which were even more restrictive than the 1877 model byelaws which had been adopted by most municipalities in the rest of England. The LCC created a Housing of the Working Classes Branch and employed the architect Owen Fleming. Rather than outsource the redevelopment of cleared slum areas to bodies such as the *Peabody Trust* as they had done previously, the LCC between 1893 and 1900 built 23 individually-designed five-storey tenement blocks in a cleared slum area at Shoreditch. The Boundary Estate opened in 1900 to wide acclaim; however of the 5,000 tenants evicted from the slum, very few moved into the new estate, because the rents were too high and the paternalistic rules governing behaviour were too restrictive. The rest just moved into other slums.

Under the Housing Act of 1890, displaced slum tenants were no longer required to be rehoused on the same site, and with increased accessibility by train and tram, they could be rehoused in the suburbs. One of the largest of these suburban council estates was at Tooting where in 1900 the LCC built rows of terraced housing covering over 39 acres. Thus by the turn of the century not only had the class hierarchy been enshrined in legislation, but dwelling type became even more overtly associated with class – inner city slum terraces or tenements in subdivided inner city houses for the labourers, new inner city tenements or flats for the artisan class, and new byelaw terraced housing (usually “two up two down”) for the

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aspirational in new working class suburbs. Knowing this, both councils and private speculative builders could precisely target their new buildings. Semis at that time were still largely either suburban middle class villas (see Section 4.3) or rural double cottages.

#### **4.2.4 MODEL VILLAGES**

Although the model dwellings, design competitions and pattern books did little to influence the speculative builder to improve standards, there were industrial employers who were inspired to improve the conditions of their workers by building new self-contained villages to house them. These model villages were set out with dwellings, roads, village squares, churches and other community facilities to provide what the developer thought was an ideal environment in which people could live happy, healthy lives and therefore be more productive at work. Often based on an idealised medieval village (Barrett and Phillips 1987, 92) with its supposedly superior sense of community and value systems, the new villages were designed to be models of how people (especially the labouring class) should live. Whilst sometimes being described as model villages, the emparkment villages on the rural estates were focussed mostly on the aesthetics of the village, rather than being a model of how the occupants of such a village should live. The model dwellings built by landowners for their labourers were designed with the welfare of the occupants in mind, but were not part of a planned village with other facilities.

Although the concept of a model village became prominent during the nineteenth century, there were some earlier English examples of utopian experimental villages. The Moravian Church created self-contained settlements at Fulneck near Bradford (1744) and Fairfield, near Manchester (1785). The dwellings of Fulneck were in two long terraces while those of Fairfield were in three-storey Georgian-style blocks, with the top floors designed for the hand spinning and weaving of cotton. Although not having the green spaces of later model villages, they shared the assumption that “moral or spiritual uplift could be assisted by the careful composition of the physical environment” (Creese 1966, 8-9).

The motives of the industrialists were broader than pure philanthropy. By ensuring that their workers were housed properly, they could engender loyalty and a more stable workforce. They could also encourage what they saw as appropriate behaviour through rules and regulations governing the tenants of their villages. Most importantly, they could attract workers to factory sites which in many cases were in remote rural areas or on the fringes of towns.

Several well-known industrial model villages were built around the woollen mills of West Yorkshire, by three related families. Walter Creese notes that the region had an “unusually strong medieval tradition of responsibility” and the industrialists were “conscious of the

ancient feudal responsibilities”, as demonstrated by a long history of philanthropy (Creese 1966, 13).

Colonel Edward Ackroyd built a model village between 1849 and 1853, adjacent to his large textile mill at Copley, just south of Halifax. It included a canteen, a school, a library and a church. Although he used the services of the architect Sir George Gilbert Scott, the “most eminent of mid-Victorian gothic revivalist architects”, the mostly two-roomed dwellings were in three long rows of 36 back-to-back terraces, with an area of allotments. This was a curiously urban form to use for a new rural village, although Ackroyd defended it as being “in the common style of the country” (Creese 1966, 28).<sup>6</sup> Architects until that time had rarely been involved in anything as lowly as designing actual workers’ housing (as opposed to publishing pattern books) and Scott had to redesign his initial plans which were “not adapted to modern requirements” (Burnett 1986, 25). Even then, residents were “unimpressed with his designs, which they claimed resembled almshouses” (Miller 2010, 7). The housing was designed “to be secure against the sudden withdrawal of workpeople” and to “improve their social condition” (Colonel Ackroyd, cited in Creese 1966, 23, 27).

In 1861 Ackroyd also commenced a model village for workers at his Ackroyden mill. His second village had shorter terraces with no back-to-backs, surrounding a large open square, and his vision was summed up by *The Builder* magazine:

Mr Ackroyd is very desirous of keeping up with the old English notion of a village – the squire and the parson, as the head and centre of all progress and good fellowship; then the tenant-farmers; and lastly, the working population....that the better paid and better educated might act usefully on the desires and tastes of others in an inferior social position (*The Builder* 14 February 1863, 110).

Further, Ackroyd and his architect Scott chose the neo-gothic style because of its links with the “native style” of the older villages in the region (Creese 1966, 43). However, even with the addition of dormers and gables, the terraces’ grim, uniform appearance hardly resembled an organic village and there was no garden space attached to the dwellings. Villagers had the use of a central park and allotments.

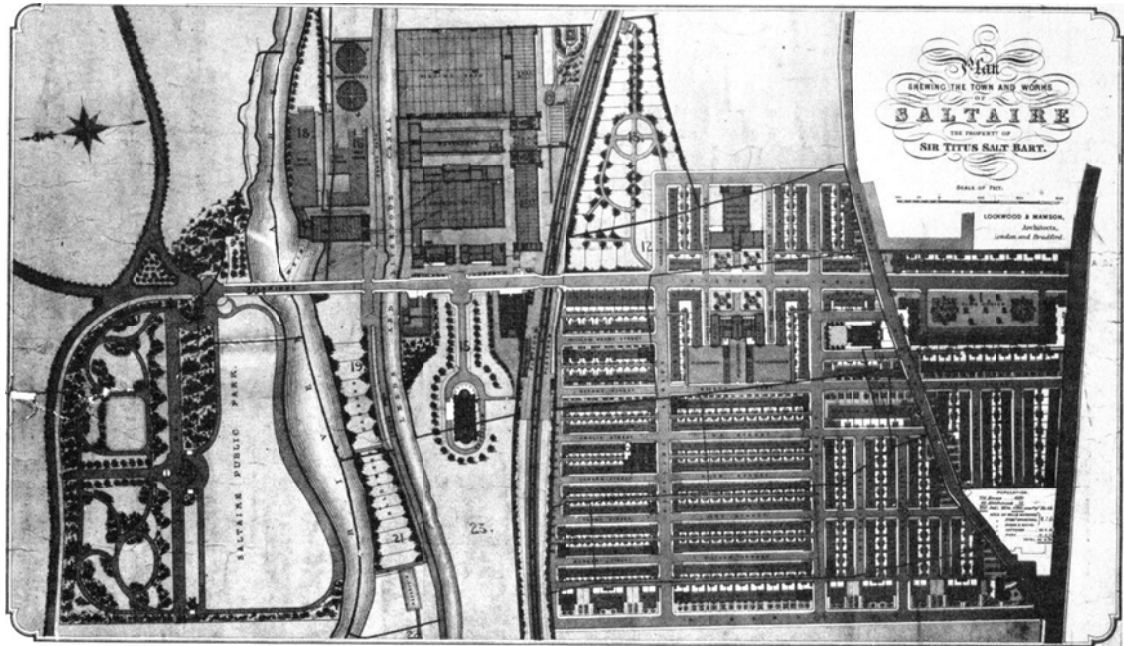
Saltire near Bradford, was developed adjacent to his alpaca mill by Sir Titus Salt between 1851 and 1861. The architects Francis Lockwood and William Mawson chose a high-density urban solution for the mill and its self-contained village, despite the availability of land. The village eschews notions of romanticism and gothic in favour of an Italianate style, and although austere it is well planned around a church, hospital, school, green spaces and almshouses for the aged. The dwelling type was determined by the status of the occupants,

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<sup>6</sup> There were no new building approvals for back-to-backs after 1909.

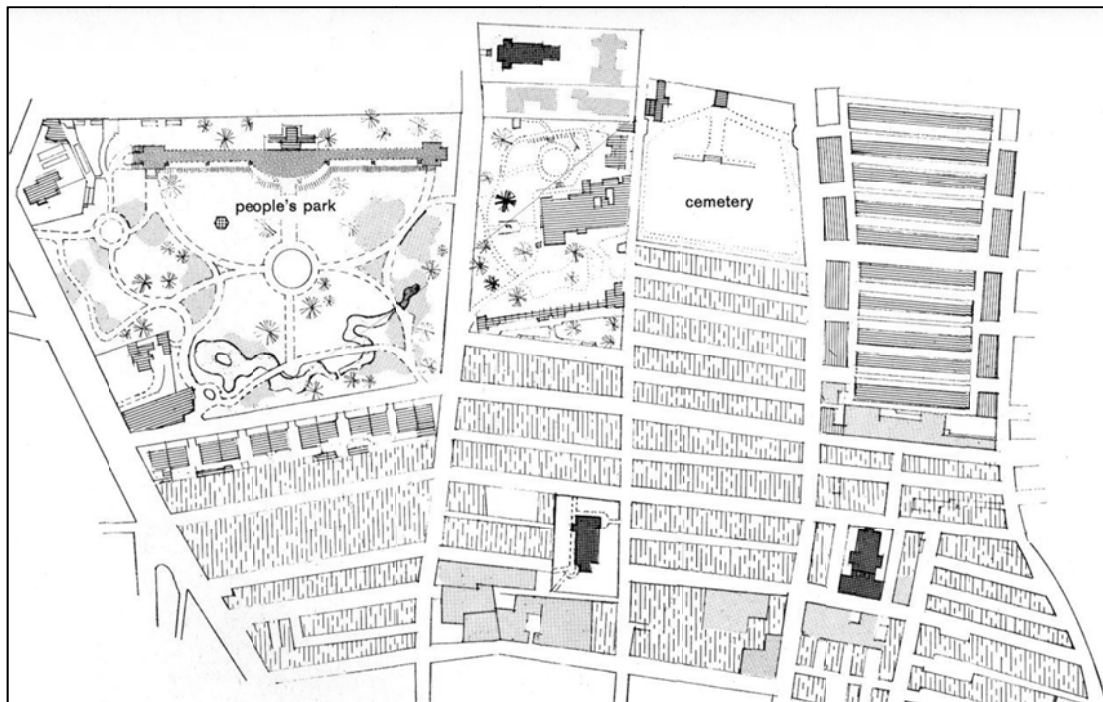
based on a survey carried out by Salt. Labourers were housed in long grids of terraces (there were no back-to-backs), while those such as overseers with a slightly higher status had a row of larger terraced houses with gardens. Further up the scale were managers in short terraces with gardens, and for those at the top, five pairs of semis with gardens. The higher-status dwellings were located in a group on the western edge of the town (Figure 4.14).

**Figure 4-14: Plan of Saltaire, c1851**



The plan of Saltaire, showing the mill (top), grids of labourers' terraces (right) and the row of short terraces and semis (bottom right) (Creese 1966, 32).

The third pioneering model village developer in West Yorkshire was John Crossley, who was inspired by Ackroyd to create West Hill Park Estate at Crossley Mill near Halifax in 1863. Like Saltaire, the village contained a range of dwellings to match the status of its occupants. Each row of terraced houses contained dwellings of a certain size, many of which had gardens. A People's Park (designed by Joseph Paxton) was created nearby. The terraces are separated from the park by Sir Francis Crossley's mansion estate, but the park itself has six pairs of large semis overlooking its southern edge (Figure 4.15). This clearly indicates the superior status of the semis. Crossley introduced the idea that all of the dwellings should not only be zoned by social class, but positioned so that the primary outlook from each class of house was to cottages of a similar or superior class only (Gorst 1995, 27). Importantly, as changes such as the *Ten Hour Act 1847* gave workers more leisure time, Crossley and Paxton were pioneers in recognising that "the problems of the model dwellings and villages in relation to open spaces were ... inseparable" (Creese 1966, 55).

**Figure 4-15: Map of the People's Park, Halifax 1856-57**

**The picturesque park (top left) is flanked by Crossley's mansion estate and a row of large semis. The workers' terraces (top right) are set out in parallel grids (Creese 1966, 49).**

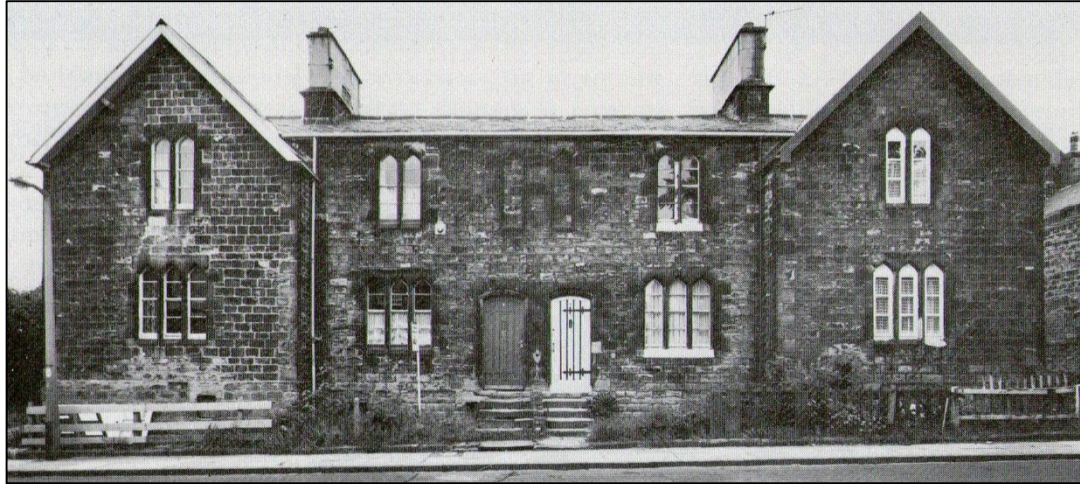
Other industries also created a demand for large numbers of workers' cottages. The model villages around the cotton mills of Lancashire came later than those of Yorkshire's woollen mills, because the cotton prices were depressed by the American Civil War. As collieries expanded in scale with improvements in technology during the second half of the nineteenth century, housing in the form of terraces was provided, but without the additional features which would classify them as model villages. Semis in colliery housing were rare, with status being indicated by factors such as the length of the terraces. For example, at Altofts Colliery the miners were housed in a row of 52 three storey cottages while the higher status employees were housed in a shorter row of only seven cottages (Caffyn 1986, 68).

The expansion of the railways during the nineteenth century also brought with it a requirement to house employees of the rail companies. One of the earliest model villages was the Railway Town designed by the engineer Isambard Brunel in 1842 when the Great Western Railway Station opened at Swindon. The self-contained community housed railway workers near the new railway workshops, two miles from Swindon, in 280 terraced houses. Its intention was to "provide all the necessary facilities (as perceived from a 19th-century point of view) for a 'decent' life" (Swindon Borough Council 2006, 5). The facilities included a church and vicarage, and a school.

In addition to attracting and retaining good employees with terraced housing, the railway companies built quality houses for the higher ranks as a "display of wealth, prestige and

philanthropy of the companies that built them” (Caffyn 1986, 72). This display of quality included large semis (Figure 4.16).

**Figure 4-16: Semis for railway employees, Batley, West Yorkshire**



(Caffyn 1986, 72)

Although providing a relatively high standard of dwelling for workers, the early model villages were not architecturally sophisticated, with the industrialists themselves usually actively involved in the layouts and the designs of the buildings. It was not until Port Sunlight was developed near Liverpool for the employees of Lever Bros that the involvement of architects became a key component of model village design. Importantly, the increased involvement of architects did not change the hierarchy of dwelling types in the villages. Although there was some debate over whether workers required a parlour, the mix of terraced houses for the lowest ranks, pairs of semis for the middling ranks and detached dwellings for the managers or foremen was maintained.

The debate over the desirability and need for a parlour in a working class cottage commenced when architects questioned the need for a room which, even in a very small cottage, was set aside for receiving guests and special occasions, leaving the other rooms cramped and often poorly lit. While creating one large room with lighting and ventilation from both ends made perfect sense to architects, for the tenants the loss of a parlour was tantamount to a loss of privacy; that guests would be able to see the most private family living spaces within a cottage was unacceptable. Significantly, the loss of a parlour was also seen as a loss of social status. Some of the dwellings at Ackroyden, which were targetted at the lower middle class, included parlours because “more gifted workmen have been driven from their homes to places of less profitable resort, through the want of a quiet room in their own houses, than perhaps by any other circumstance” (*The Builder* 14 February 1863, 110).

Some model villages had already been built in the vicinity of the Port Sunlight site. The Wilson brothers of Price's Patent Candle Factory had built some short terraces, with open space, front and rear gardens, allotments, a school and a church at Bromborough Pool in 1854. There were two pairs of semis for the managers. Although very austere, it was one of the first "house and garden" model villages. Semis for the workers were added to the mix (built on the sites of allotment gardens) between 1889 and 1891 (Wirral Borough Council, 2007) (Figure 4.17). In 1888 Hartley's Jams and Marmalades built workers' housing at Aintree. Both of these villages were built in the old tradition of long, uniform streetscapes.

**Figure 4-17: Semis at South View, Bromborough Pool, c1890**



(Author 2011)

The development of Port Sunlight model village commenced in 1887. William Lever used architects William Owen and his son Segar Owen to revive the "middle-class idealisation of working-class housing" inherent in the black and white vernacular Cheshire architecture, with its half timbering and Tudor effects (Miller 2010, 9). Lever stated in 1888 that:

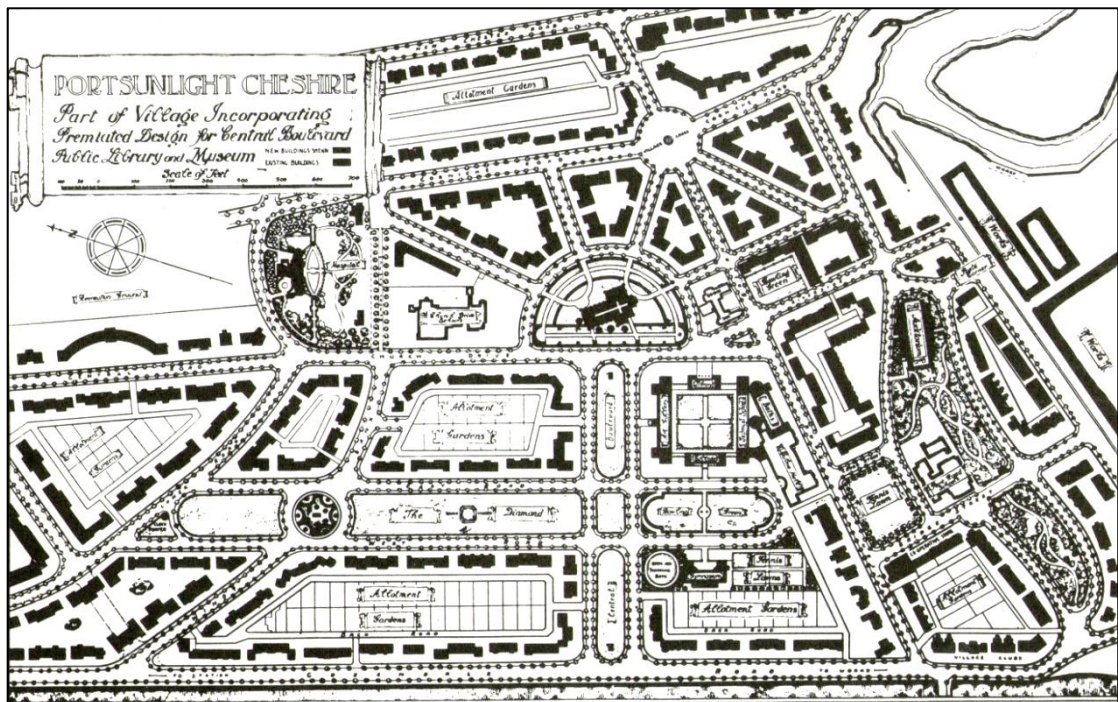
It is my and my brother's hope, some day, to build houses in which our work-people will be able to live and be comfortable – semi-detached houses with gardens back and front, in which they will be able to know more about the science of life than they can in a back-to-back slum (cited in Darley 2007, 142).

Despite Lever's initial preference, there was insufficient land for all the houses to be semis. However, even with a mix of short terraces, semis and a few detached dwellings for



managers, the density was low. In addition, the layout (Figure 4.18) minimised the number and length of the streets. Both of these features were later embraced as principles of the garden city movement. Amenities such as a village green and even an old English inn were part of the design; all the houses were owned by the firm and the village was stiflingly paternalistic. Many of the semis and grouped dwellings were designed to appear as individual houses within the streetscapes, a technique reminiscent of the early London villa developments. All of the semis had parlours (Jensen 2007, 94) (Figure 4.19).

**Figure 4-18: Layout of Port Sunlight, 1910**



This revised plan for Port Sunlight incorporates ideas from the American City Beautiful Movement, with its boulevards and civic centre. (Creese 1966, 134)

**Figure 4-19: Examples of semis at Port Sunlight**

**New Chester Road (Author 2011 and Google Maps accessed 25 March 2012)**

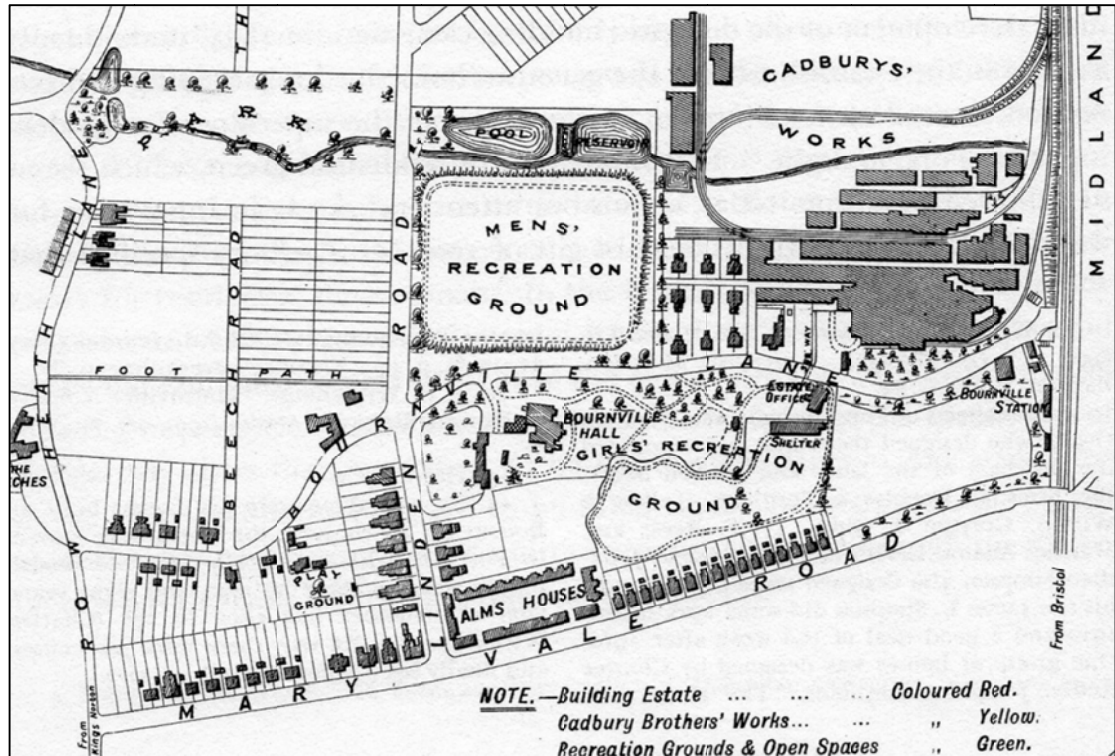
With Bourneville, George Cadbury was less a philanthropist and more an economic rationalist than was Lever. His intention was that his village would net a return of 4% after costs, and unlike Port Sunlight, it was not built exclusively for his employees. Leases of up to 999 years were offered initially, although this system was later dropped in favour of rental arrangements when Cadbury became concerned about the tenants making windfall profits on the resale of leases. He had aspirations to provide a model village to “encourage a social intermixture of all classes” (Tarn 1973, 159) and as a Quaker, Cadbury was also keen to promote moral improvement.

The Cadbury cocoa works moved to a new site near Birmingham in 1879, and the village of Bourneville commenced on a small scale with a detached house for the manager and six pairs of semis, “widely spaced and set in large gardens” to house key workers. According to the prevailing custom in Birmingham the semis had tunnel backs (Creese 1966, 111).

Bourneville expanded significantly after 1895, mostly with semis and some short terraces. There was “a new emphasis on individual gardens and allotments” (Barrett and Phillips 1987, 93) (Figure 4.20). Cadbury’s specification that a dwelling could not occupy more than 25% of its site was an innovation for working-class houses. William Alexander Harvey,

Bournville's main architect, was strongly influenced by the Arts and Crafts architects such as Charles Voysey and M H Baillie Scott (Figure 4.21).

Figure 4-20: Map of Bournville, 1897



The original large semis are in Linden Road. Later semis are of smaller sizes, reflecting the class of occupant, but all have their own spacious gardens. (Creese 1966, 112)

Figure 4-21: Semis in Bournville, c1900



Maryvale Road, designed by William Alexander Harvey, influenced by Voysey (Miller 2010, 10).

Bournville, unlike Port Sunlight, had very little attention paid to the layout of the buildings within the village, and many of the early dwellings were of an urban design which ignored their rural setting. Nevertheless both Port Sunlight and Bournville, by “enhancing utility with beauty” provided inspiration for the later garden cities and the early LCC cottage estates (Miller 2010, 10, Creese 1966, 123). After the development of Bournville was taken over by the Bournville Village Trust in 1900, the designs were simplified by removing the tunnel backs and the subsequent floor plans closely resembled what later became the universal interwar semi (see Section 6.4).

Port Sunlight and Bournville were responsible for the “cloaking of working class housing in a middle class disguise” and “breaking down the distinctions between housing for the workers and housing for others” (Darley 2007, 144,145). In addition, Cadbury fulfilled the goals of the *Society for Improving the Condition of the Labouring Classes* by proving that:

a low density layout could be a practical possibility even for the working classes, and unwittingly he opened the flood gates to a new kind of suburbia (Tarn 1973, 161).

### **4.3 HOUSING THE MIDDLE CLASSES**

Although the middle class had been “rising” for centuries, it was still only 15% of the population in 1851 (Burnett 1986, 14, 97). At the upper level were the industrialists and merchants, in the middle the professionals and clerks, and at the lower end the tradesmen and shopkeepers. Members of the middle class were aspirational, and sought to differentiate themselves from the working classes. Moving out of the city centres, away from the working class terraced housing areas, had the advantage of distance from the threats to health inherent in overcrowded slums with limited sanitation, and also ensured that middle class families were not influenced by the perceived poor morals and unacceptable behaviour of the working classes. The middle classes defined themselves by strict cultural norms and values, with a particular emphasis on family, and their dwellings were a very visible and powerful statement about status. The need for privacy was an overarching middle class attribute; both it and the employment of one or more servants were key characteristics which impacted on the size and form of a middle class dwelling.

The dream was of an escape to an idealised, healthy countryside, despite the reality that rural areas themselves had many examples of squalid housing. The suburb, with its perception of a rural lifestyle, fulfilled this dream for urban dwellers. Middle class families wishing to build a suburban home or retreat were well served by the plethora of pattern books which continued to feature dwellings from tiny cottages to large villas, or they could use their own architect. Or they could move into a new home provided by a speculative builder.

The initial response by speculative builders to this need for distinctive and separate middle class housing was to build estates of large terraces in new suburbs, and to embellish the exteriors with Italianate or gothic detailing (Barrett and Phillips 1987, 11). The terraces usually had narrow frontages (one room plus a hallway) and multiple storeys with two rooms on each level. A basement contained the kitchen, the ground floor a dining room and a room for receiving guests, the first floor had bedrooms, and there was often an attic for servants. Curiously, this same form, without the basement and attic, was also characteristic of the working class terraces of the inner city.

Just as the working classes would not readily give up their parlours, for the middle classes having a hallway and a dedicated room to receive and impress guests was seen as an essential, given that the larger houses of the upper class always included many rooms with specific uses (such as billiard rooms and libraries) and reception areas for greeting and entertaining guests. As the lower classes tended to use the term "parlour", the middle class often adopted the term "drawing room" or "sitting room" for the room which was usually off limits for general family life, and therefore used infrequently.

The fashionable picturesque styles were not readily applied to high density urban housing, but country estates and suburban villas began to display forms which rejected order and uniformity. The Georgian terrace therefore gradually became less popular, although terraces continued to be fashionable in London, even for the upper classes, long after they had fallen from favour elsewhere (Burnett 1986, 79).

The European model of apartment living, with social class evident by a family's location within a building, was unacceptable to the Victorian English middle class, who saw complete separation from the lower classes as the ideal, and for whom loss of privacy was an important factor. Flats (or tenements) in England also become inextricably linked in the middle class mind to the philanthropic projects to house the labouring classes and even when in the 1850s high quality apartment blocks appeared in London, that form of dwelling was mostly shunned by the middle classes (Burnett 1986, 107).

This rest of this chapter will consider middle class housing in the suburbs of London, although the concepts were also applicable to other cities and towns within England. The middle class suburbs in smaller towns and cities were closer to the city centres, yet were still clearly separated from working class areas. Because land was cheaper in the smaller towns, housing densities were lower and the middle classes could often readily afford detached housing. For example, detached villas for the middle class started appearing in villages such as Edensor in 1839 (Darley 2007, 121).

The architect George Dance the Younger (1741-1825) is credited with being the first to use semi-detached villas in a design for an urban London estate (Galinou 2010, 77). However, his Camden Estate plan of 1790 was not built.

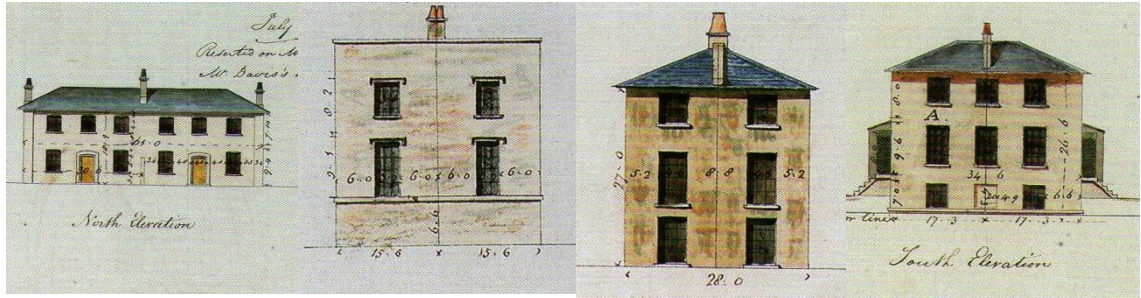
Planning for St John's Wood (the Eyre Estate) commenced in 1794, the same year that the quasi-semi-detached Paragon houses were being constructed. John Burnett states that it was "the first suburb to abandon the terrace in favour of the suburban villa" (Burnett 1986, 107). Further, Mireille Galinou (2010) claims that it was not only the world's first planned villa estate but also the first garden suburb, predating that movement by 100 years.

The dwellings in the first master plan were to be large numbers of semis (plus a few detached houses) on substantial plots, with the whole estate set out in lines, squares, crescents and circles, and with a planned infrastructure such as roads and sewers. Unusually, status was denoted by the sizes of the gardens for each semi. This was in stark contrast to the previous suburban villa developments which were ad hoc and followed no master plan for their vicinity. The use of semis for the estate was a deliberate attempt to build a respectable neighbourhood which would embody the moral virtues of the natural, simple, village way of life, as exemplified by the rural double cottage.

The master plan was revised several times, but retained the mix of mostly double houses. Building commenced in 1805 under architect John Shaw. The developer Walpole Eyre described his new estate as a "cottage estate" and although he then used the terms "residences" and "houses", the first dwellings to be built on the estate were the Alpha Cottages, which had more than a passing resemblance to the estate village of New Houghton (Figure 3.11) although they were a mix of semis and detached houses (Galinou 2010, 67) (Figures 4.22 and 4.23). For many years the Eyre Estate continued to be developed with some terraces, but mostly with semis and detached villas. It was said recently that the "innovative suburban semis" of St John's Wood were:

...a product of pragmatic vision. Aspirational but practical, the typology straddles the worlds of town and country as well as labourer and aristocrat (Galinou 2010, 8).

Large numbers of flats were added during the early twentieth century and with the addition of council housing after the Second World War St John's Wood became home to a mix of social classes.

**Figure 4-22: Examples of Alpha Cottages in pairs, St Johns Wood, c1805-15**

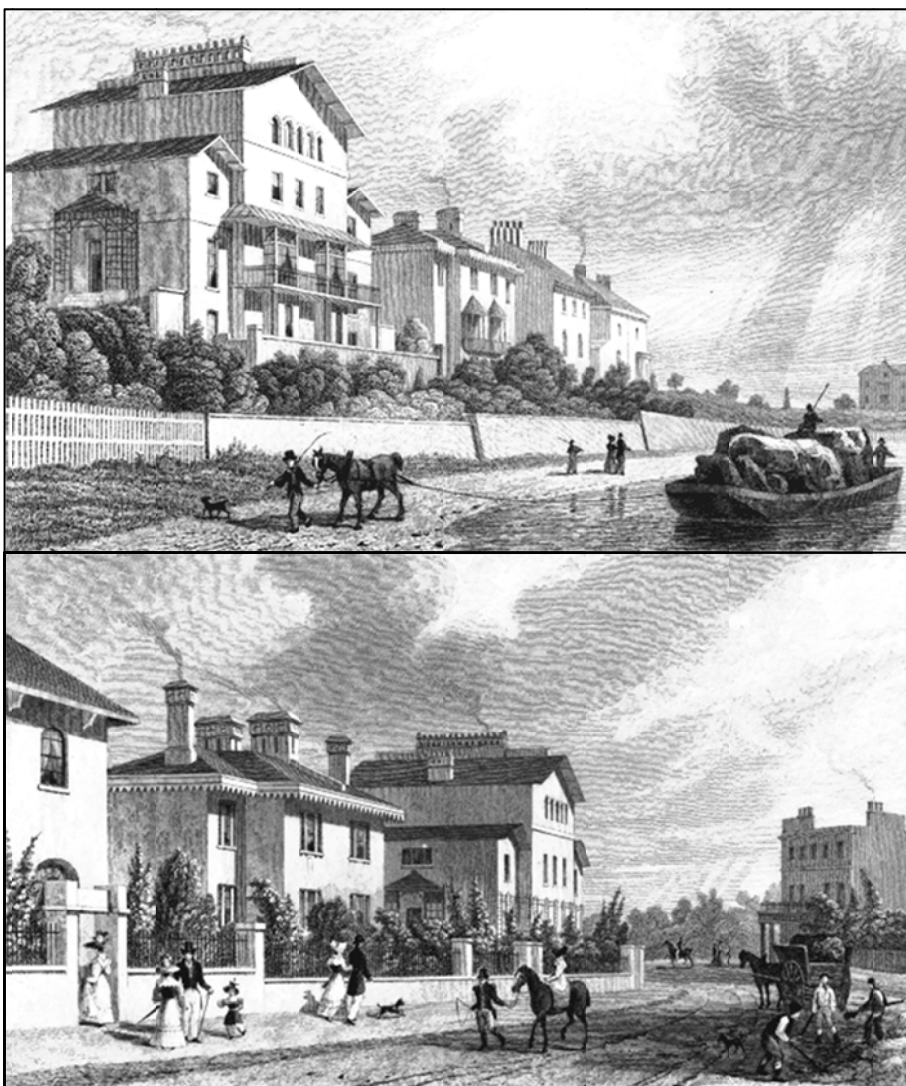
(Galinou 2010, 126)

**Figure 4-23: Alpha Cottages Estate Plan, St Johns Wood****A mix of detached and double cottages. (Galinou 2010, 127)**

The term “semi-detached”, which has been used throughout this study to describe a pair of attached dwellings, was not used in England until the nineteenth century. John Burnett suggests that the term was coined by the developers of the Eyre Estate in St John’s Wood (Burnett 1986, 107). In her definitive book about the estate Mireille Galinou notes the early preference by Walpole Eyre for the term “cottage” and later “villa”, and credits the estate with making the two terms interchangeable within a middle class suburb (Galinou 2010, 8). However, although she describes the double cottages as semis, she does not suggest that the term “semi-detached” was used in official estate documentation in those early days.

Suburban expansion gathered pace in 1815, after the French wars. Most of upper middle class estate development, such as the prominent builder Thomas Cubitt's housing in Belgravia, was based on large, high quality terraces surrounding landscaped squares. However, from 1824 John Nash designed two villa developments (Park Village East and Park Village West) along the sides of the new Regent's Canal. Unlike the picturesque Blaise Hamlet housing, Nash's urban Villages comprised mostly classical stuccoed pairs of villas which appeared to be single houses (Figure 4.24). The National Archives holds the drawings for Nash's Park Village semis because he attempted (without success) to patent them (Mitchell, 2011).

**Figure 4-24: Pairs of villas, Park Village East, John Nash, 1829**



**Pairs of villas overlooking the Regent's Canal**  
([http://www.ph.ucla.edu/epi/snow/1859map/parkvillage\\_east\\_a4.html](http://www.ph.ucla.edu/epi/snow/1859map/parkvillage_east_a4.html), accessed 24 March 2012)

It was Nash who was the most influential in making the semi-detached villa socially acceptable, as long as it retained the appearance of a single large villa, and was in the right location.



The economic doldrums dampened the development of new housing until the late 1830s, when the recovery led to what Mireille Galinou describes as a "meteoric rise for the villa" (Galinou 2010, 150). The prominent architect and pattern book author J C Loudon is attributed with the revival of styles such as half-timbering and latticed windows for the new villas, although the speculative builders chose only the features which could give otherwise-plain houses the "look" which their clients desired and could afford (Burnett 1986, 116). Loudon's designs were not just in book form – he was responsible for several pairs of semis in Albion Square, London (Figure 4.25).

**Figure 4-25: Semis designed by J C Loudon, Albion Square, 1846-49**



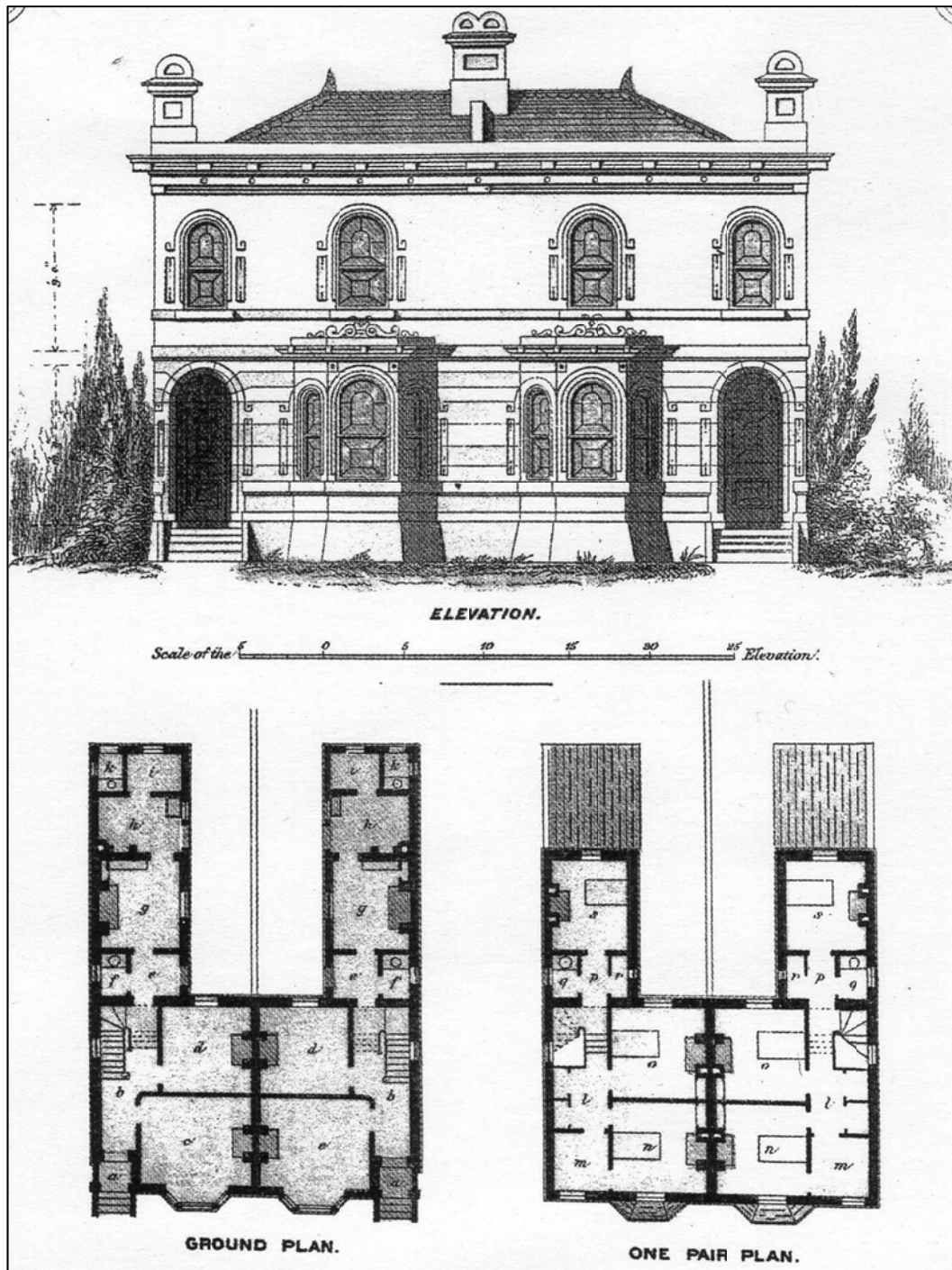
(Long 2002, 7)

Another very influential author, John Ruskin, published his ideas during the late 1840s and early 1850s (for example Ruskin 1849). His gothic revival styles, his ideas about features such as decoration, massing and repetition, and his promotion of detailing such as bay windows and polychromatic brick and stonework, soon filtered down to speculative builders and became an "ubiquitous feature of mid to late Victorian houses" (Long 2002, 42). His bay window was to become an enduring feature of English semis.

The classical Italianate style also remained popular in the pattern books aimed at the suburban middle class, for example, E L Blackburne's *Suburban and Rural Architecture* (1869) (Figure 4.26). The outcome of the speculative building boom was that the semi

became widely available to the middle and lower middle classes, as the popularity of the suburban middle class terraces waned.

**Figure 4-26: Design for pair of semis, 1869**



Design by E L Blackburn (Barrett and Phillips 1987, 57)

The extension of the railway network facilitated the spread of the ad hoc middle class suburbs, but planned estates for the upper middle class also took advantage of the improved

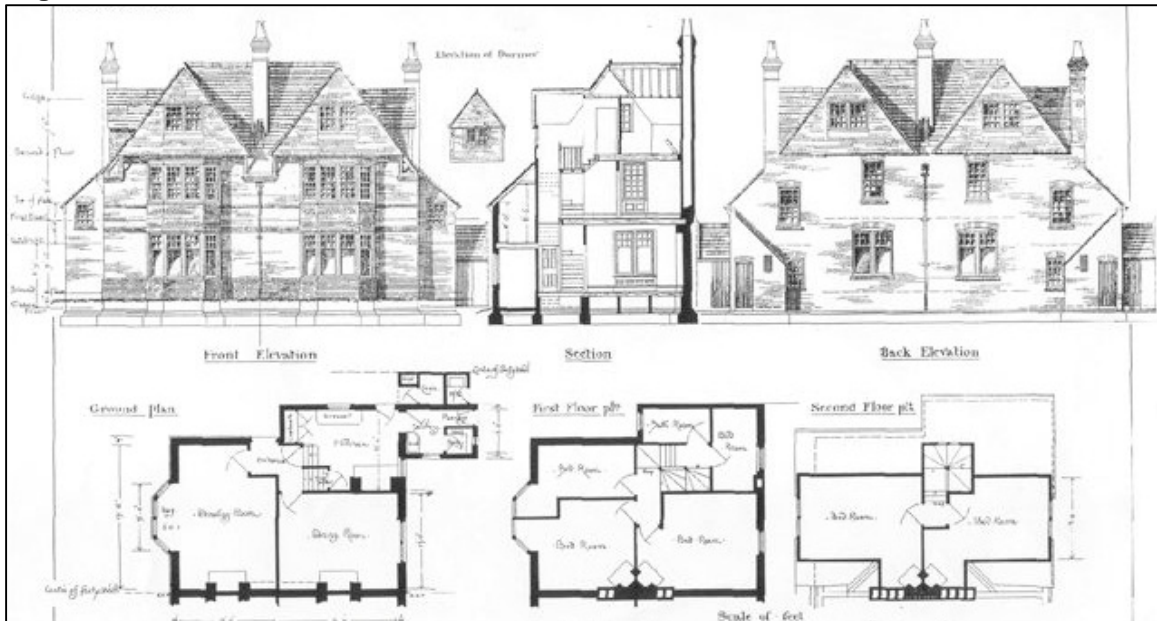
access. The Bedford Park Estate (1875-81) was developed beside Turnham Green railway station by Jonathan Carr and designed by several architects including Edward Godwin and Maurice Adams. More famous was (Richard) Norman Shaw who was the suburb's architect from 1877, adopting the Queen Anne style. The estate contained some terraces and detached dwellings, but most of the buildings were pairs of semis (Figures 4.27 to 4.30). The houses were arranged around existing trees and roads; each dwelling was set back from the road and had its own garden. The dwellings all had hot and cold water, inside toilets connected to sewers, and ground floor kitchens rather than the usual basement kitchen. They were in stark contrast to the speculative semis which were being built in the suburbs and towns at that time, which Shaw described as "the small Victorian house with bad ornament in stucco, its travesties of classical detail, the deplorable legacy of John Nash and the speculative builders of the thirties and forties of the nineteenth century" (Blomfield 1940 cited in Tarn 1973, 156).

The new suburb received fulsome praise from many quarters and its character made it a prototype for the later garden cities and suburbs. Walter Creese attributed its success to the "cogent expression" of the "English dual requirement, the seeking of new images through the restoration of old values" and "the beginning of the essentially modern and middle class search for some effective compromise between street and home, dynamic and static, public and private, big scale and little elements in the suburban picture" (Creese 1966, 89).

**Figure 4-27: Poster advertising Bedford Park, 1877**



(Barrett and Phillips 1987, 93)

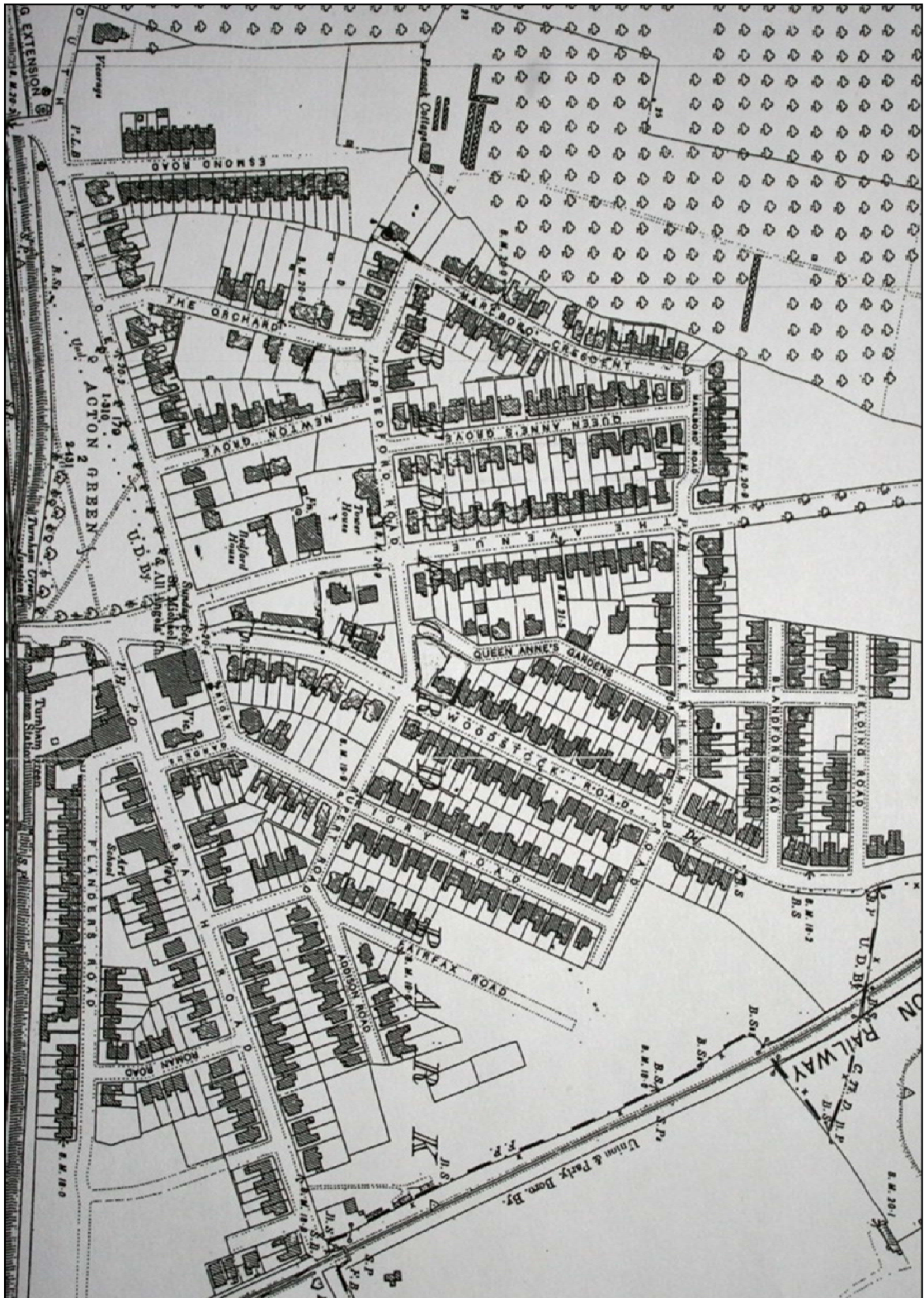
**Figure 4-28: Semi-detached Villas at Bedford Park, 1875**

Bedford Park semis, designed by architect Edward Godwin 1875 (The Bedford Park Society [www.bedfordpark.org](http://www.bedfordpark.org), accessed 23 August 2011).

**Figure 4-29: Semis at Bedford Park, 1880**

Semis designed by architect Maurice Adams at 12-14 Newton Grove. The entrances are designed to enhance the appearance of the semis as one large villa. (The Bedford Park Society [www.bedfordpark.org](http://www.bedfordpark.org), accessed 23 August 2011).

Figure 4-30: The layout of Bedford Park, 1893



Although predominantly semis, there are some terraces and detached villas in the mix (The Bedford Park Society).

Unfortunately, for some the novelty value of Bedford Park soon palled. The author G K Chesterton called the suburb “a work of art, a dream, or a comedy” and the experiment was not repeated for some decades. Suburbia continued to expand mostly in rows of terraces. The architect M H Baillie Scott voiced protests in the late 1890s. He saw only two alternatives, both unappealing – the building of small unimaginative houses on identical plots or colonies of model cottages where:

...the earnestness and reality of the ancient village is replaced by complacently picturesque semi-detached cottages which seem to constitute a sort of high-class suburbia. In attempting to mimic larger houses they become little villas and in their pretensions fail utterly to succeed on any count. Art is underlined everywhere and each of these miniature bijou residences seems to pose and smirk in the conscious appreciation of its own artistic qualities (Kornwolf 1972 cited in Darley 2007, 186)

#### **4.4 CONCLUSIONS**

By the end of the nineteenth century the industrialisation of England had caused myriad social and environmental changes in urban and suburban areas, and enclosure had changed the face of the rural landscapes.

The Poor Law Board reported in 1842 that:

In the rural districts the worst of the new cottages are those erected on the borders of commons by the labourers themselves. In the manufacturing district, the tenements erected by building clubs and by speculative builders of the class of workmen, are frequently the subject of complaint as being the least substantial and the most destitute of proper accommodation. The only conspicuous instances of improved residences of the labouring classes found in the rural districts are those which have been erected by opulent and benevolent landlords for the accommodation of labourers on their own estates; and in the manufacturing districts those erected by wealthy manufacturers for the accommodation of their own workforce (cited by Caffyn 1986, 82).

Attempted solutions in the towns ranged from health and building legislation, some slum clearances, the model dwellings of the 5% philanthropists and the intervention of local authorities into the provision of housing. Although the number of model dwellings built was very small, they were very important influencers of later government regulation.

Most of the philanthropists, both societies and industrialists, did not provide housing for the poorest of the working classes. It was the “deserving poor” such as the skilled artisans who

could be “improved” by better housing. Sydney Waterlow, the founder of the *Improved Industrial Dwellings Society* believed that the “lower orders, who are least likely to appreciate the comforts of a decent home” would be able to move up into the dwellings vacated by the rehoused artisans (Gorst 1995, 26). Later, Ruskin’s ideas around the “dignity of labour” and “decency of surroundings” were taken up by architects of the model villages such as Port Sunlight and Bournville (Miller 2010, 7),

Throughout the nineteenth century, the typical urban terrace form was gradually abandoned by the middle and upper classes who moved to cottages or villas in the suburbs and when the byelaw terrace became the default dwelling type for the working classes, a terraced house of any size was deemed socially inferior.

The forms of all dwellings, from mansions to the smallest cottage expressed the increasingly important cultural shifts towards “seclusion, privacy and convenience” (Muthesius 1982, 99). This meant, where possible, a move away from attached housing or if compromises had to be made, away from attachment on both sides to attachment on one side only. This, of course, was more achievable for the middle classes who in addition had the desire for more individuality and display of middle class wealth than the anonymity of a Georgian terraced house could allow. Ironically, because of the lack of planning controls, the speculative suburban semis for the middle classes were often more unsanitary than the model tenement blocks and the dream of *rus in urbe* was not always realised.

John Ruskin disliked the suburbs of semis, describing such dwellings in 1873:

They are fastened in a Siamese-twin manner together by their sides, and each couple has a Greek or Gothic portico shared between them, with magnificent steps, and highly-ornamented capitals. Attached to every double block are exactly similar double parallelograms of garden, laid out in new gravel and scanty turf... (cited in Burnett 1986, 202).

Some attempts had been made to provide middle class apartments in the centre of London as an alternative to suburban sprawl, for example the upper middle class apartments in Victoria Street (1852-1854). Despite this, the flat continued to be seen as suitable for the working class only. So with detached housing unaffordable for most, a semi was by default, and despite the criticisms from people like Ruskin, the middle class dwelling type of choice.

From the middle of the nineteenth century, technological developments such as the mass production and distribution of building materials and the introduction of construction laws caused a reduction in the use of local materials and the pattern books introduced standardised designs across the country as well as reinforcing the hierarchy of dwelling types. Duty on glass was removed in 1845 and the window tax was abolished in 1851,

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therefore larger windows (which were a sign of status) became possible for even the cheapest houses, reinforcing the moves towards better access to sunlight and ventilation for health purposes.

Hygiene reformers eventually instigated change and legislation. Social reformers stressed the importance of better education and facilities, and the more idealistic visions of the model village planners were in many cases realized by the end of the century.

The detached upper class suburban villa had split into two during the eighteenth century, although in the correct location and with the right form and style, the architect-designed pairs remained socially desirable for the upper middle class. This opened up opportunities for the nineteenth century speculative builders to provide double villas for the aspirational middle and lower middle classes. Aided by the pattern books, these builders created ad hoc middle class suburbs, in which new semis gradually overtook the provision of new middle class terraced houses. In effect, attachment on only one side had moved down the social scale from the upper middle class to the rest of the middle class. The urban artisans were provided with terraces or tenements, while the labouring classes remained in the older housing, much of which had become slums.

In rural areas the middle classes were generally able to afford detached housing, and the labourers in their new estate villages were given double cottages, a trend reinforced by the pattern book authors and social reformers, and embraced by the villagers for whom attachment on one side of their dwellings was well established. Terraces remained the primary housing for some new villages (in particular those whose owners cared little for philanthropy) and most new industrial housing.

The class distinctions made manifest by dwelling type were therefore very clear. Although the form had followed very different paths up and down the social scales in the city and the country, semis as double villas were for the middle classes in the suburbs and semis as double cottages were for the working classes in the country.

There were two trends which signalled the end of this clear-cut hierarchy. The first was the development of planned suburbs, which not only used semis because they were an accepted part of middle class suburban life, but introduced the concept of bringing the village, with all of its perceived benefits, to the city. For the first time, the suburb became a replica of the village, including its double cottages, although the transference of class along with that dwelling type was avoided by adapting the cottages for a middle class clientele. Even the term "cottage" became interchangeable with "villa" in the suburbs.

The second trend was the new model villages in which philanthropic owners determined that semis were an appropriate dwelling form for urban industrial workers. For the labourers in

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their new model semis, there was a realisation that they too could aspire to a semi, which for so long had been available only to their social superiors. It was the garden city movement which was to accelerate this process of moving the semi down the social ladder to the artisan classes, and later in the twentieth century, to the poorest levels of the working classes.



## 5.0 THE GARDEN CITY MOVEMENT

### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

Until the late nineteenth century, the average town dweller, although (perhaps because) only a generation or two away from the rural past, saw the countryside exclusively in agricultural terms and in any case, distance and cost of travel precluded visits. However, as roads and railways made the countryside more accessible, it became attractive as a place of recreation and leisure. There was also a growing belief that the supposedly healthier, rural dwelling types should be extended to the urban working classes, whose overcrowded terraced houses and tenements were increasingly associated with ill health and questionable morals. The upper classes who had previously been quite satisfied with their elegant Georgian terraced houses in urban centres such as Bath, had increasingly rejected this dwelling type as the terraced form became the housing type of the lower classes. The middle classes followed the upper classes to the outskirts of the cities, initially by building better quality terraced housing and later with their flight to suburban villas. As the industrial and agricultural revolutions progressed, rural labourers continued to move into already-overcrowded urban centres in search of work and opportunity, and the total English population increased. During the 1850s half of Britain's population lived in towns – by 1900 it was three quarters. During the nineteenth century London's population increased from 864,000 to 4.5 million (Miller 2010, 1).

The search for a solution to the dual problems of social and environmental degradation in the cities, and the depressed economy and depletion of skilled labour in rural areas, culminated in the utopian vision outlined by Ebenezer Howard (1850 – 1928) in his book *To-Morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform* (1898). His goal was to create new self-contained communities (garden cities) on rural land, separate from existing towns. This was to be facilitated by the expansion of the railway networks. Although Howard was a parliamentary reporter and inventor with no architectural training, he took inspiration from the social reforms and philanthropy of the nineteenth century, suburbs such as Bedford Park, successful industrial model villages such as Port Sunlight and Bournville, and writers such as John Ruskin and William Morris. Howard was aware of the social reform movement, having been a shorthand reporter on the Royal Commission on labour. Despite scepticism from some quarters, Howard established the Garden City Association<sup>7</sup> in 1899 and saw his ideas as an integral part of a social revolution which would bring about what he described as a “joyous union” of the town and the country. He had a very precise definition of what his garden city should be; however the movement which developed during the early twentieth century was

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<sup>7</sup> The term Garden City had previously been used to describe Chicago and Christchurch, and was the name of a New York suburb (1869). However, although Howard had lived in Chicago, he coined his term to mean a city within a green space rather than a city containing gardens.

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more moderate, and mostly focussed instead on improving the planning and design of the suburban environment.

The garden city movement has been well researched and well documented, by scholars such as Walter Creese, Robert Freestone and Mervyn Miller. This chapter provides only a high level overview, into which the specifics of dwelling type have been added.

## 5.2 GARDEN CITIES

Ebenezer Howard's book was republished in 1902 as *Garden Cities of To-Morrow*. Many philanthropists and others who were concerned about the living conditions of the poor seized upon his ideas as a workable solution, although his vision was much broader than housing the working classes. In 1919 the *Garden Cities and Town Planning Association* (with support from Howard) adopted a definition of a garden city:

A Town designated 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 (cited in Howard 1902, 26).

With community space at the centre and factories on the periphery, the traditional industrial town model was inverted. Howard envisaged a "slumless, smokeless city" (Freestone 1989, 13). To enable the tenants of the new towns to participate in the anticipated capital appreciation of the land, the co-partnership model (known in Australia as "company title") was offered – tenants were able to purchase shares in the company owning the land, rather than individually owning the lease of a dwelling or farm. Such tenants could then build their own homes, following the estate guidelines. Other tenants rented homes provided by the company.

In his book Howard does not discuss dwelling type specifically, although he believed that a garden city could overcome the "lack of society" in the country by providing the "social opportunity" of the town (Howard 1902, 46). The authors of earlier pattern books had expressed a preference for attached cottages as providing such social interaction between working class families. Howard also quotes Ruskin – "...building of more (houses), strongly, beautifully, and in groups of limited extent" (Howard 1902, 50). He recommended a minimum building plot of 20 x 100 feet, and the 5,500 plots were to have an average size of 20 X 130 feet, with 5.5 people on average per plot. Each plot was to be leased by one family. Further clues to Howard's intent for the types of dwellings are provided in his suggestions for how "the workers may look for means to build their own homes". These included individuals approaching building societies, co-operative societies and trade unions rather than

contemplating the “exploitation” of “speculative builders of a strongly pronounced individualistic type” (Howard 1902, 107). The garden city was to take up Edward Gibbon Wakefield’s 1849 proposal that a new colony should be a “representation of the parent State – colonists from all ranks” (Howard 1902, 119). Howard had “found little inspiration” in the grids of terraced housing which characterised new nineteenth century towns such as Middlesbrough, preferring the crescents of Regents Park or Bath (Miller 2010, 4-5). It can be assumed therefore that Howard had in mind a mix of dwelling types (short or curved terraces, semis and detached houses) to cater for various occupants depending on the established class hierarchy of dwelling type, with a preference, in principle, for individual houses on their own plot of land.

Howard was very skilled at marketing his vision. Following a series of promotional meetings and tours throughout England (including Port Sunlight and Bournville) a group of investors formed The Garden City Pioneer Company, with the same financial structure as the 5% philanthropy companies. In 1903 almost 4,000 acres were purchased at Letchworth, a rural area 35 miles north of London. The architects Barry Parker (1867-1947) and Raymond Unwin (1863-1940) were chosen for the project after submitting the winning entry in a competition for a layout plan. Both were followers of the Arts and Crafts movement and like Howard, were “alert to the emerging social forces and popular aspirations that were to transform housing and factory design in the next generation” (F J Osborn in the preface to Howard 1902, 12). It was these architects who gave form to Howard’s high level vision.

Unwin had already been involved in the development of model mining villages when he formed a partnership with Parker in 1896. In 1898 they completed “Woodcote”, a substantial Arts and Crafts house in Cunnery Road, Church Stretton and two years later added a pair of semis at the entrance to the “Woodcote” estate (Figure 5.1).

**Figure 5-1: Parker and Unwin semis, Church Stretton, c1900**



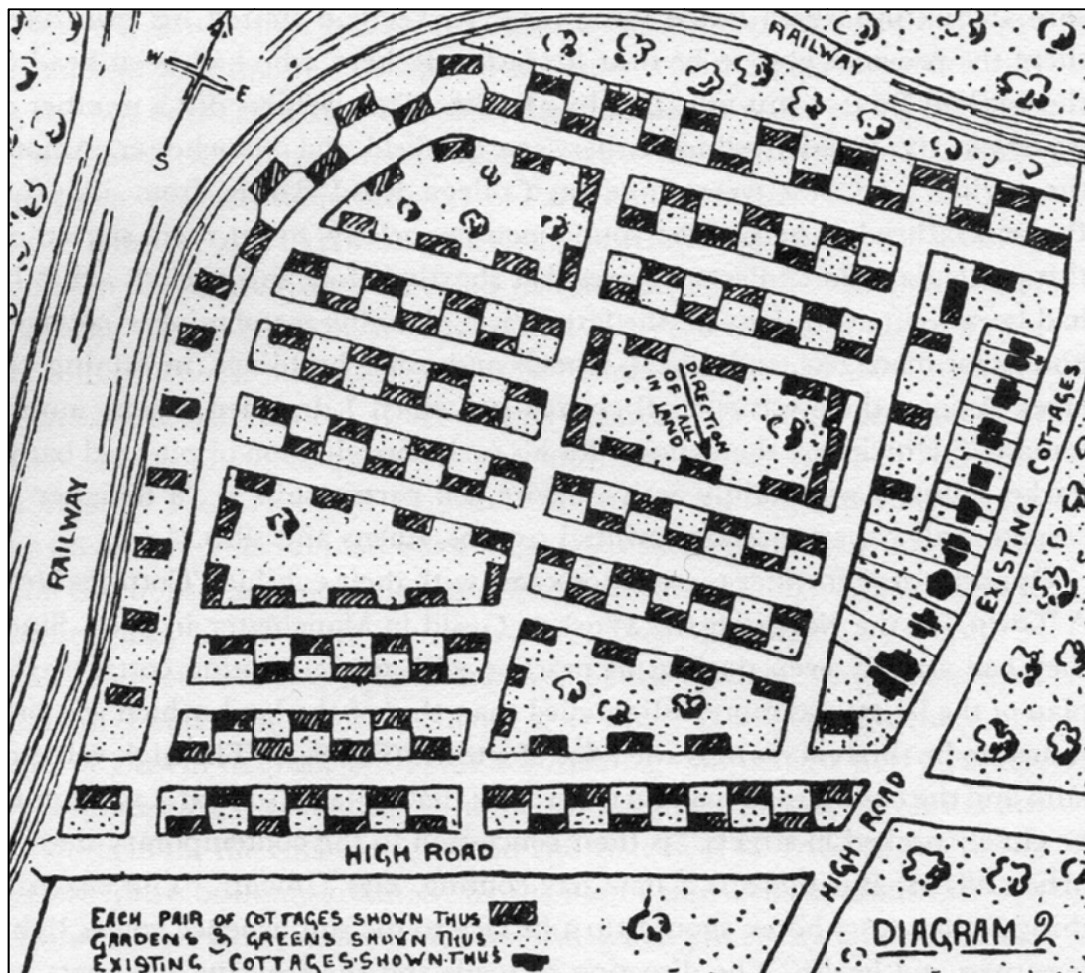
**Cunnery Road (Google Maps, accessed 30 January 2012)**

In his booklet *Cottage Plans and Common Sense* Raymond Unwin stated that, in the future:

The essential thing is that every house should turn its face to the sun, whence comes light, sweetness and health. The direction of roads and the fronting to streets are details which must be made to fall in with this condition, or to give way to it (Unwin 1902, 3).

He went on to say that the standard unit of dwelling should be the double or semi-detached house. The following year Parker and Unwin submitted an exhibition scheme for “cottages near a town” in Manchester, which consisted of rows of offset semis (Figure 5.2).

**Figure 5-2: Parker and Unwin – Plan for cottages near a town, 1903**



(Creese 1966, 186)

One of the semi designs from this exhibition was constructed in Harrogate in 1903. Although it was supposed to be part of a large estate of workers' cottages, only one pair was built (English Heritage, Images of England No 382325) (Figure 5.3).

**Figure 5-3: Parker and Unwin semis at Harrogate, 1903****Nos 197 and 199 Hookstone Chase (Google Maps, accessed 30 January 2012).**

Parker and Unwin's evolving ideas were given form in a major commission; to build a model village on 150 acres at New Earswick, purchased in 1901 by the Quaker philanthropist and industrialist Joseph Rowntree near his Cocoa Works in York. Rowntree knew Cadbury and had met Parker and Unwin during the garden city promotional conference at Bournville the same year.

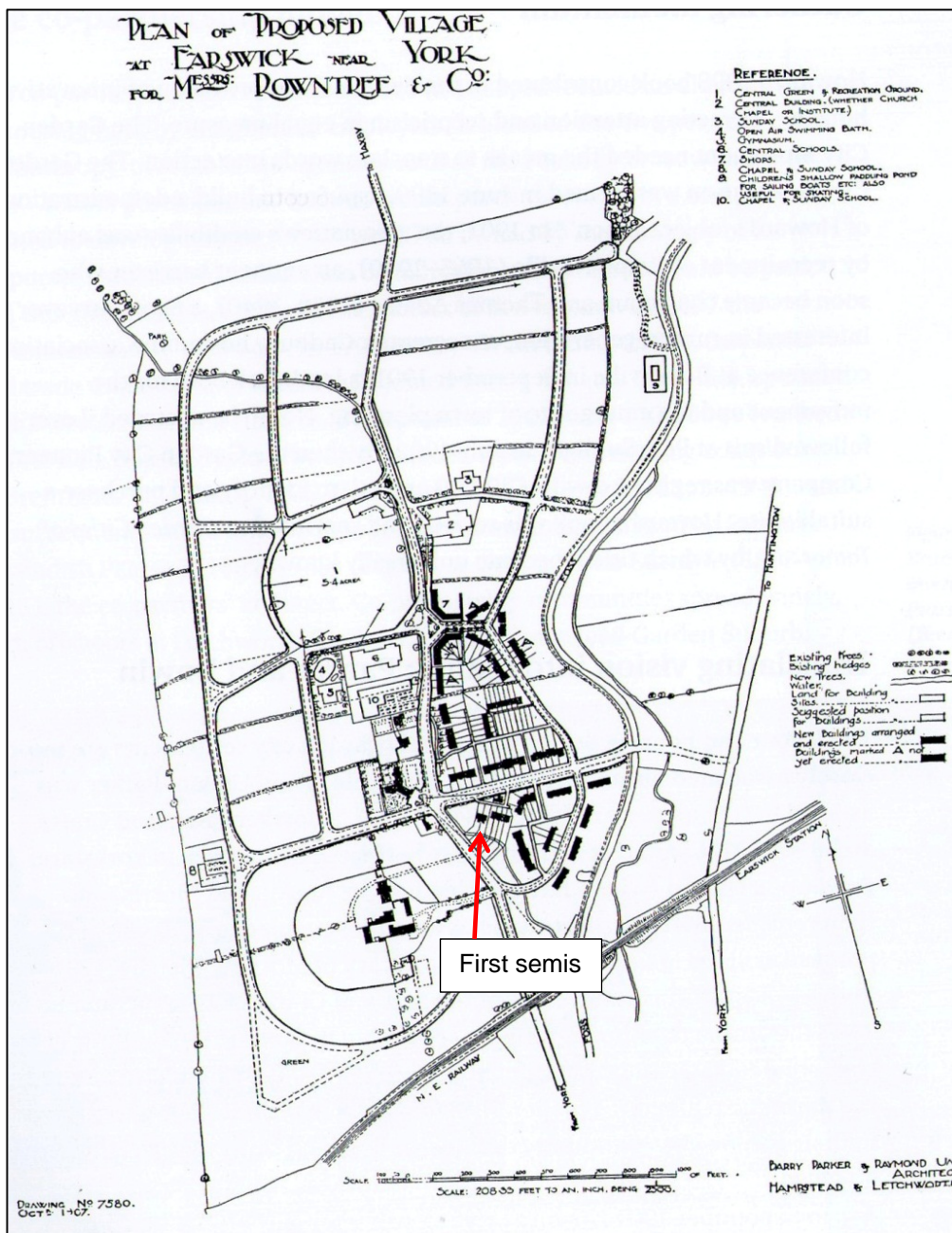
To avoid the speculation by tenants which occurred at Bournville, a Trust retained ownership of all the land and buildings at New Earswick. The Trust's financial model required a return on capital. Initially 3%, it was later increased to 5%. And in another echo of the 5% philanthropy movement, the Trust had as its objective:

(The) improvement of the condition of the working classes...by the provision of improved dwellings with open spaces and, where possible, gardens, to be enjoyed therewith, and the organisation of village communities with such facilities for the enjoyment of full and healthy lives as the Trustee shall consider desirable (cited in Sinclair 2004, 2).

Rowntree's son Seebohm Rowntree had in 1901 published a survey in which he categorised the working classes in York. Only Classes C (moderate working class) and D (well-to-do artisan working class), including Rowntree employees, were the target tenants for New Earswick. As the earlier philanthropists had discovered, Classes A (struggling poor) and B (labouring class) would have to remain in their rundown housing, because they could not afford the rents.

The architects produced a site layout comprising mostly short terraces in streets laid out according to the local topology, rather than in straight lines (Figure 5.4). The use of courts and curved roads brought the ideal village and town layout full circle. The “unhealthy” haphazard urban streets and courts of the early nineteenth century had been replaced by the orderly and uniform streets of the model villages and the long, straight byelaw streets. But these in turn had become undesirable, as their promise of improved living conditions failed to materialise where high population densities in monotonous, sterile rows of dwellings persisted.

Figure 5-4: Early layout at New Earswick, 1907



The plan showing the first stage groups of houses (including only one pair of semis) with the planned stage 2 groups to the north (Miller 2010, 14).



The first houses at New Earswick were built between 1902 and 1903. Not as eclectic in style as those at Port Sunlight, they were laid out in one pair, and several terraces (Figures 5.5 and 5.6). There are distinct similarities to the semis built at Harrogate at the same time (Figure 5.3). As Parker remarked later in a lecture, the mix of dwelling types was similar to the plan at Port Sunlight and Bournville in order to “avoid producing the spotty restless effect ... which would result from using pairs only” (Parker 1923 cited in Sinclair 2004, 4). Clearly Parker and Unwin had moved away from their ideas for the Manchester “cottages near a town” which were decidedly “spotty” (Figure 5.2).

The dwellings at Port Sunlight and Bournville contained relatively traditional internal layouts, including some tunnel backs. At New Earswick Parker and Unwin tried out various internal layouts which better suited the aspects and the need for light and air. The density was around eight houses per acre. They believed that a parlour was a waste of space, preferring one through living room, with windows at each end, but eventually had to compromise, following pressure from the tenants who demanded this symbol of upward mobility. Bay windows, which had previously featured only in the better class of terraced house, became a characteristic design feature; Unwin stating that “windows facing the street are much less depressing if slightly bayed to invite a peep up and down as well as across” (Unwin 1902, 12). The Parker and Unwin designs for a double fronted parlour semi, with bay windows and no back projections, were soon to become widely adopted by speculative builders.

**Figure 5-5: The first semis at New Earswick, 1902-3**



**Western Terrace (Author 2011)**

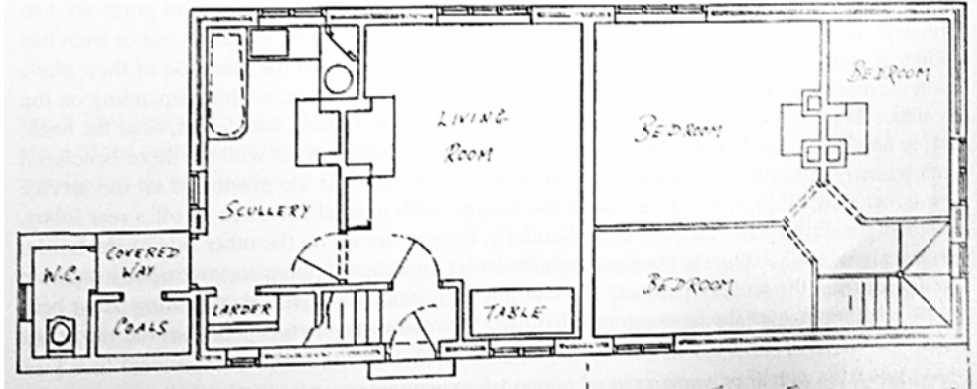
**Figure 5-6: The first terraces at New Earswick, 1902-3****Terrace of four dwellings****Terrace of seven dwellings**

**(Western Terrace, Author 2011)**

In 1914 Parker and Unwin designed a row of semis in Sycamore Avenue, New Earswick, in which each pair was joined to the next by a small outbuilding containing a WC and coal storage (Figure 5.7). This was despite the architects' aspiration to contain all parts of a

cottage under its main roof. These resembled the quasi-semi-detached row, first seen in the late eighteenth century (see Section 3.7).

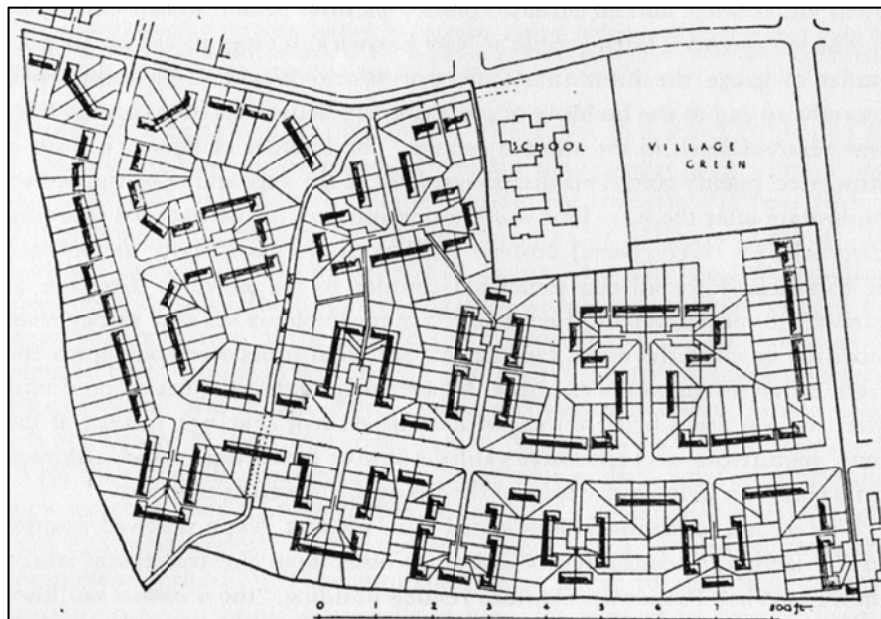
**Figure 5-7: Semis at New Earswick, c1914**



**A non-parlour semi with side extension (Sinclair 2004, 11)**

The semis at New Earswick were used where they were the most suitable dwelling type for the site. Later stages in the development of the village saw them being used as a feature on corners, and as “punctuation marks” to separate the terraces (Figure 5.8). The interwar examples are in the stripped down neo-Georgian style of council housing as designed by Unwin for the Homes Fit for Heroes housing schemes (see Section 6.2) but still have varied setbacks around the curved streets. Some also show an attempt to give the building the appearance (from the street) of a single house (Figure 5.9).

**Figure 5-8: Interwar New Earswick – a mix of terraces and semis**



**The interwar development around the school, with extensive use of cul-de-sacs (Creese 1966, 197)**

**Figure 5-9: Interwar semis at New Earswick**



**Symmetrical pair**



**Pair designed to look like one house**

**(Author 2011)**

New Earswick was an “experimental” project where the architects could test designs for Howard’s first garden city. Unwin’s subsequent interwar designs for the Homes Fit for

Heroes council housing were similarly influenced by his experiences at the garden city as well as New Earswick; the prototype designs in his 1919 Government Housing Manual (see Section 6.2) contained three New Earswick cottage plan types (Sinclair 2004).

Unwin not only saw the cottage as synonymous with a healthy family life, but considered that low density housing (where land values were relatively low) was essential. However he stated:

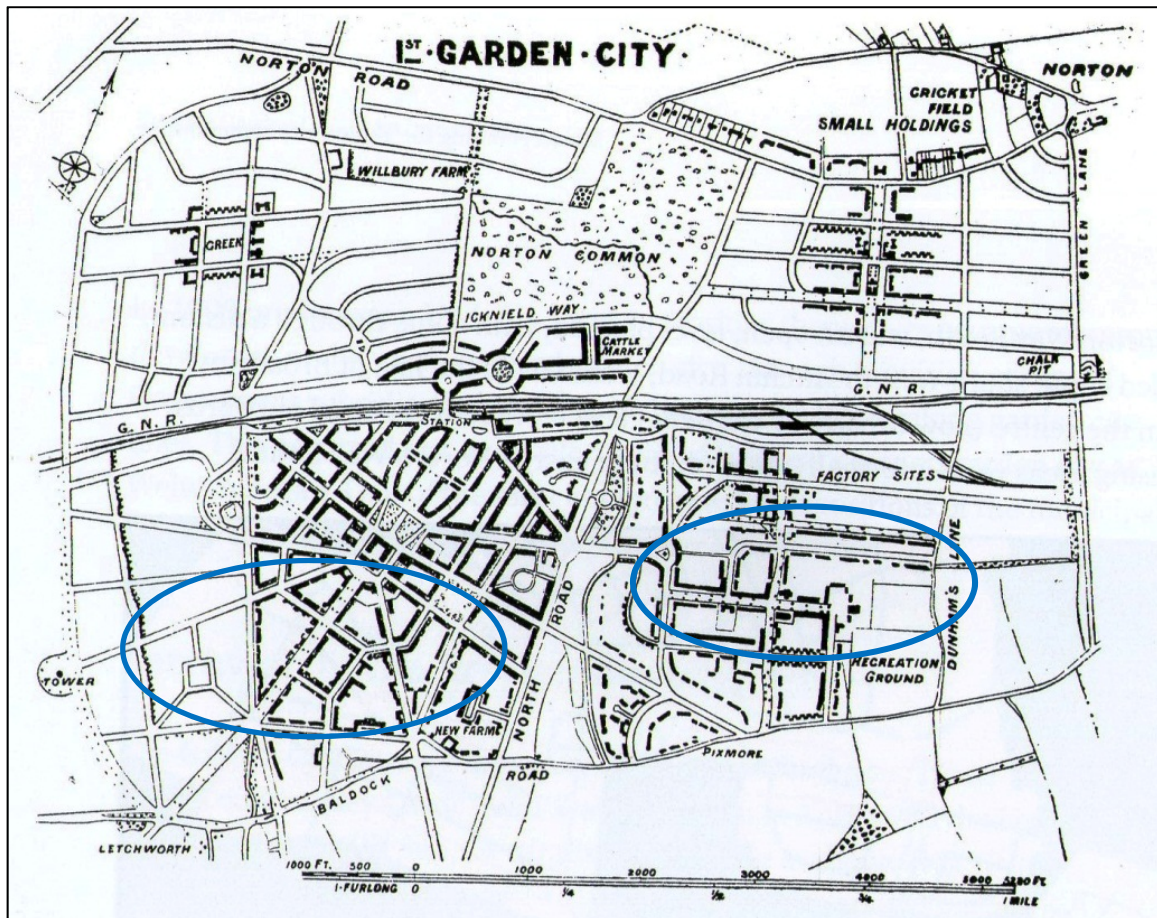
There is nothing in garden city principles that calls for scattering, or even semi-detachedness; nor is there anything with which the crescents of Bath or the squares of Bloomsbury would be inconsistent (Unwin 1938, cited in Creese 1966, 179).

On the contrary, both Parker and Unwin were opposed to the “present ideal of having each house standing alone in the middle of its own little plot”, describing it as “architecturally disastrous”. They suggested that “the social stability and well-being of the community require that the tendency to segregation of the people’s dwelling-places according to the depth of their pockets, should be resisted“ (Unwin 1938, cited in Creese 1966, 190). However, Parker and Unwin’s reality was that levels of attachment and detachment in housing were inextricably linked to wealth and status. The poorest sections of the community (Rowntree’s Classes A and B) could not afford to live in developments such as New Earswick, and the wealthy would continue to distance themselves with detached housing.

Parker and Unwin’s 1904 master plan for Letchworth Garden City (Figure 5.10) included houses, cottages and factories encircled by agricultural land. The buildings were arranged to maximise the natural light and the absence of tunnel backs in the dwellings facilitated this. Curving roads took account of the natural topology, and housing density (at that time unregulated) was set at twelve dwellings per acre<sup>8</sup> for the cheapest houses, and less for the more expensive dwellings. Despite Unwin’s wish to avoid segregation based on wealth, this was exactly what was built into the plan of the garden city. Even with Howard’s utopian vision, the dwelling hierarchy which had been established during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was firmly adhered to. Working class housing near the industrial areas was high density (terraces) while further away were lower density zones of semi-detached and detached cottages. Closer to the prime streets such as Broadway, larger detached houses for the “upper middle classes” were set in spacious plots (North Hertfordshire District Council 2001, 7)

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<sup>8</sup> Unwin, in *Nothing Gained by Overcrowding!* (1912) demonstrated that a density of 12 houses per acre was an efficient use of land. It was he, rather than Howard, who created this benchmark which was used extensively in later suburban developments.

**Figure 5-10: Layout of Letchworth, 1904**

Parker and Unwin's layout, showing terraced housing for workers near the factory sites (right) and lower density semis around the more upmarket Broadway (left) (Miller 2010, 20).

The initial dwellings for Letchworth were designed by Parker and Unwin. Although many other architects were later involved in the development, their designs set the initial architectural agenda for the garden city. The dwellings which "created the norm" were semis, built in 1904 in the vernacular style, with dormers, tall chimneys and painted roughcast (Figure 5.11). One of these semis was Unwin's home until 1906 while Parker lived in the other from 1906 until 1935 (Miller 2010, 42, English Heritage, Images of England, 161869).

**Figure 5-11: Parker and Unwin's own homes in Muddy Lane, Letchworth**



Built in 1904, the semi on the right was Unwin's home. The other semi was Parker's home; he made the extensive additions in 1914, destroying the symmetry of the pair in the process ([www.lethworthgardencity.net/heritage/tour/muddylane.htm](http://www.lethworthgardencity.net/heritage/tour/muddylane.htm) accessed 24 January 2012).

In 1907 Parker designed a thatched building based on a medieval "hall house" (see Section 3.2) in which the solar became his private office. This too was planned to have a mirror image other half, which was never built (English Heritage, Images of England, 161942). The prominent architect M Baillie Scott designed and built some semis (Figure 5.12) for the 1905 Cheap Cottage Exhibition at Letchworth, although they were excluded from the competition because the cost of his dwellings exceeded the maximum allowed (Miller 2010, 47).

**Figure 5-12: Letchworth semis designed by M H Baillie Scott, 1905**



**Nos 7 and 7a Norton Way (Creese 1966, 281)**

The appraisal for the Letchworth Conservation Area states that:

The promoters of the Garden City were also convinced that a high standard of beauty should be attained which could only result from simple, straightforward buildings and from the use of good harmonious materials. The buildings were to be designed for their purpose and position and unnecessary ornamentation was to be discouraged. The parameters outlined complemented the ideals of the Arts and Crafts style and vernacular forms (North Hertfordshire District Council 2001, 20).

However the idealism of the garden city experiment was somewhat watered down by economic realities. Unlike the model villages which had been subsidised and overseen by their philanthropic owners, the first garden city had a variety of developers and Howard was accused of “depriving his garden city of the immediate architectural orchestration that made the earlier efforts harmonious” (Creese 1966, 204). The undercapitalised project struggled to maintain the momentum, and the dwelling mix included standard output from speculative builders and individual co-partnership dwellings funded by building societies, as well as carefully designed architectural groupings. In addition it proved almost impossible to build affordable dwellings for the factory labourers.

Despite the compromises, or perhaps because of them, many semis were built in the new town as it developed into a middle class city (Figures 5.13 to 5.15).

**Figure 5-13: Letchworth semis designed by Parker and Unwin, 1905-6**



**Nos 1 and 2 Eastholm (English Heritage, Images of England, 161943).**



**Figure 5-14: Letchworth semis designed by Allen Foxley, 1906****Nos 3 and 5 Norton Way North (English Heritage, Images of England, 161942)****Figure 5-15: Letchworth semis designed by Courtenay Melville Crickmer****Nos 34 and 36 South View (Google Maps, accessed 6 January 2012)**

After the First World War the Homes Fit for Heroes campaign (see Section 6.2) gave added impetus to the garden city movement, particularly through the influence of Unwin. However the aging Howard and his associates were disappointed that none of the post-war

government subsidies were directed towards the creation of true garden cities and sought private investment to purchase land for a second garden city. By 1919 Welwyn Garden City north of London was being planned. The master plan was put together by the architect Louis de Soissons, who also oversaw the other architects' designs for the dwellings.

The housing was a mix of detached, semi-detached and terraced dwellings, mostly in the neo-Georgian style, using red bricks made from local clay.

Industries were attracted to the new development and by 1926 1,818 dwellings had been built (Miller 2010, 35). Despite its attractiveness as a commuter town for London, it did succeed in becoming a self-contained town in an attractive setting. Howard lived in Letchworth from 1905 until 1921, after which he occupied a semi in Welwyn Garden City until his death in 1928 (Figure 5.16).

**Figure 5-16: Ebenezer Howard's semi at Welwyn Garden City**



The semi at 5 Guessens Road where Ebenezer Howard lived until his death in 1928 ([www.cashewnut.me.uk](http://www.cashewnut.me.uk), accessed 31 December 2011).

### 5.3 GARDEN SUBURBS

Ebenezer Howard disapproved of suburbia. Yet only two true garden cities were built to house the burgeoning population of England.

The concept of the garden city (a self-contained community in a rural setting) soon morphed into the idea of the garden suburb (a residential estate on the outskirts of towns and cities, with a carefully planned layout based on garden city principles, but no industries) and the garden village (a model village tied to a specific industrial operation, similarly with a layout

influenced by the garden city movement). Garden suburbs and garden villages have a well-planned open layout, trees and green open space, and they may have the appearance of a rural village, but they do not feature agricultural land and do not imply adherence to Howard's ideals (Osborn in Howard 1965, 26).

Some new pre-war suburban estates called themselves garden suburbs (for example Humberstone Garden Suburb, Leicester, 1908 and Romford Garden Suburb, east London, 1910) and some had Unwin as a consulting architect (for example Wavertree Garden Suburb, Liverpool, 1912). They were built for aspirational artisans and the middle classes, and as such semis were a significant part of the housing mix in these suburbs. However, the Hampstead Garden Suburb (for which planning commenced in 1905) was the first English garden suburb and came the closest, apart from the two garden cities, to exemplifying Howard's principles. As much of suburbia continued to spread with rows of byelaw terraces, connected to city workplaces by expanding rail networks, the social reformer Henrietta Barnett commissioned Unwin to design a suburb in London.<sup>9</sup> After he was appointed to the project, he left Letchworth and made his home at Wyldes, the original farmhouse on the Hampstead site.

Unwin himself thought that the outer suburbs of London were "a depressing sight", where instead of quiet villages "files of hard-featured villas have entrenched themselves, and meaner dwellings of lamentable patterns have multiplied in rows" (Unwin and Baillie Scott 1909, 1). He asked:

But is the reproach under which Outer London lies necessary and inevitable? Cannot some of the elements of beauty in an English village – spaciousness, sense of proportion, verdure, quiet – find their place in these newer settlements of population? May not these fine things be made indeed their distinguishing features? (Unwin and Baillie Scott 1909, 1)

Unwin's original plan for Hampstead Garden Suburb included a group of detached houses, as well as an area with a curious checkerboard layout of semis similar to that created for the Manchester exhibition. This plan was soon substantially changed because the topology made it unworkable. However, it provided the impetus for Unwin to have a special law passed to suspend the byelaws and allow the use of short cul-de-sacs. The new suburb aimed to "bring together the best that the English village and the English city have to give" (Unwin and Baillie Scott 1909, 2). The Trust set up to purchase and develop the estate contained George Cadbury (Bournville) and W H Lever (Port Sunlight) amongst its members.

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<sup>9</sup> Although their partnership remained intact until 1914, Unwin moved on to other projects such as Hampstead, and government appointments, while Parker continued his close involvement with Letchworth and later developments.

In 1907 work began on the first cottages and around 120 had been built during the first year (Unwin and Baillie Scott 1909, 45) (Figure 5.17).

**Figure 5-17: Unwin's Foundation Cottages at Hampstead Garden Suburb, 1907**



**Nos 142 and 140 Hampstead Way. The plaque on the front wall by the window proclaims them as the first dwellings in Hampstead Garden Suburb. The adjacent terrace of four dwellings is in a similar style. (Google Maps, accessed 30 January 2012)**

Hampstead Garden Suburb was to have a mix of dwelling types (including flats), with the aim of housing a social mix including the lower classes who Mrs Barnett believed had been isolated in “special areas” by the *Housing Act 1890* (Barnett 1915 cited in Creese 1966, 226). She had close contact with the poorest classes, as her husband was a clergyman in the slums of Whitechapel. Such people she thought could be “improved” by their proximity to their superiors. However, each class in her suburb was to be in its own area (such as the Artisans’ Quarter) with homes befitting their status. The superior houses were in the areas with better views over the heath. However, her worthy goal was not achieved, as middle class tenants soon took up all the occupancies in the “artisan” homes.

Once again, the hopes of rehousing and improving the labouring classes had failed. Once again, the cause was the high cost of low density housing. Mrs Barnett was naïve to hope that her many prominent architects would design anything other than middle class housing for her suburb or that the people of Whitechapel could afford or even wish to live there. It is clear from the size and form of the new dwellings that they were not even designed for the artisan class. Her architects seemed to have a more realistic idea of their target market. In

seeking to build in the new suburb dwellings which would be superior to the “absurdities which constitute the modern Englishman’s home”, the architect Baillie Scott assumed that his clients were “the average family with one or more servants” (Unwin and Baillie Scott 1909, 11). It was only later in the twentieth century when many of the large Hampstead semis were subdivided into flats that a more heterogeneous mix of social classes emerged.

Like Unwin, Mrs Barnett believed that to “raise the level of total culture” even in urban slums, beauty had to become fundamental to urban life (Creese 1966, 230). Just as the desire for external beauty had given rise to the semis of the emparkment villages (see Section 3.3), so that concept of rural beauty could be transferred into a suburb by the use of that semi-detached cottage motif. The stated aim of the promoters of the Garden Suburb was:

...to find a better way of building even the smallest dwelling; and with the object lesson so long disregarded, of the cottages and farmhouses of old England, to try if we in these modern days cannot also build as they did (Unwin and Baillie Scott 1909, 11).

The 1909 Hampstead prospectus contained many designs for large semis. There were only a few examples of groups of three or four attached dwellings, as well as some designs for large detached houses. The prospectus described the new suburb.

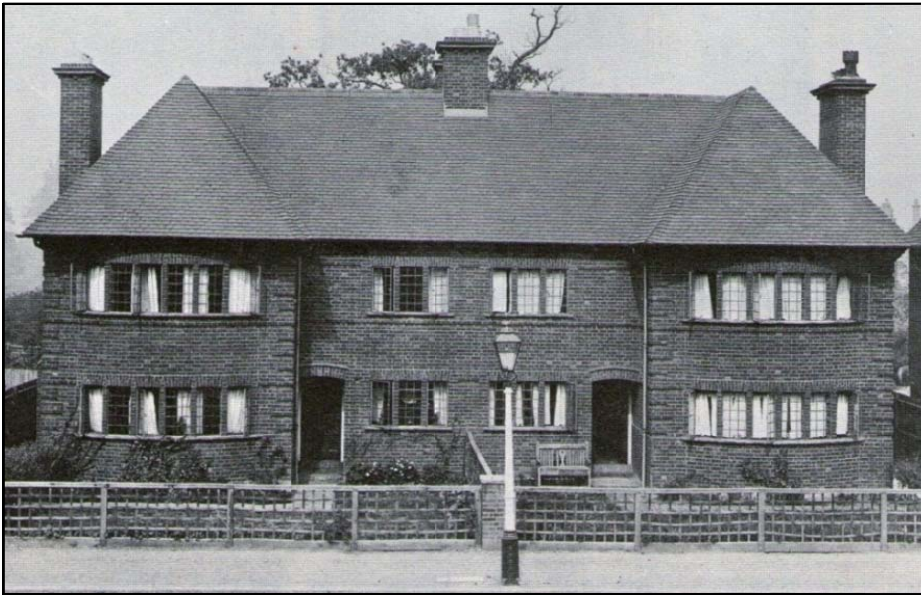
At one end of the estate...only houses of a larger type with good gardens are under erection. At the northern end, in pleasant contrast, cottages are being built, public greens and open spaces are being laid out, and the charm of an old English village is being successfully created by Barry Parker and Raymond Unwin (Unwin and Baillie Scott 1909, 27).

The early dwellings display a variety of vernacular and domestic revival styles, some by Unwin and others designed by prominent architects within the guidelines set by Unwin (Figures 5.18 to 5.21). They were built by the Garden Suburb Development Company, rather than individual building contractors, to maintain consistency of style and form. Many are grouped around a grassed quadrangle, a device which was tested at Ivy Place in New Earswick. After the formal Central Square was developed, the style of the dwellings gradually moved from the picturesque gabled house towards the formality and symmetry of the neo-Georgian style. One of the unifying elements in the suburb, as it was in Letchworth, was the roofing material. For example, by insisting on tiled roofs, Unwin could allow more freedom in the dwelling design, yet maintain a degree of unity throughout the suburb.

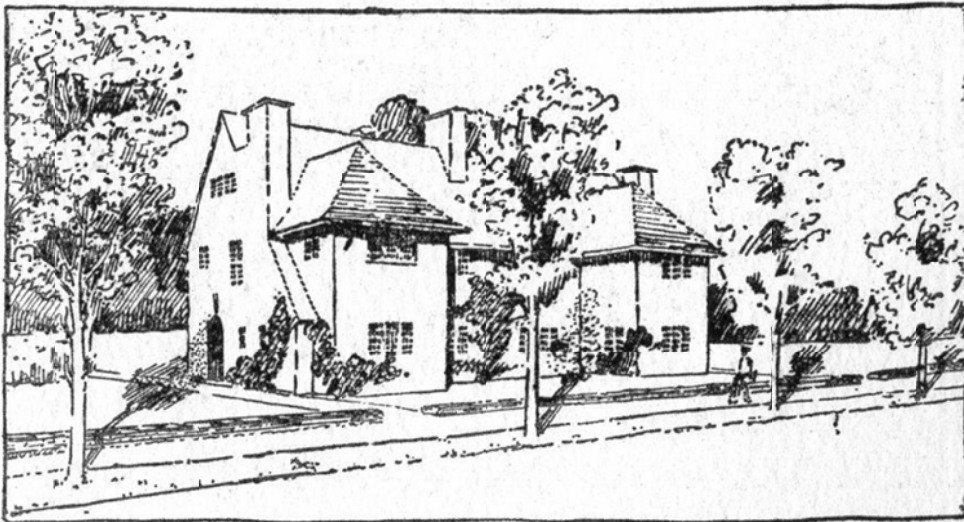
Unwin believed that the success of Hampstead Garden Suburb was due to the combination of site planner, architect, builder and the future owner or tenant, all working together to create a harmonious whole (Figure 5.22).

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Figure 5-18: Hampstead Garden Suburb semis designed by Parker and Unwin

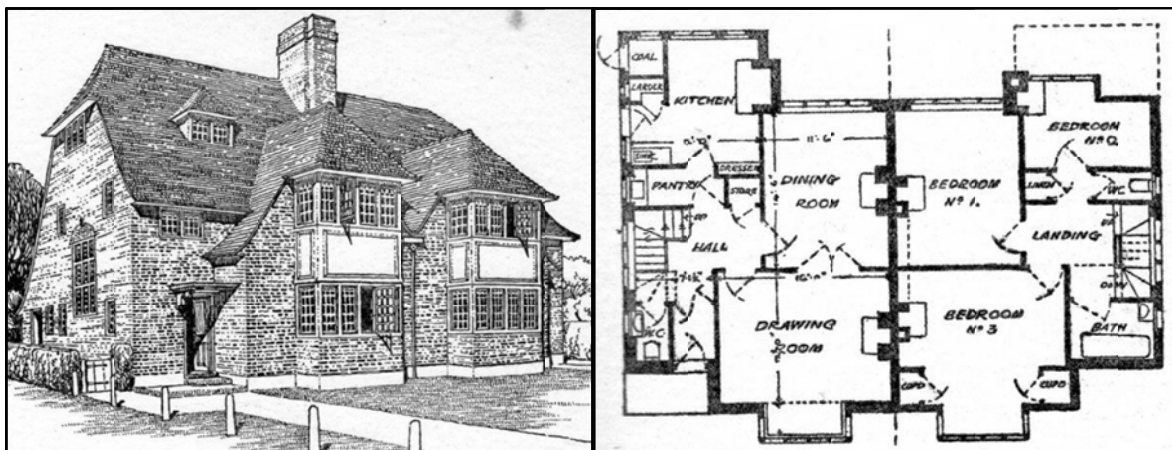


(Creese 1966, 293)



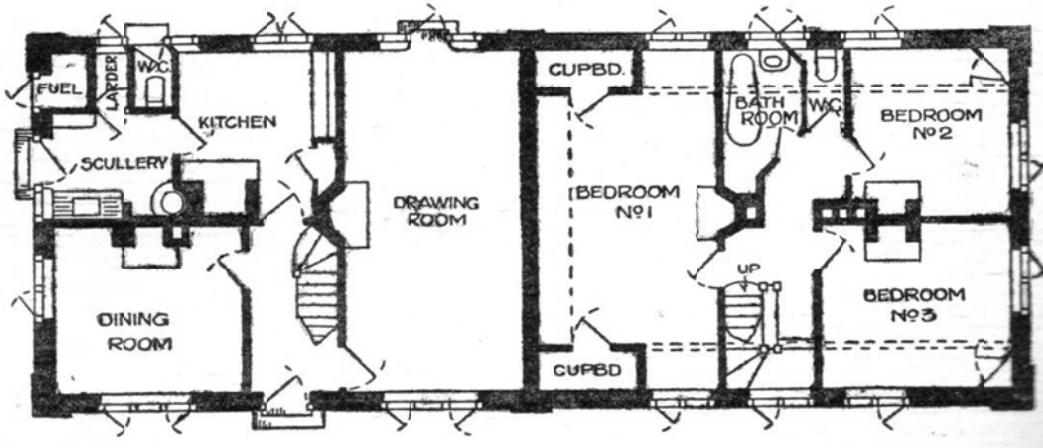
Meadway (Unwin and Baillie Scott 1909, 37)

Figure 5-19: Hampstead Garden Suburb semis designed by Michael Bunney



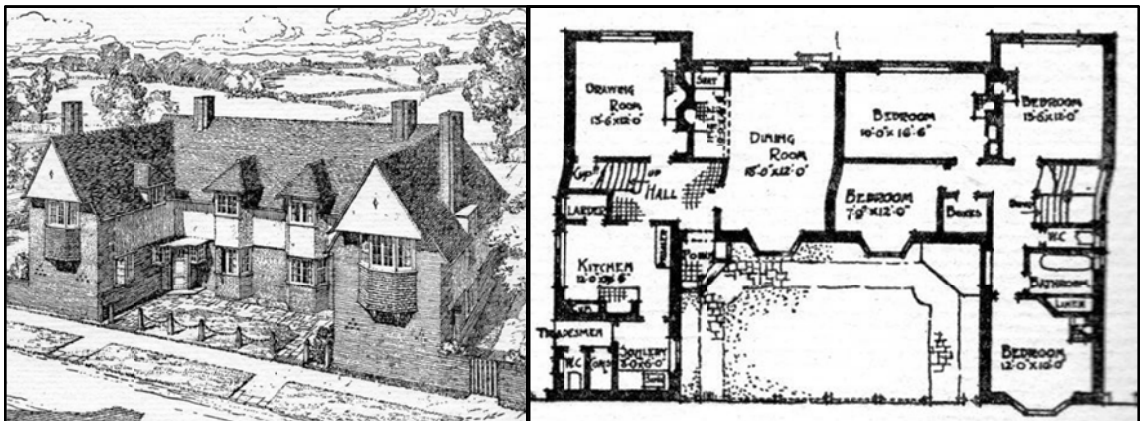
Rotherwick Road (Unwin and Baillie Scott 1909, 23)

Figure 5-20: Hampstead Garden Suburb semis designed by Arnold Mitchell

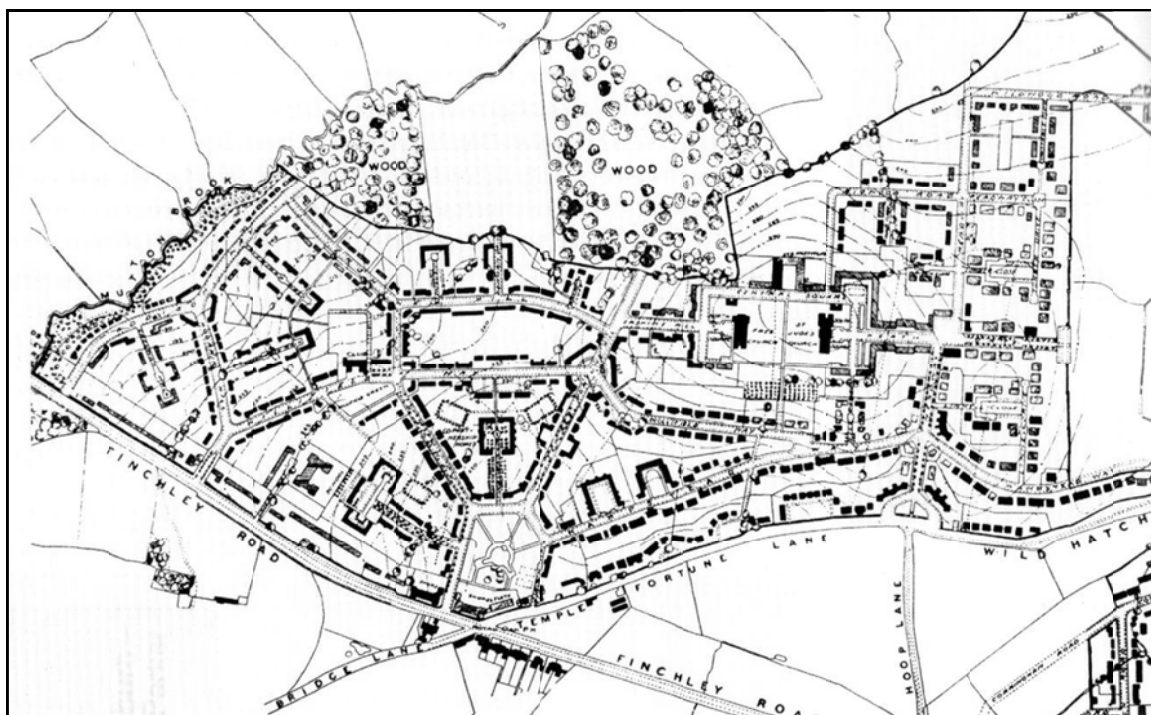


Temple Fortune Lane (Unwin and Baillie Scott 1909, 46)

Figure 5-21: Hampstead Garden Suburb semis designed by C M Crickmer



Rotherwick Road (Unwin and Baillie Scott 1909, 28)

**Figure 5-22: Hampstead Garden Suburb layout, 1911**

An extract from Unwin's site layout for the suburb, incorporating cul-de-sacs, groupings of dwellings, curved streets and an extensive use of semis (Miller 2010, 26).

#### 5.4 GARDEN VILLAGES

Although pre-dating the garden city movement, the model villages of Port Sunlight and Bournville are considered to be examples of garden villages, as is New Earswick, with gardens for each dwelling, public green spaces and community buildings such as schools. The term "model village" was replaced by "garden village" for the new model villages built during the twentieth century. For example, James Reckitt commenced his Garden Village in Hull in 1907, using architects Percy Runton and William Barry. There were two classes of dwellings – one for the "senior staff of Reckitts and middle class families" and the other for workers at the Reckitt and Sons factory (The Garden Village Society nd). The facilities included a shopping centre, club house and almshouses, and by 1913 around 600 dwellings had been built, most of them semis (Figure 5.23). An indication of the importance of semis to the village was the venue for its opening ceremony – a pair of semis at No 7 The Oval (Figure 5.24).



**Figure 5-23: Semis in Garden Village, Hull, c1908**

(The Garden Village Society nd)

**Figure 5-24: Opening ceremony, Garden Village, Hull, 1908**

(The Garden Village Society nd)

## 5.5 CONCLUSIONS

Despite the successes of the garden villages, which had foundations in philanthropy, the garden cities and garden suburbs did not achieve Howard's dream of housing all classes of society. While artisans could afford to live in Letchworth and Welwyn, it was not until the 1920s when local authorities became responsible for subsidised workers' housing (see Section 6.2) that the garden cities were able to provide affordable dwellings for the lower classes. Hampstead Garden Suburb had no council housing and remained a middle class enclave. Similarly the earlier suburb of Bedford Park remained firmly middle class.

Nevertheless, the garden city movement was the catalyst for major changes to the way housing was developed, for all classes. As part of the Hampstead development, Unwin was able to have the *Public Health Act 1875* suspended with the passing of the *Hampstead Garden Suburb Act 1906*, which removed the requirement that his site plan should adhere to the byelaws. These byelaws did not apply to New Earswick or Letchworth, where he was able to implement his low density housing model by reducing the length of roads, using courts and cul-de-sacs, and minimising wasted space at intersections. Ironically, the byelaws had been introduced to prevent the development of slums in courts and yards within short streets with no through access, but Unwin was able to demonstrate that with adequate planning, cul-de-sacs and narrow roads did not inevitably spawn slums. After 1909 many of the garden suburb standards and principles were enshrined in statutory national planning regulations which theoretically made low density (“healthy”) housing widely available even for the working classes. Sir Frederick Osborn argued that the garden city movement had “democratised” housing design and standards (Miller 2010, 37). Even the housing provided by employers for miners, which included some of the most grim terraces of the nineteenth century, was eventually improved and adopted some of the garden city ideas, including open layouts and the use of semis in the mix (Figure 5.25).

**Figure 5-25: Estate for miners, Ryehill, Havercroft**



(Caffyn 1986, 125)

Semi-detached dwellings were widely accepted in the garden cities, suburbs and villages as an appropriate compromise between space and economy, and were the most efficient way of providing each dwelling with a garden setting. The private garden was valued for social and health reasons as well as its symbolic value as a statement of community-mindedness. Unwin said:

If the Garden City stands for anything, it stands for this: - a decent home and garden for everyone who comes there. That is the irreducible minimum. Let that go and we fail utterly. (Unwin 1906, cited in Creese 1966, 292)

During the 1940s the garden city concept was again adapted for the creation of “new towns” - satellite towns within green belts. The new towns were seen as a solution to unemployment

and the housing shortage after the war. The *New Towns Act 1946* created a state development authority, which in its first development (Stevenage) added blocks of flats and apartments to the dwelling type mix of terraces and semis. However, the dwellings were mostly small in scale, and town layouts were generally along garden city principles, leading to criticisms at the time from people like John Summerson and J M Richards, who accused them of being sentimental “confectionery” because they had no modern forms such as skyscrapers (Summerson 1956, 8-10). Into the confusion of dwelling types within the new towns came England’s first (1951) high rise (10 storey) block of flats and the three-storey maisonette rows inspired by the expansion of Stockholm, although Creese (1966, 339) noted that “the single or semi-detached house is still invoked as an ideal”. Welwyn Garden City and nearby Hatfield were purchased by the government and became just another new town. One commentator suggested that “Welwyn, though far from perfect, made the New Towns Act possible, just as Hatfield, by its imperfection, made it necessary” (*The Times*, 3 January 1948, 5). Eventually over two million people were housed in more than 20 New Towns which were built until 1970.

Ironically the improvements in transport and communications, which made the garden cities viable in the early twentieth century have also been the cause of their decline as self-contained communities in the current century. Car ownership across all social classes means people do not have to work locally. New railways and motorways have made the cities readily accessible from London, and with the demise of the factories, they have become little more than functional, albeit attractive, commuter suburbs. Nevertheless, there is no pressure from the residents to replace the original semis, which continue to provide comfortable middle class homes.

At the 1901 Garden City Conference at Bournville, Unwin said:

No weak compound of town and country, composed of wandering suburban roads, lined with semi-detached villas, set each in a scrap of garden, will ever deserve the name of Garden City. Acres of such suburbs are only one degree less dreary than miles of cottage rows; they cover an extravagant amount of land while missing most of the advantages which a generous use of land can give (cited in Creese 1966, 326).

Yet economic and political realities compromised this dream, and many new twentieth century suburbs became dreary rather than garden suburbs. However, it was Parker and Unwin’s garden suburb planning concepts, albeit diluted, which provided the blueprint for residential expansion, both public and private. This new town planning regime enabled England to avoid the worst aspects of the nineteenth century byelaw suburban expansion, and a major factor during the twentieth century was the prime role of the semi within that planning regime.

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## 6.0 TWENTIETH CENTURY

### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

Prior to the First World War the middle class and working class suburbs continued to spread, with the garden suburb principles followed to a greater or lesser extent, depending on the quality of the development and whether it was speculative byelaw housing. Prior to 1919 around 90% of the population lived in private rental accommodation with only 10% in owner-occupied dwellings and very small numbers in rented social housing (Cole and Furbey 1994, 28). By 1911 nearly 80% of the population of England and Wales lived in towns and cities (Burnett 1986, 141), real incomes had risen and working hours for many occupations had decreased.

There were several types of suburbs. Upper middle class suburbs had semi-detached villas set in gardens within walking distance of the station, larger detached villas with long driveways a short carriage ride away, smaller cottages by the station for servants and employees, and some rows of shop/dwellings (Oliver et al 1981, 1). Slightly down the social scale were suburbs served by trams and occupied by the middle middle classes such as clerks, with relatively new, small, medium density double cottages and terraces. Further down again were byelaw suburbs of terraces and semis for skilled workers and poorer white-collar workers, located near stations. However, slum areas and substandard housing in the inner city remained a problem for the unskilled labourers who could not afford to move to the suburbs and for whom council housing was not providing an adequate solution. The poor living conditions and their impact on health were highlighted by the large numbers of young men who were found to be unfit for service during the First World War.

It was during the interwar period that working class housing was revolutionised. Before 1914 only 2% of England's dwellings were owned by local authorities. By 1979 when the Thatcher government was elected, one third of the British population lived in public housing (Cole and Furbey 1994, 1). Government intervention provided a new regime of public housing, which drew upon the ideas of the garden suburbs and the model villages. The semi became, for the first time, a dwelling for the urban labouring class as well as for the middle classes. This posed a threat to the status-conscious middle classes, with alarming similarities between the proposed council semis and the suburban semis which made up many of the garden suburbs. Out of the desire to retain a display of social superiority through housing, the middle class interwar semi developed a distinctive style which could immediately differentiate it from a council semi.

This Chapter describes the development of public housing, and how the interwar middle class semi was modified to combat the threat to the prevailing dwelling hierarchy.

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## 6.2 PUBLIC HOUSING

It was not until the introduction of the *Town Planning Act 1909* that the building of new substandard dwellings by speculators could be controlled in England. Back-to-back terraces were forbidden as mandatory building standards were introduced. Yet despite these controls and the increasing importance of the garden suburb movement, the labouring class could not afford the rents for council or private low density housing. Just prior to the First World War the government (advised by Seebohm Rowntree and Raymond Unwin) implemented a policy change that resulted in legislation on minimum wages as a way of making housing more affordable. The low density garden suburb model was then widely adopted after the war for all public housing, on the assumption that the labourers would eventually be able to afford it (Swenarton 1981, 41).

Several plans for state-provided rural labourers' cottages were published by a government committee in 1913. One was an Unwin cottage design from Letchworth and another a design from Unwin and Parker's New Earswick (Swenarton 1981, 43). Unwin's influence in the public housing debate was unmistakable, and continued during the war when he was involved in a housing scheme for munitions workers at Gretna. There he used semis and short terraces, the designs for which included two from New Earswick. However, they were stripped of the decorative flourishes which were characteristic of earlier garden suburbs, to display the trend for the neo-Georgian simplicity of design.

Despite these initiatives, until the end of the war was imminent, government intervention in the English housing market was limited in its scope and was confined to the "poorer classes" (Local Government Board 1919, 3). Although the various Acts had made the provision of public housing possible, it was the post-war housing shortage which made it a priority. Even before the war, speculative builders had dramatically reduced their output following the *Town Planning Act 1909* and the introduction of land tax in 1910.<sup>10</sup> A regime of rent control and security of tenure of rental properties<sup>11</sup> kept rentals artificially low at the lower end of the market both during and after the war, thus ensuring that any new dwellings were targetted at those who could afford higher, uncontrolled rents. The post-war shortage of housing was therefore felt most keenly by the working classes and the government was particularly aware of the plight of returned soldiers and their families, many of whom were being forced back into the slums as a result of the shortage. There was also a growing recognition that, apart from the philanthropic housing of the nineteenth century, there had never been an adequate provision of housing for the poor, and the threat of civil unrest was increasing. In 1917 a government committee was formed, chaired by Sir John Tudor Walters MP, and with Raymond Unwin as a member. Walters was also a Director of Hampstead Garden Suburb. Following extensive consultation, including an assessment of the model villages and garden

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<sup>10</sup> *Finance (1909-10) Act, 1910.*

<sup>11</sup> *Increase of Rent and Mortgage Interest (War Restrictions) Act 1915.*

suburbs of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the committee's report was published in November 1918. The landmark document became known as the Tudor Walters Report and the housing principles it espoused for the working classes were supported enthusiastically by all sides of politics as "insurance" against a revolution (Swenarton 1981). Even the King made a speech suggesting that "if 'unrest' is to be converted into contentment, the provision of good houses may prove to be one of the most potent agents" (*The Times*, 12 April 1919).

The government's aim was to provide "satisfactory dwellings for a working man's family" (Local Government Boards 1918, 8). The Tudor Walters Report estimated that 500,000 cottages were required to address the shortfalls in England, Wales and Scotland, with an additional 100,000 cottages required per year (Local Government Boards 1918, 4).<sup>12</sup> In particular the government hoped to provide "Homes Fit for Heroes", a slogan coined by the Prime Minister Lloyd George. It was thought that the programme would operate until 1927, by which time private enterprise should have resumed its role as the provider of working class housing. The dwellings and their settings were to conform to a new set of principles which were, in effect, Unwin's garden suburb design principles and it has long been assumed that Unwin played a major part in the drafting of the Report. It was no longer acceptable to build to the Victorian byelaw standards. The Report recommended minimum standards of housing, with wider cottage frontages (minimum 20 feet) and no tunnel backs. A two-storey cottage with three bedrooms, one or two living areas, scullery, larder, fuel store, w.c., bath in a separate chamber, a rear garden and no shared facilities, was proposed as the standard dwelling, and the maximum recommended housing density was twelve dwellings per acre in urban areas and eight per acre in rural areas.

The Report also suggested that local councils should oversee the standards of public utility societies, and private enterprise including speculative builders (Local Government Boards 1918, 5).

The principles of the Tudor Walters Report were enshrined in the Local Government Board's *Manual on the Preparation of State-aided Housing Schemes* (1919). However, it was not until the introduction of the *Housing, Town Planning, &c. Act* in July 1919 that the adequate provision of public housing for the working classes by local councils became mandatory, with costs subsidised by the central government as long as the schemes were pre-approved by the Local Government Board. This Act, which became known as the Addison Act (after the then President of the Local Government Board and later Minister for Housing Dr Christopher Addison) also removed the requirement for new council housing to satisfy the previous byelaws and local Acts (Local Government Board 1919, 3).

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<sup>12</sup> The Report avoids the use of "house" in favour of "cottage".

The housing manual provides several examples of how buildings could be located on various types of urban and rural sites. These “model” site plans show arrangements of terraces, some containing up to eight dwellings (although the Report recommended rows of only four or six), with semis used as fillers in places such as at the end of a cul-de-sac. Nowhere in the Tudor Walters Report or the housing manual does it mention a preference for semis but the statement is made that:

There does not generally appear to be any justification for the claim of economy in the construction of tenements or two-storey flats as compared with two-storey cottages (Local Government Board 1919, 29).

The housing manual allows for tenement blocks, two-bedroomed cottages and bungalows only in “special circumstances” (Local Government Board 1919, 29) which are not defined but were most likely sites which did not consist of cheap, plentiful municipal land on the suburban fringes.<sup>13</sup> It also suggests that rural housing should be located within existing villages rather than building houses “in twos or threes on the various farms” (Local Government Board 1919, 5).

Despite this ambiguity surrounding dwelling type in the text of the Report and the housing manual, and the model site plans, the twelve cottage designs provided in the housing manual as a guide for local councils provide a strong hint about the government’s preferred dwelling type. There is one design for a terrace and ten for pairs of semis, including rural semis and two bungalow semi designs (Figures 6.1 to 6.3). The last plan in the manual is a design for a “flatted type” despite the housing manual’s earlier dismissal of that dwelling form.<sup>14</sup> This two-storey block of four cottage flats is remarkably similar in design to Henry Robert’s design for the 1851 Great Exhibition model dwellings, which influenced many later nineteenth century model buildings. The housing manual contained many of Unwin’s previously published and built designs.

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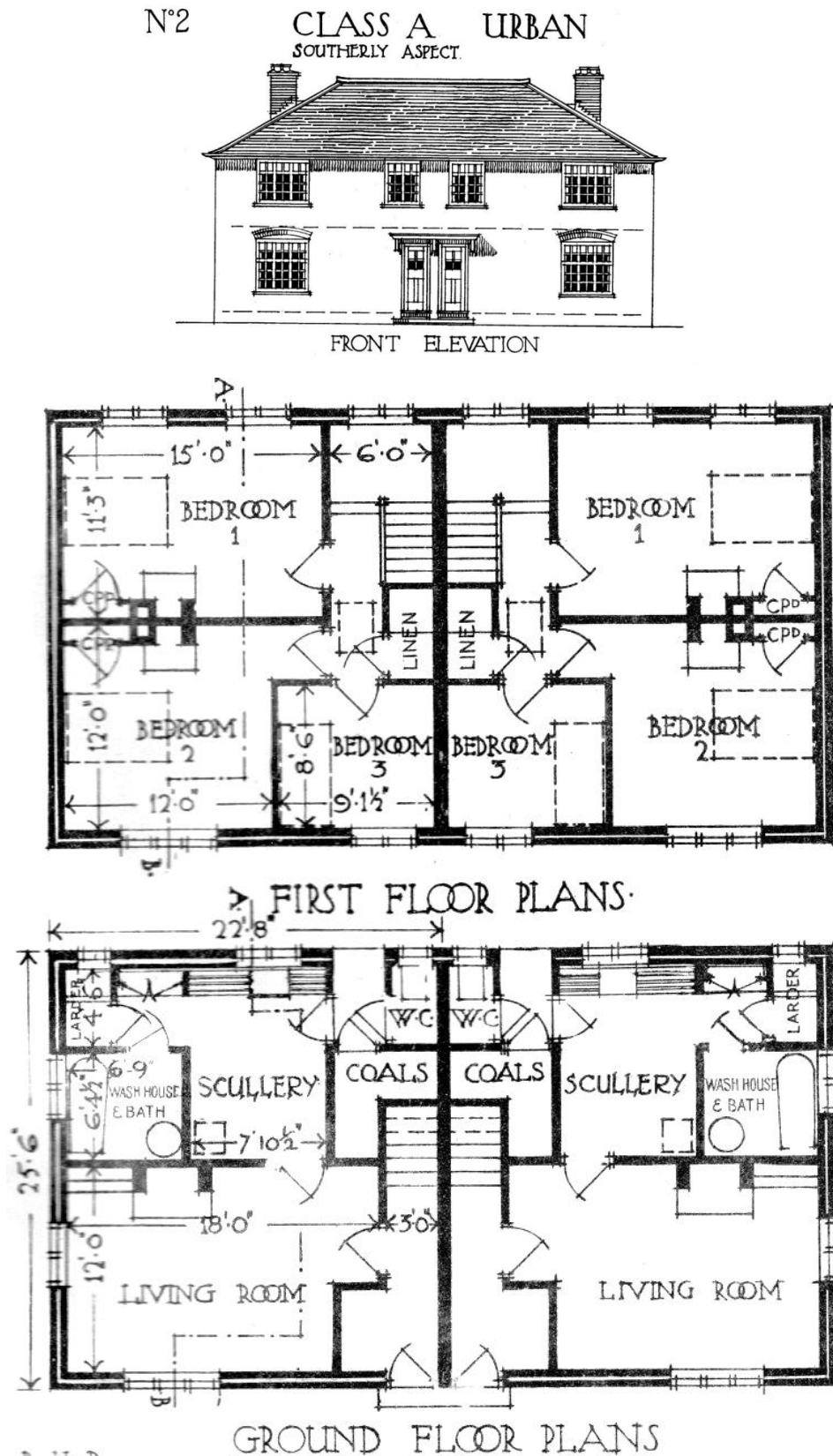
<sup>13</sup> The Report recommended that housing estates be built on the outskirts of towns, with transport in the form of trams and railways.

<sup>14</sup> It was believed that Scottish tenants preferred a dwelling which was on one level.

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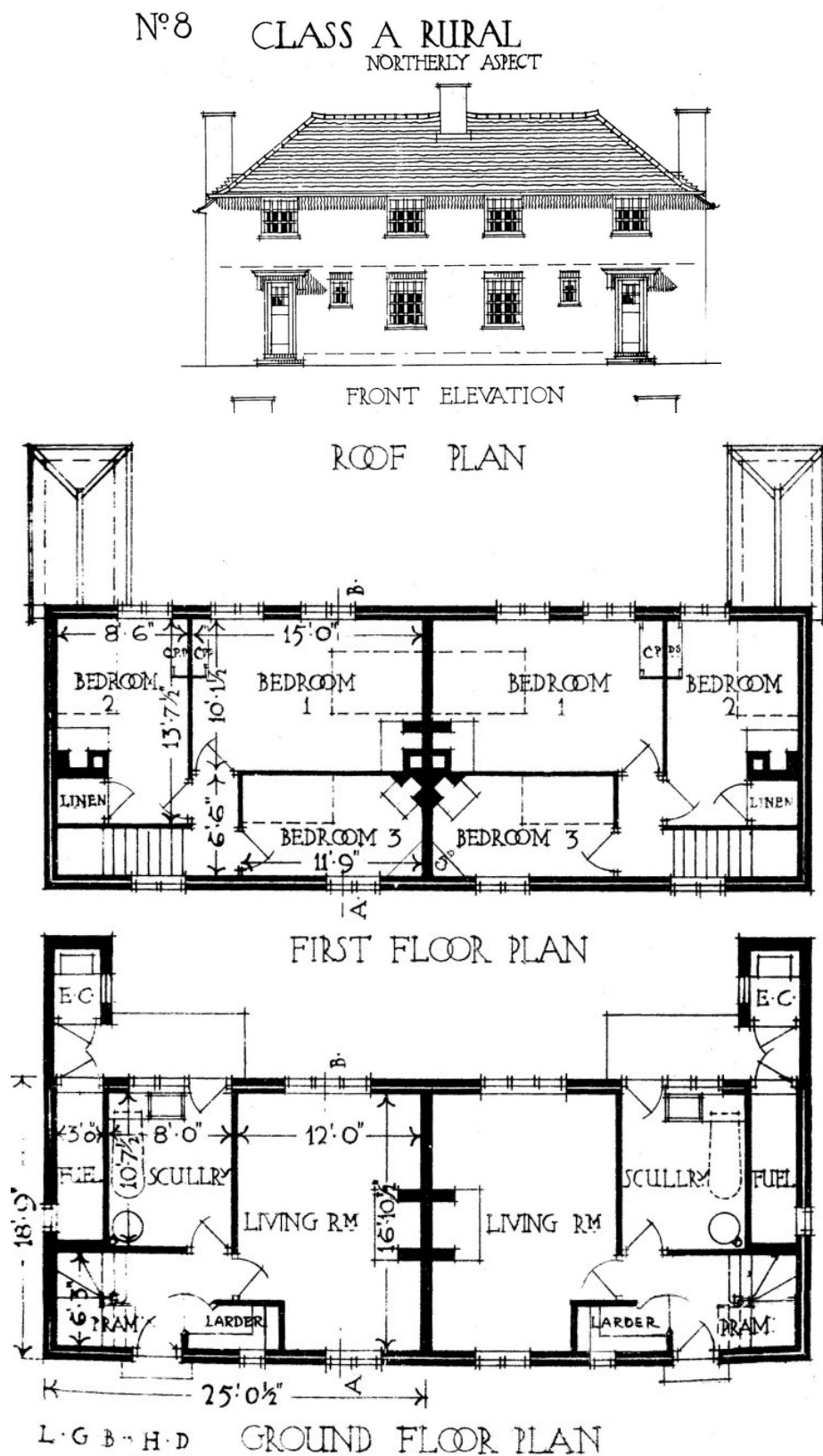


Figure 6-1: Class A3 urban semis with no parlour, 1919



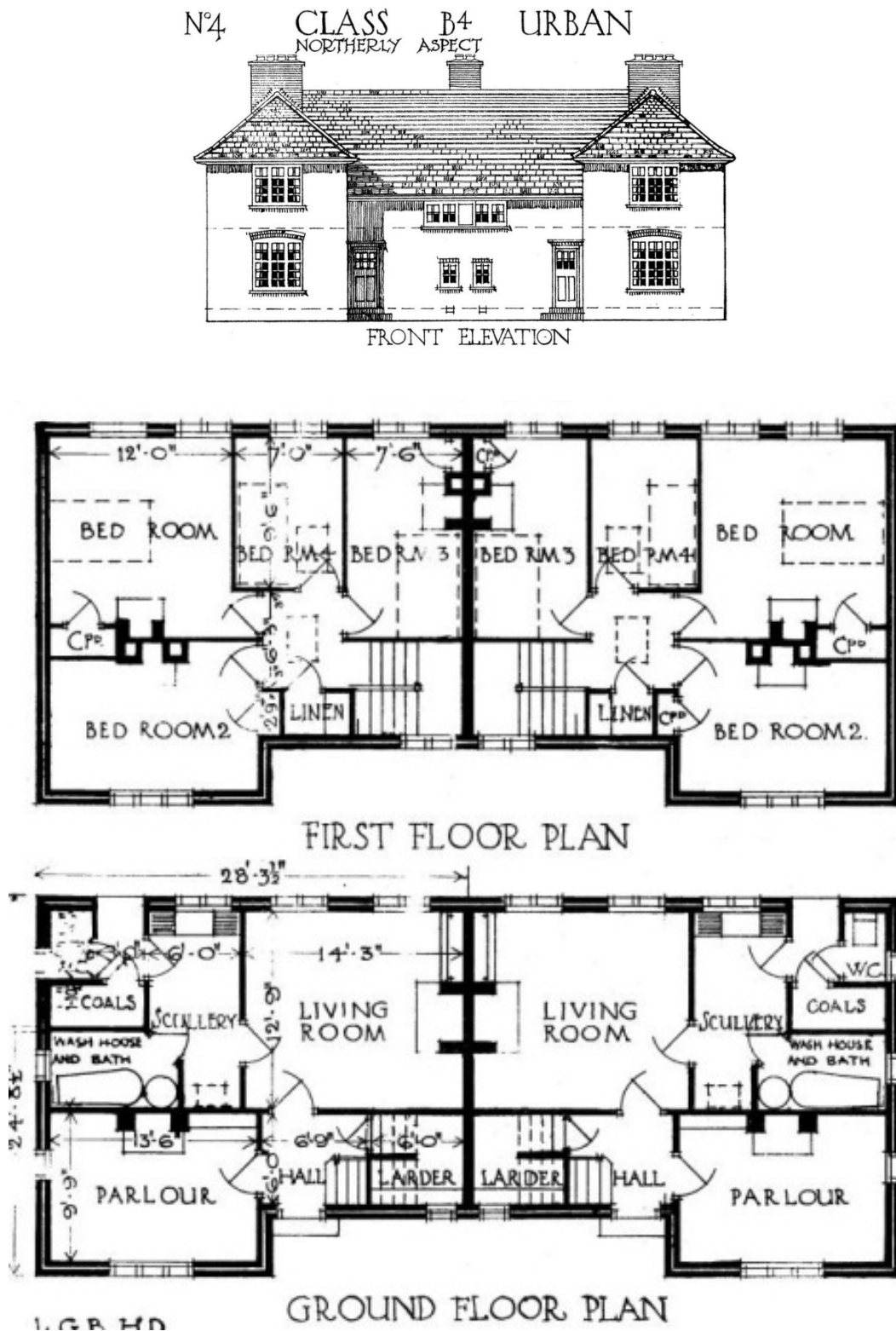
The most common type of design was for Class A3 - three bedrooms (Local Government Board 1919, Design No 2, no page number).

Figure 6-2: Class A rural semis, 1919



Rural semis could have rear extensions for earth closets (Local Government Board 1919, Design No 8, no page number).

Figure 6-3: Class B4 urban semis with parlour, 1919



A B4 cottage design – four bedrooms (Local Government Board 1919, Design No 4, no page number).

Raymond Unwin believed that low cost housing in a garden suburb could be provided by using simple yet elegant designs (no gables) and using mass produced components – and his “simplification and standardisation” ideas were adopted as official policy:

Considerable economy may be practiced advantageously in the external design of cottages, both in regard to their initial construction and with a view to reducing the cost of periodical repairs in the future. Ornament is usually out of place and necessarily costly both in first execution and in upkeep. The best effects can be obtained by good proportion in the mass and in the openings, by careful grouping of the various parts of each cottage, by grouping the cottages themselves, and by well-considered variations in the designs to suit their different positions and the different materials used. In this way the deadly monotony may be avoided which is associated with so many housing schemes, where street after street of houses have been erected of precisely the same pattern in plan and elevation regardless of aspect, position and amenities generally. (Local Government Board 1919, 36)

From the designs presented in the Report and the housing manual, it is clear that the Homes Fit for Heroes programme was squarely targetted at families (mostly three bedroom cottages) of the working classes (simple, cheap, unadorned cottages) - labourers (short terraces), artisans (semis) and aspirational artisans (semis with parlours).

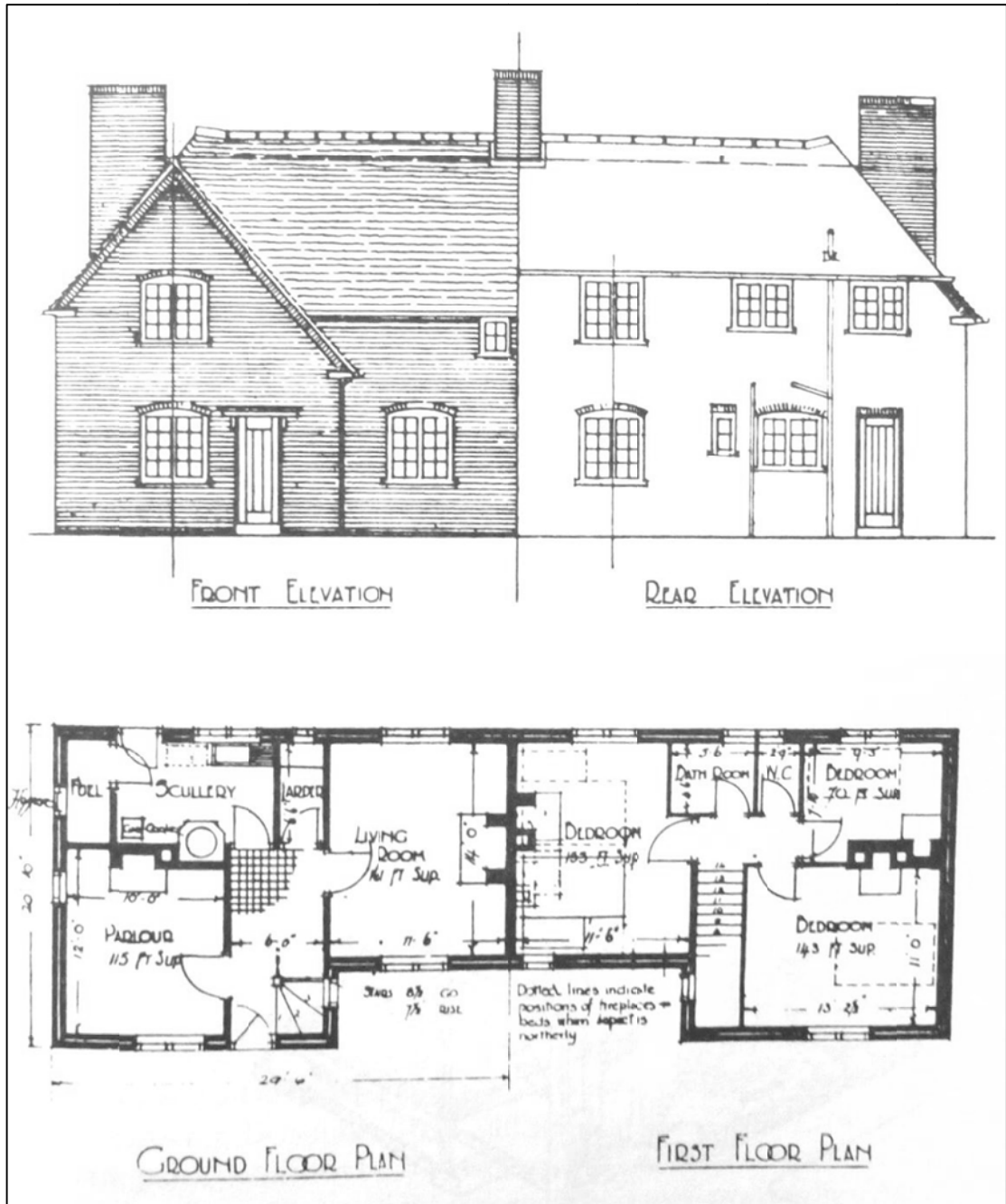
To implement the new regime, the Local Government Board was replaced by a Housing Department in the Ministry of Health. Unwin became the Housing Department's Principal Architect in charge of housing layout (Swenarton 1981, 138). The Tudor Walters Report had warned against “covering large areas with houses all of one kind accommodating tenants all of the same social class” (Burnett 1986, 223) and Unwin's advice to local authorities was to create pleasing streetscapes with a mix of short terraces and semis. This advice was often ignored because:

...the thing that most local authorities desired above all was the ‘semi’; it was the ‘semi’ that fulfilled most popular aspirations and it was not something that local authorities were prepared to give up readily in order to satisfy the notions of the architects at the ministry (Swenarton 1981, 144).

In May 1920, at the same time as the development of Welwyn Garden City was commencing, the Ministry of Health published *Type Plans and Elevations*, in which some of the designs moved away from the unadorned simplicity inherent in those of the earlier housing manual. In order to reduce roof spans where tiles were used instead of scarce slate, L-shaped floor plans and gables (particularly for parlour dwellings) or dormer windows were used for the semi designs (Figures 6.4 and 6.5). In addition, the new designs had slightly smaller room sizes and were expected to be cheaper than those in the housing manual. Architects

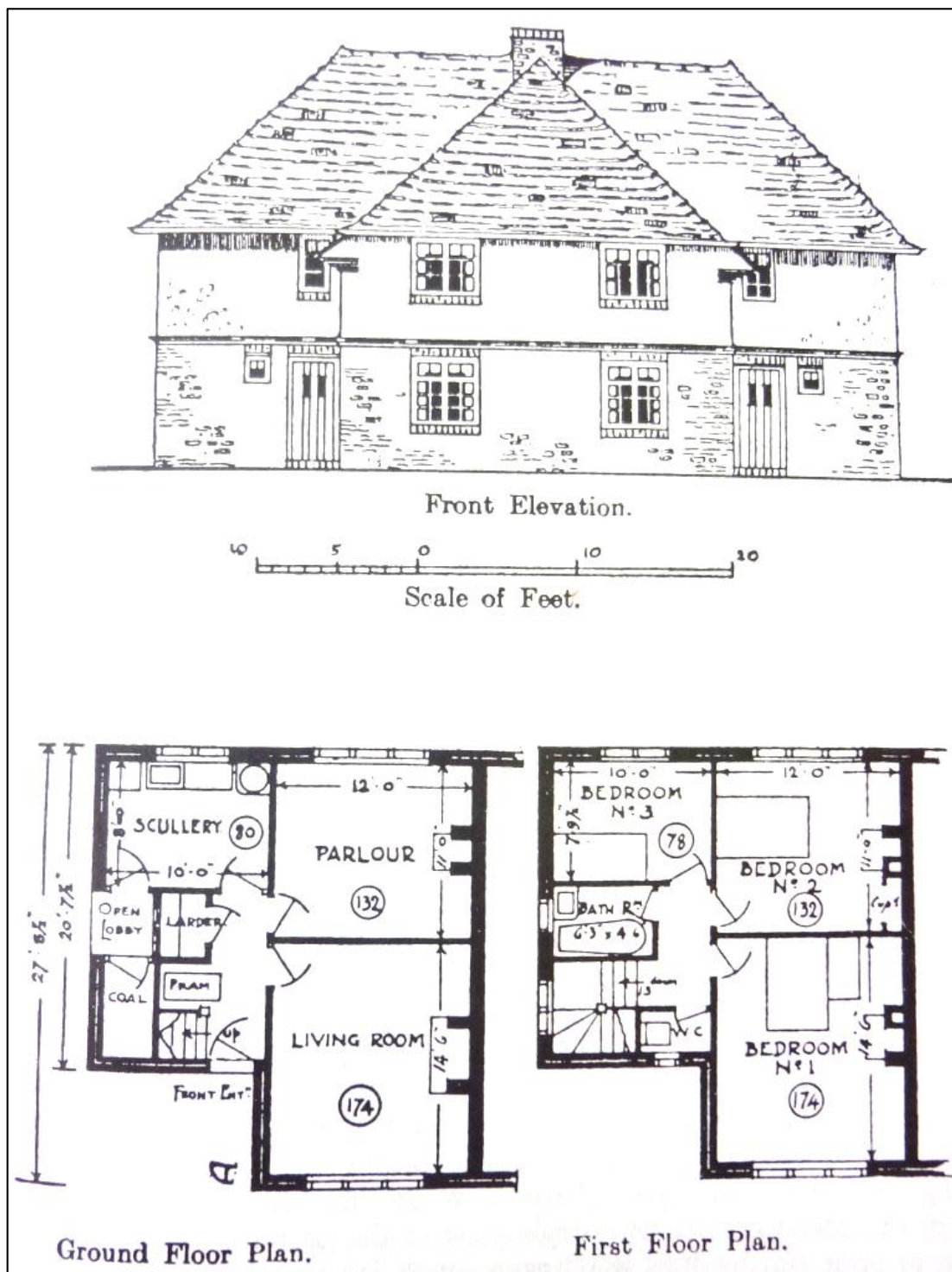
appointed by the Ministry of Health continued to produce cottage designs for use by local councils as the programme progressed.

**Figure 6-4: L-shaped council semi design, 1920**



(Ministry of Health 1920)

Figure 6-5: Three-bedroomed council semi with a parlour, 1920



(Ministry of Health 1920)

The guidelines in the housing manual were supposed to apply to both public and private housing developments and indeed most of the standards were adopted almost universally by both councils and private developers – pairs of semis, built at a density of twelve dwellings

per acre, in estates with cul-de-sacs, became the norm for most interwar suburban expansion, although some council estates included short terraces (four dwellings) in the mix. Rear gardens, accessible from the street, also became universal in both terraced houses (via open archways under the first floor bedrooms of the inner pairs of houses) and semis (with side access).

Approvals for subsidies under the Addison Act ceased in February 1921 when it became clear to the government that the threat of revolution had disappeared plus the scheme was proving to be more expensive than expected. Despite the target of 500,000 cottages plus 100,000 per year, only around 213,000 dwellings were built under the provisions of the Addison Act (UK Parliament nd).

Another amendment to the Housing Act in 1923 resulted in government subsidies for public housing being redirected to the speculative builders within the private sector. Housing prices fell, and with relatively easy access to finance at that time, many lower middle class people were able to realise the dream of owning their own home. With rent controls still in force, owner-occupiers were a lucrative market for the builders. A change in government the following year reinstated subsidies for council housing, but it never again reached the level of importance it had seen immediately after the implementation of the Addison Act.

A council estate near Manchester is considered to be the most representative example of public housing within a garden city design (Miller 2010, 80). The layout of Wythenshawe, eventually comprising around 3,500 acres, was initially designed by Barry Parker.<sup>15</sup> While not technically a garden city, it was separated from Manchester by a green belt and adopted the “twelve dwellings to the acre” standard. Building commenced in 1931 and Parker continued his “search for beauty in the environment” (Creese 1966, 259). A “special provision” was made to include “sites suitable for all purses and all classes of society”, although the higher class private housing did not eventuate. Although Parker was responsible for some semis (for example, Figure 6.6), most of the dwellings were designed by the Manchester city architect. With the “stripped down” form and low costs inherent in council housing, Wythenshawe grew rapidly and fulfilled its charter to provide housing for the working classes, albeit with the later inclusion of large high-rise blocks of flats. This was in stark contrast to the slow development of both Letchworth and Welwyn Garden Cities.

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<sup>15</sup> Raymon Unwin was not involved directly.

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**Figure 6-6: Council semis in Wythenshaw, 1931**



Semis designed by Barry Parker, in a plain style as demanded by Manchester City Council (Creese 1966, 259).

Amended Acts during the 1920s reinstated various subsidies, albeit for smaller dwellings in mostly monotonous estate layouts (Figure 6.7).

**Figure 6-7: Typical interwar council semis**



Chatteris, Cambridgeshire, photographed in 2007. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Councilhousing02.jpg> accessed 26 September 2011).

A new Housing Act in 1930 obliged local councils to instigate five year programmes to clear all the remaining slum areas as well as provide subsidies for rehousing the tenants. This Act, which was the only one of the interwar housing acts to specifically target the poorest segment of the working classes, led to the construction of more than 700,000 council dwellings, bringing to 1.1 million the number of council dwellings built as a result of the interwar housing



Acts (UK Parliament nd). Although after 1933 there was a general move towards the use of five-storey blocks of flats to rehouse slum tenants in cities, a significant proportion of those council dwellings were semis.

### 6.3 SUBURBAN EXPANSION

By the twentieth century many middle class families no longer had servants and were no longer constrained by Victorian formality; therefore they could live comfortably in smaller dwellings. By 1913 around 60 estates containing over 11,000 dwellings had been built in accordance with garden suburb planning principles (Freestone 1989, 26) and other, cheaper estates and developments continued to produce terraced housing and semis. While the suburbs of London saw the greatest suburban expansion, and the greatest numbers of semis, smaller towns and cities also continued to spread. Model villages continued, albeit on a smaller scale, during the twentieth century (Figure 6.8). By then they were exemplifying the garden city principles yet they continued to maintain a dwelling mix of short terraces, semis and detached houses which reflected social status.

**Figure 6-8: Moderne semis in Silver End, 1927-8**



Designed by architect Frederick MacManus to showcase Crittall metal windows, in the interwar Essex model village created to house Francis Crittall's factory workers ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silver\\_End](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silver_End), accessed 6 January 2012).

For the spa and resort towns semis continued to provide an ideal middle class "escape" or retirement home. For example when the public gardens in Harrogate were expanded in 1911, Harlow Moor Drive was created and "laid out with fashionable terraces of tall houses" overlooking the gardens (Landscape Design Associates, 2003). There were also several pairs of large semis along the road, all displaying a pastiche of styles (Figure 6.9).

**Figure 6-9: Semis in Harrogate, c1911****Nos 60 and 61 Harlow Moor Drive (Author 2011)**

The rent controls during and after the First World War impacted upon the ownership of interwar private housing within the suburbs. Where investors might previously have invested directly in real estate, there was no longer an economic return from rental properties. Instead, investors sought better returns in the rapidly-growing building society sector (Barrett and Phillips 1987, 20). As a consequence, building societies had the funds to offer loans, at reasonable rates of interest, to people who aspired to own, rather than rent, a home. Owning rather than renting a home became a status symbol as mortgage finance became widely available.

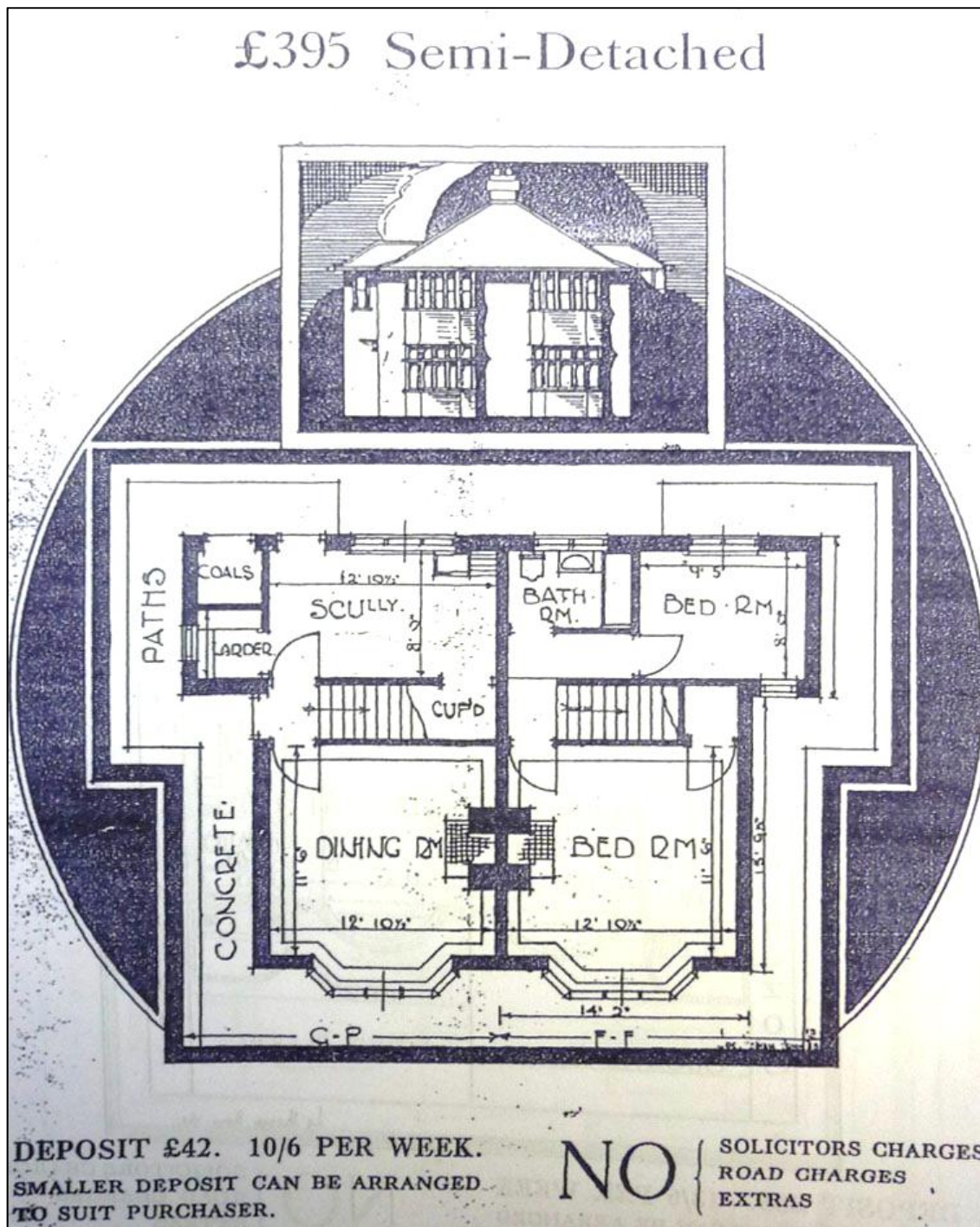
At the same time, the *Housing Act 1923* offered some subsidies and incentives to speculative builders to build new estates. And as Alan Jackson (1991) describes in his book about suburban London, the massive expansion of the tram, railway and underground networks made it possible to live in a suburb and commute to work in the city. Suburbs of semis which were accessible by the London Metropolitan trains were known as Metroland (Figure 6.10).

**Figure 6-10: Interwar semis in Metroland****A street in Pinner (*The Telegraph* 15 July 2009)**

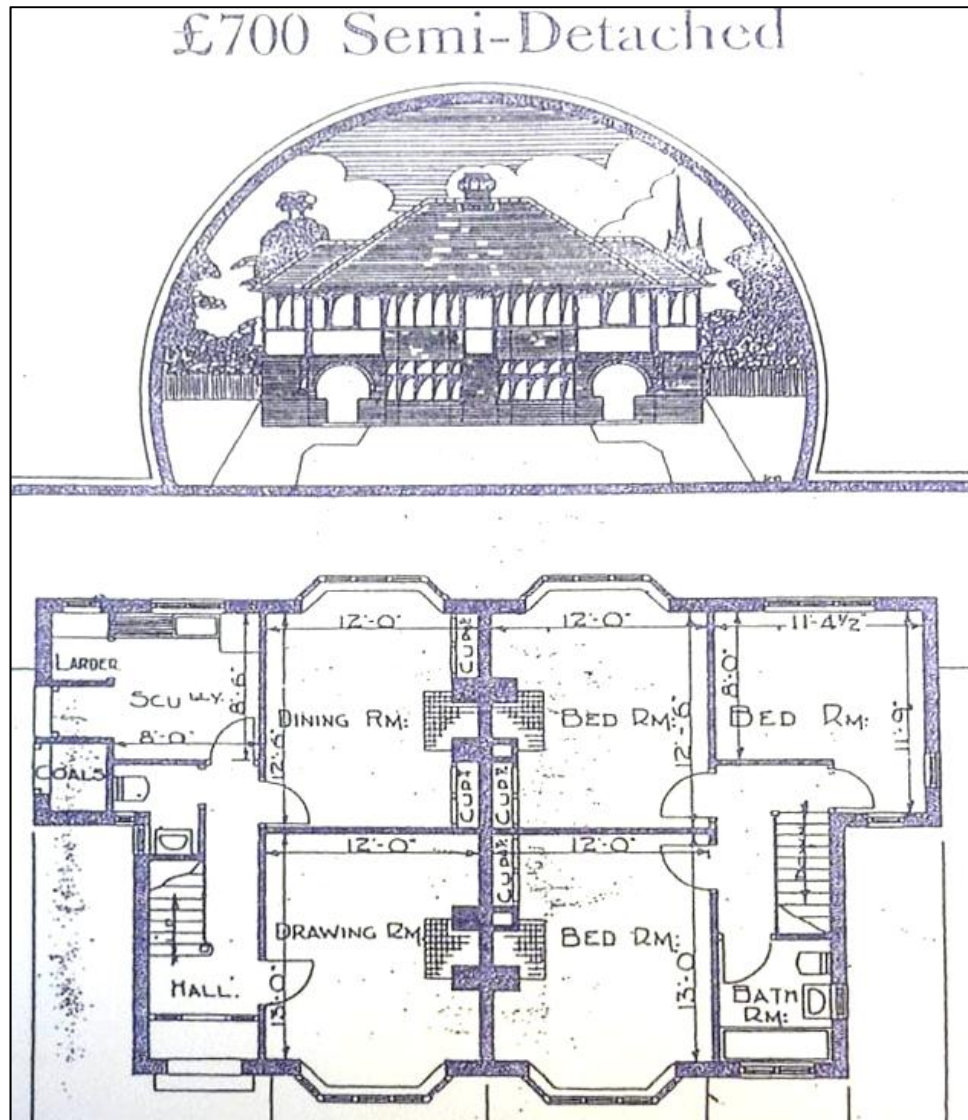
This combination of factors was a catalyst for a building boom which created countless new English interwar suburbs surrounding the cities and towns. Activity reached a peak during the late 1920s and early 1930s, a period when the speculative builders undertook every aspect of suburban estate development, “from the initial purchase and layout of the land, to marketing the houses and encouraging the maximum number of potential buyers” (Barrett and Phillips 1987, 20). Of the four million houses built during the interwar period, almost three quarters were constructed by private builders, with around 400,000 of those attracting a state subsidy (Jensen 2007, 150). Of the 2.9 million privately-built dwellings, 2.5 million were semis (Clapson 2008, 155).

For the developers of an estate, the goal was to fit the maximum number of dwellings into the given area, while still being able to market desirable, affordable cottages in the fresh air and “rural” surroundings of a new suburb. It was the semi, which was cheaper to build than a detached house (and therefore could be purchased with a smaller, more affordable loan) yet still had all the features which were important to the aspirational home owner, which provided the optimal solution (Figures 6.11 and 6.12). Thus the interwar English suburb became synonymous with semis.

Figure 6-11: Speculative semi without a drawing room, 1930s



Burnholme Estate, York (Cann 2008, 22)

**Figure 6-12: Speculative semis with drawing room, 1930s****Burnholme Estate, York (Cann 2008, 24)**

The developers of speculative suburban semis mostly ignored the neo-Georgian and modernist styles being promoted by the architects of the day (see Jensen 2012 for the exceptions) and interwar semis became confections of exterior display. Picturesque and romantic flourishes such as mock Tudor half-timbering, lead-lights, oriel windows, porches, gables, multi-coloured brickwork and hanging tiles all symbolised yearnings to be a rural gentleman (according to Burnett 1986) or “a return to a cosier and more secure age”, and a semi displaying such styles was very attractive to the middle classes (Barrett and Phillips p15). The style was dubbed “Tudorbethan” and the view was held amongst architects and social commentators that these semis were “an infernal amalgam of the least attractive materials and building devices known in the past” (Osbert Lancaster, cited in Barrett and Phillips 1987, 125). However, just as important as the rural connotations was the fact that such highly decorated semis did not look like council housing. For the English:

The main aim of the Victorian in suburbia was to emulate the gentry, and of the Edwardians to reflect an artistic sensibility...the new generation of suburbanites had a more complex set of aspirations. The suburban semi ...had to express a degree of individuality without being too different from its neighbours. Even more importantly, it had to be easily distinguishable from its local-authority counterpart (Barrett and Phillips 1987, 125).

The early Addison Act cottages were in many cases larger and better equipped than many middle class detached dwellings and garden suburb semis. The floor plans and forms of the dwellings in the housing manual were in many cases identical to the plans used in the garden cities and the garden suburbs. Raymond Unwin had designed middle class private semis and had now used those same designs for working class council semis. For class conscious England, this was a serious affront (Figure 6.13).

**Figure 6-13: Council semis and garden suburb semis**



To a casual observer there is no difference between the council semis (top) and the garden suburb semis (below). Both pairs were designed by Raymond Unwin.

The owner occupiers of the private estates demanded dwellings which were clearly not council houses, and further, which would be perceived as superior to council houses. These

groups considered council estates, despite the merits of their dwellings, to be monotonous, and their inhabitants were assumed to be inferior in status, although in reality there was often very little difference in their social backgrounds. The private developers became extremely skilled at creating semis which could not be confused with council semis. While the council semi's façade had the pared down simplicity of the neo-Georgian style, the private semi had bay windows and varying amounts of vernacular or picturesque decoration (Figure 6.14). Sliding sash windows with timber glazing bars were used for council housing so these were avoided on private semis in favour of casement windows. But the differences were cosmetic – the basic floor plans remained almost identical. As Frank Brown observed:

Functional demands seem ultimately to have taken second place to the question of symbolism and external expression: in the final analysis, it was the social message that mattered most (Brown 1990, 274).

**Figure 6-14: Interwar speculative semis**



(Google Images)

Despite the careful external differentiation of interwar council and private housing, tensions and resentments remained if owner occupiers feared that nearby council estates might decrease their property values, or perhaps even worse, that council tenants might stray into their areas. This hostility reached a peak during the 1930s, when one private estate in Oxford erected a wall across two streets, to keep the council tenants out. The wall was not removed until 1959, yet ironically the semis on each type of estate were, excluding the external decorations, essentially the same (Figure 6.15).

**Figure 6-15: The Cutteslowe Wall, Oxford, 1930s**

([www.oxfordcoskaigne.com/cutteslowe/cutteslowewallscon.htm](http://www.oxfordcoskaigne.com/cutteslowe/cutteslowewallscon.htm) accessed 24 April 2011)

The almost universal use of semis which were identical in their floor plans led to them being called “universal semis” or as Paul Oliver *et al* (1981) later named them, “Dunroamins”. The critics’ opinions of the Dunroamins ignored the fact that the universal semi was the culmination of various historical and cultural factors, all coming together to create the definitive English dwelling type. Without decoration it housed the working classes yet with suitable dressing up, the universal semi could also be appreciated and enjoyed by the middle classes.

#### **6.4 THE UNIVERSAL SEMI**

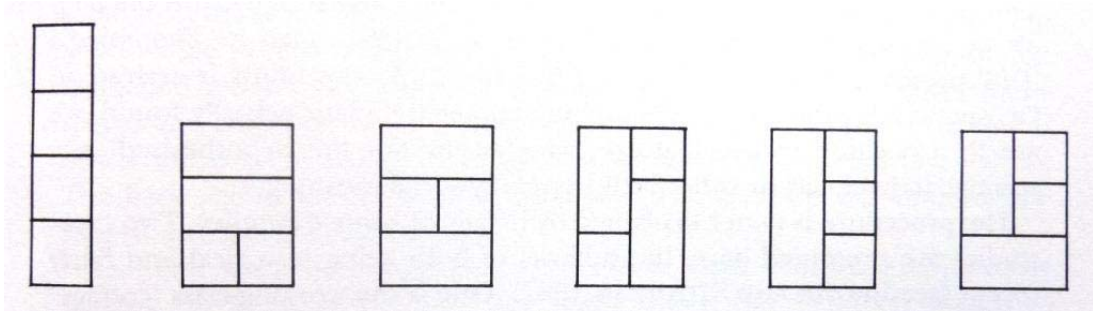
The constraints in the 1919 housing manual were based on what the government (via its agent Raymond Unwin) considered were minimum standards for dwellings. Concerns for public health and the family were reflected in rules for room sizes and connectivity, aspect, and solar access, and politically, a working class housed in accommodation which promoted healthy living was assumed to be less prone to social upheaval. The resulting designs were for “general guidance” and were “not intended to hamper initiative or to prevent full expression being given to local customs and traditions, or the use of local building materials” (Local Government Board 1919, 8).

Frank Brown has analysed the floor plans of interwar English council semis and speculative semis to add to the understanding of how their social and regulatory contexts have impacted upon their design. He uses an approach known as “rectangular dissection”, a form of spatial analysis, in which floor plans are divided into a series of large and small rectangles, each one representing a room, or transitional space. By ignoring differences in dimensions, floor plans can be reduced to a surprisingly small number of variations. For example, all dwellings with



only one room are represented by a single rectangle and all those with two rooms, whatever their size, can be represented by two rectangles. Even with four rooms, there are only six possible representations for the layouts of those rooms (Figure 6.16). Although for dwellings with a large number of rooms this type of analysis is almost impossibly complex, it is ideal for relatively small dwellings such as semis.

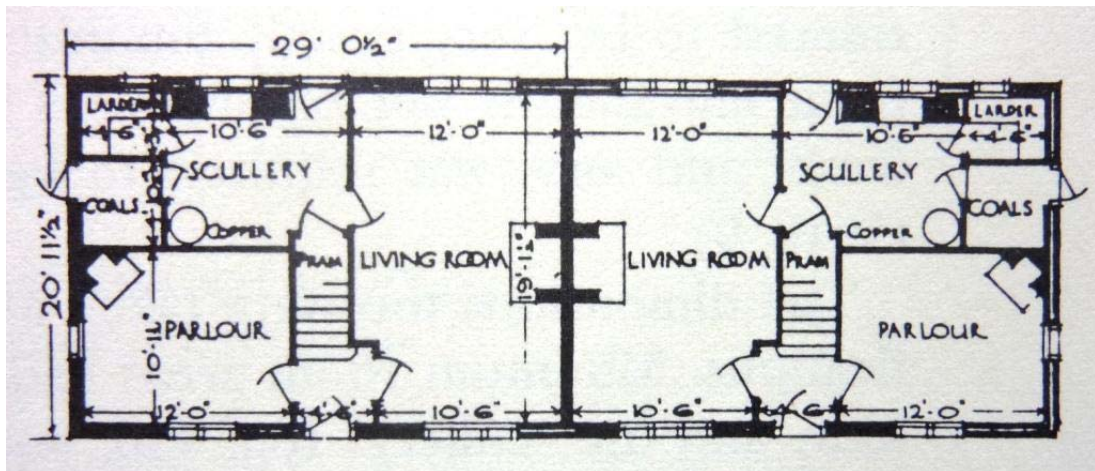
**Figure 6-16: Spatial analysis of four rooms**



**The set of representations of a dwelling with four rooms (Brown 1990, 261)**

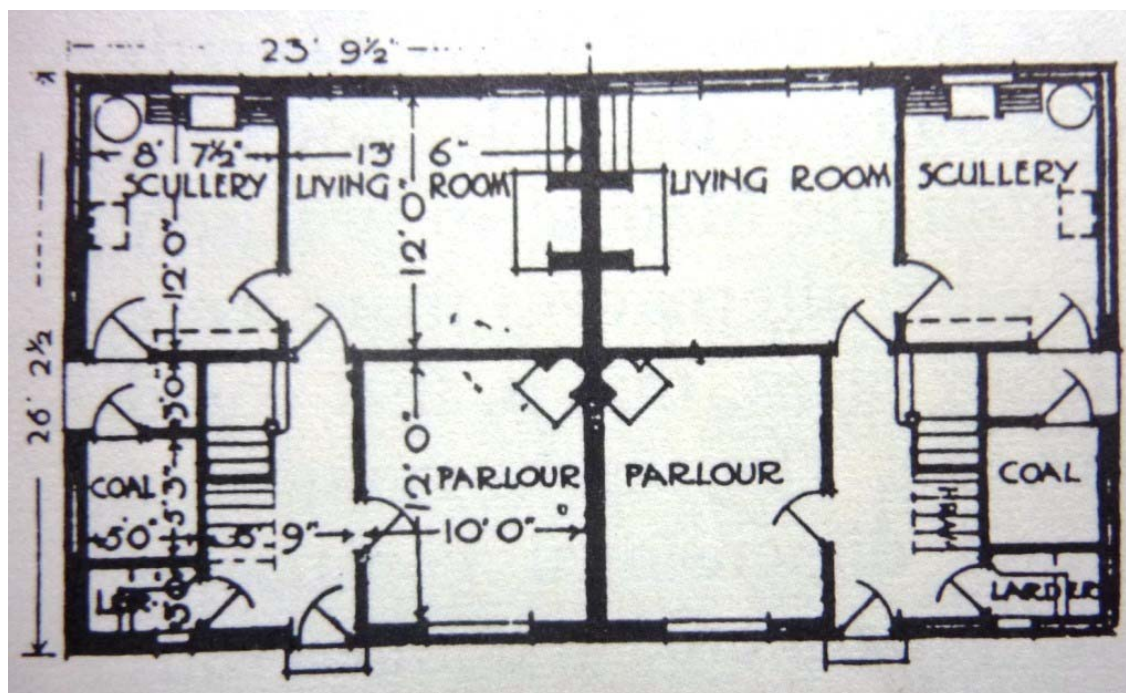
The spatial analysis of six rooms naturally creates many more representations for possible floorplan layouts. Yet remarkably, Brown discovered that by applying the housing manual constraints, there was only one possible floor plan for a south-facing dwelling with a parlour, with six spaces on the ground floor (Figure 6.17).

**Figure 6-17: Floor plan for south facing semis**



**(Local Government Board 1919)**

For a north-facing cottage, again there was only one feasible floor plan after an option which provided access to the larder only from the parlour was discounted (Figure 6.18).

**Figure 6-18: Floor plan for north facing semis**

(Local Government Board 1919)

Despite the housing manual claiming to provide twelve floor plans for the general guidance of builders:

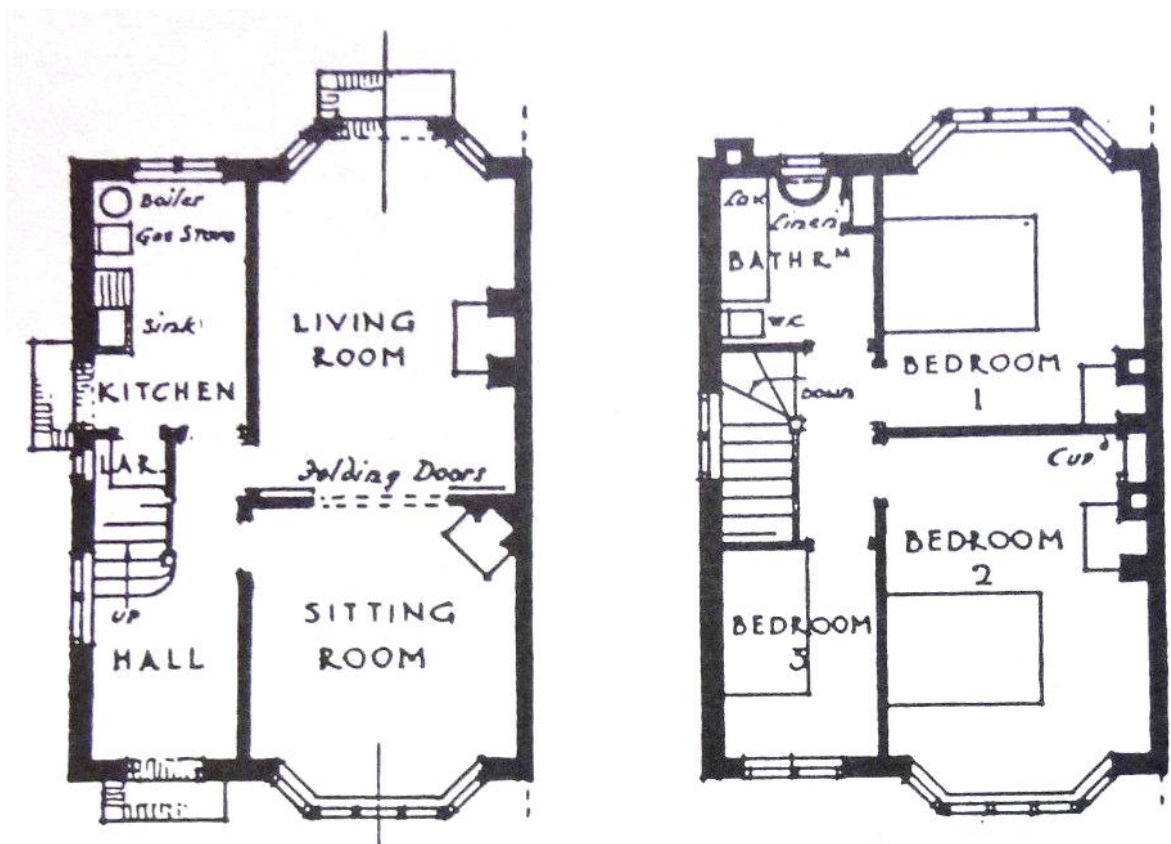
...the choice left open to the designer was in fact so restricted that their injunctions seem ironic. For the south-facing house, at least, the required conditions were clearly so strict that no architect, however inventive, could have found an alternative solution to the one prescribed (Brown 1990, 267).

Brown also analysed the typical interwar speculative semi using rectangular dissection. Despite not being constrained by the housing manual, privately built semis were influenced by the Tudor Walters Report. In common with council housing they mostly had wider frontages than the earlier terraced houses, two storeys and no tunnel backs. However, to achieve the mandated minimum room sizes *and* satisfy all the housing manual constraints, council semis had frontages larger than the required 20 foot minimum. For example the council south-facing parlour semi has a frontage of 29.5 feet. Without the constraints of the housing manual the typical speculative interwar semi had a frontage of around 20 feet. This allowed for a living room to be located behind the parlour, adjacent to a narrow kitchen, creating a narrower but deeper floor plan, and allowing the builder to fit more dwellings along the street frontage.

Unlike the designs of council semis, the floor plans of private semis were not tailored to suit the orientation of the building. Yet although a speculator had economic incentives to repeat the same design in all developments, this does not fully explain why the standardised or “universal” design was so ubiquitous. Brown’s analysis (explained in more detail in Appendix 4) showed that there were just two floor plans which satisfied the requirement for a three-bedroomed semi with a parlour as well as a living room, and that the only difference between them was the position of the entrance door.

In the first of these plans the front entrance and hallway/staircase are situated against the party wall, placing the living rooms and bedrooms at the sides of the building. This provides separation and sound insulation for the bedrooms and living rooms of each dwelling, as well as allowing for side windows to those rooms. It also allows the builder to economise on the shared services and drainage at the rear of the building. The other plan, with the entrance/hallway/staircase at the opposite sides of the building, has less sound insulation, and less flexibility in the arrangement of the upstairs bedrooms and bathroom. The assumption could be made that the builders would favour the former plan. Yet it is the plan with the entrances at each side of the semi-detached building which is seen in the universal semi (Figure 6.19).

**Figure 6-19: Typical floor plan for the universal semi**



(Brown 1990, 269)

An explanation for the widespread adoption of the less efficient plan for the universal semi is found in the social climate of the period. The middle classes wanted to be part of a recognisable street or community, with its associated status, but they also wanted a certain amount of individuality.<sup>16</sup> The builders were aware that anything which differentiated a semi from council semis (decoration), and also had some statement about individuality (each pair with its own prominent bay window) would appeal to their target market. By separating the front gates, front paths and front doors of a pair of semis, illusions of both privacy and individuality were created. Similarly, when the constraints of the housing manual were watered down to reduce the costs, the universal floor plan was also adopted for council semis.

## 6.5 POST SECOND WORLD WAR

In post-war England the semi endured. The universal semi was updated in the 1950s and 1960s with mock Georgian forms, with no bay windows and simple, symmetrical facades. The stark differences between council housing and private housing became blurred, although the speculative developer still managed to use a form of the mock Georgian style to proclaim private ownership. Increasing use was made of short terraces of two or three storeys with small gardens and garages and the middle classes rediscovered terraced houses in the inner city. Terraces were no longer so unfashionable and associated only with the poor. A large terraced house is now usually preferred over a smaller semi or detached house (Burnett 1986, 341). The symbols of status shifted away from the dwelling type, onto moveable objects such as cars and household appliances.

After the Second World War the provision of public housing was again a priority, and there were some similarities to the Homes Fit for Heroes programme. The Dudley Report on the design of post-war housing was published in 1944 and its principles supported by a new Housing Manual. It identified two major problems with the interwar housing – lack of variety and dwellings which were too small for contemporary lifestyles. John Burnett notes that:

It was still assumed in 1944 that the most common building type would be the semi-detached house with three bedrooms to meet the needs of the normal four- or five-person family...Flats received only one page of text in the 1944 Manual (Burnett 1986, 299).

In 1949 the term “working class” was removed from the Housing Act and the theoretical ideal for public housing was classless housing for everyone. However, “mixed development” of varying house types and sizes became the norm for post-war suburban public housing

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<sup>16</sup> The nineteenth century notion that villas had to look like one large building had been replaced by the growing desire for individuality in an owner occupied semi.

estates. Economic pressures during the 1950s led to a reduction in the dwelling standards, an “increased variety of house types and a marked breakaway from the traditional semi-detached” (Burnett 1986, 300). Council estates began to include a higher density mix of terraces, four-storey blocks of maisonettes and blocks of flats. High rise blocks of flats became the alternative model for slum clearances during the 1950s. The semi in a suburb was no longer seen as the solution to the housing shortage, although the government overlooked the fact that tenants from slum areas at least aspired to live in a semi. Few tenants actually aspired to live in a high rise flat, and this lack of consultation was one of the factors which eventually led to the decline of the council high-rise and ironically, its replacement with high density terraces, albeit with modern plumbing and ventilation.

In 1961 a government report *Homes for Today and Tomorrow* (known as the Parker Morris Report) described the social changes which had taken place since 1945. It determined that there had been a “revolution in expectations” (Burnett 1986, 304). Design principles for public housing then became focussed on minimum standards such as space and heating, and the way rooms were used, rather than the type of dwelling itself. The parlour was no longer an indicator of class or status. The Parker Morris standards were abandoned in 1981 when adherence to them became unaffordable.

By then the stereotypical image of a council estate (suburban and high rise) was of antisocial behaviour, dysfunctional families and vice - living in a council house was a step down, rather than a step up. The government halted the construction of council housing in the mid-1970s and in 1977 a new Housing Act shifted the focus of public housing to one of need. In 1980 Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher introduced the “right to buy” scheme, where council tenants could purchase their home at a discounted price. Over a million tenants did so during the 1980s, and many immediately set about individualising the exteriors of their semis by adding the decorative features of the private semis, in an attempt to remove the council stigma. A large proportion of the remaining public housing (renamed social housing) in England is now managed by housing associations. There are current plans to continue to provide council housing to those in need, but only as a temporary solution – all tenancies are to be short term. This may prevent any sense of pride in occupying a council house, or of belonging in a community. Nevertheless there are countless English people who are happy to rent or own a council semi.

## **6.6 CONCLUSIONS**

The interwar semi was a response to the redefinition of the middle class. Where previously that class had been characterised more by lifestyle choices than disposable incomes, nevertheless until the First World War many of its members were wealthy professionals who could afford at least one servant. After 1919 the ranks of white collar workers and lower

ranking professionals swelled enormously, until by 1951 the middle class was estimated as 30% of the population (Burnett 1986, 251). They still believed in suburbia, privacy and the primacy of the home, but could not afford the large houses, large families, servants and public schools of the nineteenth century middle class. Nor did they wish to remain in the terraced housing of their youth. The standardised dwelling – the universal semi – was developed to house a small family with no servants. Decorated appropriately it could provide the illusion of the rustic country cottage. It was also affordable enough to be owned rather than rented, with finance from increasingly sophisticated mortgage products. Even some higher-paid skilled workers could achieve the ownership of a semi.

Suburbs themselves, as well as the dwelling types within them, became indicators of social status. Although some fell far short of the garden suburb ideal, they all offered a way of life which was desired by many. As J M Richards (1973) suggested, even a modest suburban semi provided a “castle on the ground” for a houseproud owner, yet he was scorned by the modern movement for his support of suburbia. Suburbs were mercilessly criticised, especially by architects. Paul Oliver suggests that this was because the speculative builder was able to satisfy the occupants’ “physical, material, emotional and symbolic needs” – they “got it right” without requiring architects (Oliver et al 1981, 203). Allen Clarke wrote “there are dream-builders as well as brick-builders, and dream-builders really lay the foundations for the brick-builder” (Clarke 1923, cited in Oliver et al 1981, 33).

The working classes in their council estates were similarly satisfied, at least initially. Even without the decoration and bay windows, the terraced houses and semis provided a far superior dwelling to the rundown houses and tenements of the inner city or town centre.

In smaller towns and rural areas, lower land and labour costs made the detached house more attainable for the middle classes, although the semi continued to provide a desirable home if it was in the right position. As they had for centuries, rural working class people continued to appreciate their semis.

Even though they remain the subject of criticism, for their irrelevant architectural styles such as mock Tudor, and their part in the out-of-context recreation of rural life, the twentieth century semi derives cultural significance from the associative qualities and symbolism implied by their setting, their decoration and their form. The next chapter considers why an understanding of the historical and social significance of the semi is important for the conservation of English semis.

## 7.0 SEMIS AS HERITAGE

### 7.1 ATTITUDES TOWARDS SEMIS

The evolution of semis is underpinned by a strong theme of social class. However, the class distinctions which so clearly created the hierarchy of dwelling types became blurred by the social mobility which arose after the wars and the cultural revolution of the 1960s. With class apparently no longer such a defining factor in English society, have attitudes towards semis changed?

The rural double cottage, although generally ignored by most commentators, continues to occupy its desirable position in villages across England. The cottage semi provides a home for all classes of society, including the urban upper middle class weekend escapees who delight in their character-laden cottage retreat in the country. However, the addition of the term “suburban” to “semi-detached” has always generated a reaction, from a slight whiff of implied criticism to outright hostility, particularly when contemplated by architects and intellectuals. In 1848 *The Builder* magazine described the suburban “building mania” as “the most melancholy thing in existence” (cited in Barrett and Phillips 1987, 42). John Ruskin lamented in 1878 that the occupants of suburbia were “lodgers in these damp shells of brick, which one cannot say they inhabit, nor call their ‘houses’ ...but packing cases in which they are temporarily stored, for bad use” (cited in Barrett and Phillips 1987, 42). The author of the Greater London Plan of 1944, Patrick Abercrombie said in 1939:

The individual house and the long terrace give way to the semi-detached villa, perhaps the least satisfactory building unit in the world (cited in Oliver et al 1981, 76).

The prominent architectural historian John Summerson was of the opinion that:

The Italianate villa suffered the ultimate humiliation by becoming two houses rather than one (cited in Gallinou 2010, 8).

James Eyre, descended from the founder of St John’s Wood, questions Summerson’s opinion by asking whether it was:

A patrician viewpoint that a building form should be so demeaned or just a swipe, perhaps, at a clever innovation to create the now-stigmatised physical manifestation of a suburban lifestyle – the semi-detached house? (Galinou 2010, 8)

However, it was the interwar explosion of suburban semis which really irked the English critics, particularly the architects who had had very little influence in their development. John

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Betjeman in *Ghastly Good Taste, or, a Depressing Story of the Rise and Fall of English Architecture* (1933) was scathing about both Victorian and twentieth century suburbs. The outpouring of scorn during the 1930s has been detailed by Oliver, Davis and Bentley in *Dunroamin: The Suburban Semi and its Enemies* (1981).

It is curious that none of the English critics over the years has used the attachment of dwellings (whether semis or terraces) in suburbia as a basis for their dislike (except perhaps Ruskin's "Siamese twins" jibe). Jane Grenville outlined the views shared by the town planners Thomas Sharp and Patrick Abercrombie during the 1940s. Both of them looked back on an idealised eighteenth century, where the English town was "pure" and "the most successful creation of its kind in the world" and "the countryside created at the same time was even more successful for its own particular purpose" (cited in Grenville 2007, 453). It was the "neither town nor country" character of the suburbs which both despised, not that the housing was attached. The fact that the inhabitants of said suburbs were (and still are) very happy in that environment was perhaps due to what Grenville describes as "ontological security" (after Anthony Giddens). Whether they had historical roots in the town or the country, the concept of people living in pairs of attached dwellings in a village, or pseudo-village setting, had been evolving since the very century so admired by the critics of suburbia. A deep feeling of familiarity with the suburban semi-detached dwelling type provides a sense of ontological security which no amount of criticism can destroy.

This feeling of security and familiarity may be compared to the twentieth century experiments in re-housing the working classes in high-rise flats. Most attempts have been less than successful, despite the fact that the actual internal amenities of the flat may have been vastly superior to the old housing. For communities and individuals who found ontological security in the old attached terraced housing, a move to a "home in the sky" was a revolution rather than an evolution. For example, the speculative semi embodies the notion of privacy, just as much as the architect-designed mansion set in a secluded large estate. To reach the house a visitor must usually enter a gate, cross a small garden, enter a porch then pass through a front door. Thom Gorst describes these thresholds as "very potent symbols of property and privacy" which were totally lacking in the high-rise developments (Gorst 1995, 57).

Semis continue to provide a dwelling which is not only familiar, but provides some social status. There is a slight illusion of being detached, and a larger house is achievable because of the savings in materials generated by the shared wall. They provide space, light and a garden setting which continue to embody (even if subconsciously) the values of village life. Buying guides on property websites sometimes list the advantages and disadvantages of buying a semi (for example, see Appendix 3).



Older semis tended to be built in suburbs with excellent transport links and this, together with their relatively large sizes, now makes them desirable enough for people to pay significant sums to own one. One UK property website notes that:

Despite their kitsch value though, semi-detached homes command serious clout on the UK housing market. Semi-detached 'villas' in London suburbs are now sold for upwards of two million pounds.

([www.ourproperty.co.uk/guides/buying\\_a\\_semidetached\\_house.html](http://www.ourproperty.co.uk/guides/buying_a_semidetached_house.html) accessed 22 June 2011).

Semis are still being constructed today, albeit in lesser numbers than during their interwar heyday. Some detached houses are being subdivided to meet the demand for semis. Although some recent estate developments provide semis with even less aesthetic appeal than the twentieth century interwar council semis (for example Figure 7.1) the semi clearly continues to offer an affordable way to obtain a relatively spacious new home. As in the past, the speculative builders know how to satisfy their target market.

**Figure 7-1: New semis at Easingwold, York**



**The "show home" of the estate (*The Press*, 14 April 2011, 3)**

But the provision of social housing is once again falling well behind the demand. Tenants purchasing council houses, at discounted prices, do not pay a price high enough to replace the dwelling, even with flats. A semi once again appears to be beyond the reach of the poorest class. Even the current housing development by the Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust at Derwenthorpe in York contains rows of attached houses rather than the semis which made New Earswick so distinctive 100 years ago.

## 7.2 HERITAGE PERCEPTIONS

This Section does not provide a heritage assessment of any English semis, nor will it canvass the theories and academic trends underpinning the contemporary practice of heritage conservation, which are more than adequately covered in books such as John Carman's *Archaeology and Heritage: An introduction* (2002). Rather, it provides some observations about the potential for studies such as this to inform the future conservation of semi-detached dwellings.

Thirty years ago the Secretary of the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England, P J Fowler, in his preface to Lucy Caffyn's book about workers' housing stated that:

The value of studying workers' housing is becoming ever more widely recognised, while the degree of physical threat to which such housing is exposed makes the need to examine and record it increasingly urgent (Fowler in Caffyn 1986).

That survey hoped to show that a joint historical and architectural approach would prove valuable for architects, planners and conservationists.

Peter Guillery suggested that as the vernacular and the polite have always co-existed, we should adopt a "re-radicalised approach to conservation that engages with heritage as everyday social environments rather than simply as art or artefacts" (Guillery 2004, 302).

But has the reality of heritage listed semis matched the hopes of such writers?

Buildings in England are heritage listed if they are of special architectural or historical interest. The English government policy PPS5 defines heritage as:

A building, monument, place, area or landscape positively identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration on planning decisions. They include designated heritage assets (as defined in this PPS) and assets identified by the local planning authority during the process of decision-making or through the plan-making process (including local listing) (Department for Communities and Local Government 2010, 13).

This is very fabric-focused. Conservation is defined as:

The process of maintaining and managing change to a heritage asset in a way that sustains and where appropriate enhances its significance (Department for Communities and Local Government 2010,13).

But to list, and then conserve, one must first identify, then research and assess. The problem is being able to recognise an important example of a semi if it is neither old nor aesthetically appealing. And once listed, it is difficult, if not impossible, to set priorities for ongoing conservation work or adaptive reuse, without knowledge of the historical or social underpinnings of its significance. Even those ordinary buildings which do not reach the thresholds for listing risk being unnecessarily degraded, through demolition, decay or unsympathetic alterations, if there is no understanding of their stories or meanings, and no safeguards are built into the planning guidelines.

All of the listings of English semis sampled for this study contained detailed descriptions of fabric, but negligible historical data. A simple search of English Heritage's National Heritage List online database reveals only four listings for "semi-detached" (Figure 7.2). An advanced search for "semi-detached, domestic, dwellings" provides 1,931 listings which although more encouraging, still seems to be low given that England has over 7 million semis.

Many of the listed English semis seem to be listed because they are part of a recognised historical precinct. For example, Port Sunlight is both a conservation area and has many of its semis individually listed as heritage assets. However, although Mervyn Miller notes that at Port Sunlight "all of the distinctive, architecturally varied cottages are listed" he suggests that "there has so far been no comprehensive listing study of the early garden city period" (Miller 2010, 92). And while individual listings may help to conserve some semis, this study has shown that semis often derive historical and aesthetic significance from their relationship to other buildings or spaces, such as those within emparkment villages. Even the boundaries of conservation areas may disadvantage semis. For example the housing on the "wrong side of the track" on the eastern side of Welwyn Garden City is excluded from the conservation area (Miller 2010, 93).

**Figure 7-2: Grade II English semis on the National Heritage List**

19<sup>th</sup> century cottages in front of old dairy, Guiting Power, Cotswolds. UID: 128730.



1824 Calverley Cottage, Woodford. Part of an emparkment village by Sir John Treveleyan opposite the entrance to Nettlecombe Court. UID: 264805.



18<sup>th</sup> century with 19<sup>th</sup> century shop front, Tarrystone Antiques, Chobham, Surrey. UID: 287140.



Mid 19<sup>th</sup> century Regent Villas. Back-to-back semis associated with Devonshire Hall, University of Leeds. UID: 466229.

(<http://list.english-heritage.org.uk/>)

In the absence of listings, and with little or no understanding of their history or the importance of their form, many semis are rapidly being degraded. Social change tends to generate transformations in buildings, as new living practices and standards emerge. This is particularly noticeable in relatively small, “ordinary” dwellings where owners demand more living space. This has occurred even in suburbs such as Hampstead Garden Suburb where new “superhouses” provide no more than a nod to the character of the conservation area (Miller 2010, 98).

Part of the importance of most pairs of semis arises from the suppression of individuality in favour of a unified composition of the building as a whole. The "individualisation" of such a semi, by making alterations and additions or even just painting it, degrades this significance. The hope for this study is that it will alert both heritage consultants and the owners of semis to the historical and social significance of semis, as well as the architectural aspects which until now have been overlooked.



## 8.0 CONCLUSIONS

The English semi has a rich history, spanning many centuries; it is a direct descendant of its medieval farmhouse precedent. Its story has its roots in social class – the double cottages of the rural labourers and working class artisans, and the double villas of the middle classes, which eventually came together to produce the triumph of the interwar universal semi. From the late eighteenth century this incremental development went through phases including model dwellings, pattern books, model villages, garden cities, garden suburbs and council housing, while England went through a transition from an agrarian base to an industrialised mercantile economy.

The designs of houses cannot be separated from the ideologies and social milieus of their time. For example, through public housing the provision of semis has been an instrument of social policy. Thom Gorst states that:

Buildings ‘speak’ to us. They tell us about the economic and social structures of the times in which they were built. They speak of pride of ownership, of municipal or state power, and of commercial success – all through the subtle use of architectural form and decoration (Gorst 1995, Introduction).

In each historical period, there is a set of values which combine to shape the type and mix of dwellings in the country, the city and the suburbs. These include the values of the architectural establishment, those of the builders and developers, those of the government and those of the intending house purchasers or tenants. As has been shown by this study, the semi’s resilience and ongoing relevance, plus its ability to facilitate improvements in living standards over several centuries have ensured that it has not only played a key role in each period since the middle ages, but became the dominant dwelling type in England.

John Ruskin’s ideal house was “not a compartment of a model lodging house, not the number so and so of Paradise Row but a cottage all of our own, with its little garden, its healthy air, its clean kitchen, parlour and bedrooms” (Unwin 1902, 4). It could be argued that with such a large proportion of the English population living in semis, and the continuing popularity of the semi-detached dwelling type for new housing, this has been achieved beyond Ruskin’s wildest dreams. In particular, although it may appear bland and boring to some, the suburban interwar universal semi has a floor-plan which has been shown analytically to be the most effective solution to the demand for an affordable but comfortable three-bedroom dwelling. It allows for a garden setting and the privacy of only one party wall. Semis should be judged as a dwelling type which, if placed in an appropriate estate environment (such as they were in the early garden suburbs) do not have to be monotonous. The fact that the traditional universal semi is still being built (with only minor modifications) suggests that it

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continues to satisfy a need. The use of semis in the development of Sledmere Estate Village over many years provides an indication of how, with good design and planning, the semi can provide attractive, high quality housing (see Case Study 2).

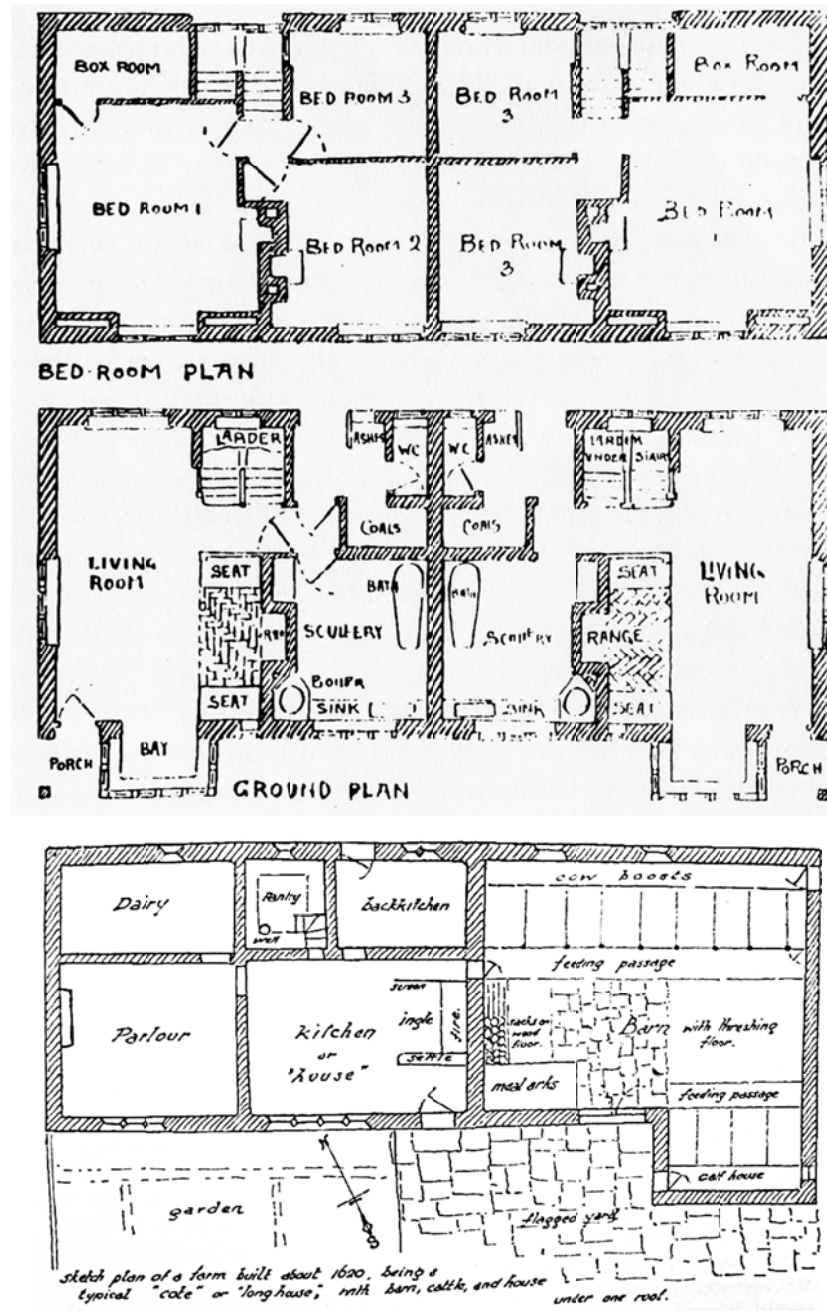
Architects and historians who are apt to dismiss the semi as a substandard product of the speculative builder are overlooking the contribution that many prominent architects made to the evolution of the semi. They were the authors of the highly influential pattern books of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, they designed model dwellings and model villages which were widely copied, they played key roles in the development of garden cities and garden suburbs, and most local councils had architects to design their social housing. It was architects who created the amazingly successful dwelling type. But the ongoing success of the traditional semi-detached form is now seen as a negative by many architects, precisely *because* it is traditional. The Royal Institute of British Architects recently stated that:

The role of architects in designing everyday homes has shifted over the centuries, with them cast as hero or villain at different periods.....But the role of the architect in housing and their interaction with developers is still hotly debated today, with issues of sustainability, housing density and interior space dominating discussion. Unlike other countries in Europe much new housing in Britain remains very traditional in look and form (RIBA 2012).

The key role played by the architect Raymond Unwin, inspired as he was by Ruskin and Morris, must be recognised in the development of the semi. Parker and Unwin's 1903 "cottages near a town" exhibit in Manchester included a suggested solution to the blight of byelaw terraces. It was a pair of semis, the design remarkably similar to the design of a seventeenth century longhouse prior to the conversion of the "animal" side into an attached dwelling, but after the insertion of a ceiling and fireplace into the hall (Figure 8.1).



Figure 8-1: Medieval and twentieth century floor plans



Plan of a semi-detached house (above, Unwin 1903) compared to the plan of a village longhouse (below, Raistrick 1976, 49). Both contain an attached dwelling with living areas (including a large inglenook) at the front, service rooms (including a larder/pantry) to the rear, a bay projection, and bedrooms upstairs.

The similarity was not a coincidence. Parker and Unwin wrote in 1901 that:

Just as in the middle ages the great hall was in the centre of the house, all other chambers clustering round and being subordinate to it; so in the modern middle class house a good living room is the first essential, and all other rooms should be considered in relation to it (Parker and Unwin 1901, 66).

They go on to state:

It is not however with suburbs only that we spoil scenery; in isolated buildings, or groups of buildings, we often put up what is offensive to the lover of the country; and it will I think be both interesting and useful to enquire a little further why the buildings which our forefathers put up mostly adorn a landscape, while our own erections so frequently spoil it (Parker and Unwin 1901, 84).

Semis should be looked at without an overly judgemental eye; one must look beyond fabric. They have stories to tell about economic and social change, fashion, government legislation, new technologies and most of all, about how people lived. The semi reflects the cultures it was built for. In addition, Peter Guillery is of the opinion that:

Houses have their own significance, but they also cast more familiar buildings in new lights, drawing out the interdependence of high and low cultures, of the vernacular and the polite (Guillery 2004, 5).

As with all dwellings, older semis must be adapted to meet contemporary lifestyle expectations. Some are already protected by heritage designation, but even without listing, if/when semis are valued for their historic and social qualities, they will be conserved. Sensitive adaptation and conservation will add to their economic value, making them an appreciating asset. As Miller (2010, 95) notes – “character and authenticity are now cherished saleable commodities in the housing market”.

Matthew Johnson concludes his study of English houses by saying:

The houses found in the English landscape do not just form part of a pretty picture: they tell a story. It is the story of transformation; of change and transition; of material ‘improvement’; of the clash between different systems of economic, social and cultural values; of the development of different kinds of cultures of building; and a story of the growing articulation of households and local communities within wider structures and processes, processes that spread out across, and integrated, different elements not just of the English and British nation but of the Atlantic world beyond (Johnson 2010, 197).

The semis of England are an important part of that story.

## APPENDICES

1. Case Studies
2. Statistics
3. Buying a semi-detached house
4. Spatial Analysis of Private Interwar Semis
5. Definitions and Terminology



## APPENDIX 1 - CASE STUDIES

### CASE STUDY 1: TANG HALL COUNCIL ESTATE

In 1910 York City Council undertook its first council housing development - Alma Grove in Fishergate - which housed council tram workers in terraces (York Open Planning Forum nd). Negotiations to purchase a large area on the fringes of the city commenced in 1914, but the sale was not settled until after the war, in early 1919 (*York Gazette*, 8 February 1919, 6). The newspaper reports the Council's view that there was "a good case for providing houses, even at the cost of rates, particularly for returned soldiers and their families, and for old-age pensioners and others". Although the possible subsidies from the government under the proposed Addison Act were still uncertain, the Council voted to proceed with the scheme. Oscar Rowntree, a Councillor at the time, appears to have played an important role in this decision.

York's Medical Officer of Health proposed two types of housing for the new estate – "cheap cottages" (without parlours) for the people displaced by the slum clearances at Walmgate and Hungate and "larger houses for the more affluent sectors of the working class" (with parlours) (Swenarton 1981, 178). It was estimated that 1,250 dwellings would be required, 950 of which were to be built by the council. The priority was meeting the housing shortage, not slum clearance, resulting in over 60% of the 185 dwellings in the first contract for the Tang Hall Estate being parlour houses.

The first Tang Hall cottages to be funded under the Addison Act were in terraces of four dwellings. Preference was given to returned servicemen and their families when allocating them to tenants. By mid-1921, with funding under the Act being curtailed, further approval was given only for basic dwellings which would "fill up vacant sites between houses already erected" at Tang Hall (Swenarton 1981, 182). This saw the completion in 1922-23 of 32 additional dwellings – pairs of parlour semis (Figure A.1) and non-parlour terraces of three dwellings.

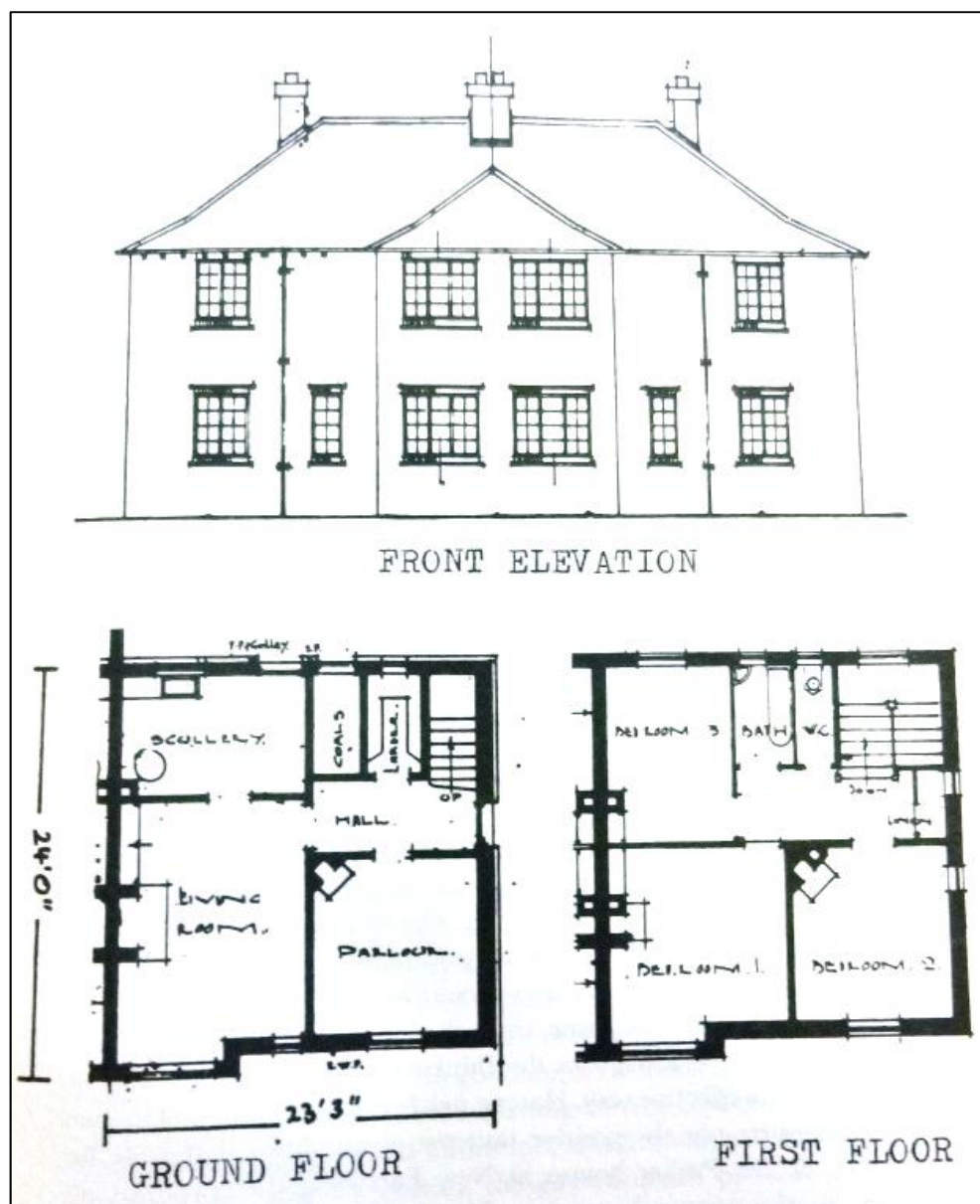
**Figure A-1: Council housing on the Tang Hall Estate, 1920**



**Non-parlour 1920 terraces (right) and the "infill" parlour semis (left) built in 1922 (Swenarton 1981, 183).**

When further funding under the Addison Act was refused for York, the council instead obtained its loans using the provisions of the *Housing Act 1890*. This allowed more freedom in the form of the buildings (for example a gabled front projection, Figure A.2), but the floor plans were still based on the Ministry of Health designs.

**Figure A-2: Semis on the Tang Hall Estate, 1923**



**Tang Hall parlour semis built under the *Housing Act 1890* (Swenarton 1981, 185).**

Between 1920 and 1939 York City Council built 4,790 dwellings, which was more than was built by private enterprise during the period. In 1939 3.9% of the working class population of York lived in semis, both council and private (Rowntree 1941, 224-6). Despite the City Council having within its boundary the acclaimed garden village of New Earswick on which to base its estate planning, and access to Unwin's 1909 book *Town Planning in Practice*, York

decided against using the services of a specialist architect for the site layout and the cottage designs. Instead it was the City Engineer and an in-house architect who designed the estate. Seebohm Rowntree called the estate “second class” and some of the designs “quite frankly ugly” (Rowntree 1941, 232). He criticised the inefficient and boring estate layout and despite Unwin’s recommendations in the Tudor Walters Report, the layout and design paid no regard to aspect. An aerial photograph of the estate certainly confirms its lack of imagination (Figure A.3).

**Figure A-3: Aerial view of the Tang Hall Estate, 1956**



**Rows of identical short terraces, with infill semis acting as “bookends” on the curved avenues (York Local Studies Library).**

London and several other cities adopted the policy of “mixed development” on their new estates. Rather than have an area housing only working class tenants (opposed by London’s Housing Committee on “social and political grounds” (cited in Swenarton 1981, 164)), part of an estate was leased to private developers for middle class housing. York took the approach of building and selling some middle class dwellings (semis with bay windows) themselves.<sup>17</sup> Of the 260 cottages built with subsidies under the Addison Act, 129 were sold to private purchasers (Cann 2008, 16). In 1924 York received subsidies under the new 1924 Housing Act for 65 terraces of four cottages and 20 pairs of semis (Cann 2008, 6).

In 1982 Fr Armand Carré recalled the development of the Tang Hall Estate:

A new world was taking shape between Tang Hall and Melrosegate. People rushed to rent houses provided by the Council. It was rewarding to leave the slums of

<sup>17</sup> For example, the semis at 1 – 38 Fifth Avenue were sold freehold.

Walmgate and to enjoy dwelling in the countryside, on Tang Hall, a land of freedom between the becks.

Alison Sinclair writes that:

Such was the excitement amongst the families who would move there that the children would run along Lawrence Street to Tang Hall to see how their new houses were coming along. To them the new houses were dreams coming true (Sinclair 2004, 15).

Whatever the future held for the new council suburb, for the tenants in their new semis (and terraces) that dream had never before been extended to the urban working classes.



**CASE STUDY 2: SLEDMERE VILLAGE**

From their beginnings as rural double cottages, semis have proved to be remarkably resilient to changes in social conditions, living standards, technology, building materials and fashion. As a designed estate village, Sledmere provides an example of how a planned village evolved from enclosure to “council” housing, and the ongoing role of semis in that evolution.

Sledmere village developed as a medieval agricultural centre and market, with the land held by several individuals. In the second quarter of the eighteenth century a Hull merchant acquired most of the village. His heir and nephew Richard Sykes then purchased the remainder. Part of the village, which had grown organically with a typical mix of medieval dwellings, was demolished in 1750 by Sykes to provide a park setting for his new mansion, Sledmere House. Sykes' nephew Sir Christopher Sykes in 1776 obtained an Act of Parliament for the enclosure of the Sledmere Estate (East Riding of Yorkshire Council 2009, 6).

Following the enclosure Sir Christopher then worked with landscape designer Capability Brown to transform Sledmere House and its surroundings. In the late 1770s the rest of the old village, with the exception of the picturesque church, was demolished to make way for the grand vision. Initially there was no replacement village – farm labourers lived some distance away and at least one displaced villager emigrated to the colonies. Some dwellings, a school and an inn were built during the 1780s but it was not until Sir Tatton Sykes II inherited the estate in 1863 that the village was fully developed, together with a major redevelopment of Sledmere House. By 1911 the village had reached its peak population of 559; however the estate remains in the Sykes family who have continued to build dwellings within the village (Burton Constable Foundation 2007, 20).

The village contains a hierarchy of dwelling types - detached housing (for staff such as the head forester), semis (for mid-level staff) and terraces (for staff such as the house gardeners). All the late Victorian dwellings were of good quality and designed by architects because Sir Tatton Sykes II believed that:

At a time of agricultural depression and rural decline (there was) a need to attract the best staff and provide them with up-to-date buildings in which to live and work (Burton Constable Foundation 2007, 26).

In Croome Road there are two pairs of gabled, three bedroomed cottages, built in 1876-8, and designed by architect John Birch (Figure A.4). The designs came from Birch's pattern book *Country Architecture* (1874). In 1864 he had won a prize from the Royal Society of Arts for that design (Burton Constable Foundation 2007, 28).

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**Figure A-4: Sledmere semis, 1876-8.**



(Author 2011)

Also in Croome Road there are two pairs of undated semis<sup>18</sup> (Figures A.5 and A.6), a pair of 1909 Arts and Crafts semis, designed by the estate architect Ernest Collett (Figure A.7) and a pair of almshouses (1924-5) (Figure A.8).

**Figure A-5: Sledmere semis**



(Author 2011)

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<sup>18</sup> The guidebook gives no details about these buildings.

**Figure A-6: Sledmere semis**



**(Author 2011)**

**Figure A-7: Sledmere semis, 1909.**



**(Author 2011)**

**Figure A-8: Semi-detached almshouses, Sledmere, 1924-5.**



(Author 2011)

Along the main road are two pairs of semis designed by Ernest Collett and built in 1910 and 1915 (Figure A.9).

**Figure A-9: Sledmere semis, 1910, 1915.**



(Author 2011)

In 1945 there was a proposal by Driffield Rural District Council to build 10 council houses at Sledmere. Instead, Sir Richard Sykes gained permission to build his own workmen's cottages, so that he could retain control (Burton Constable Foundation 2007, 33). The result was Castlegate Green (1946), a group of 12 dwellings and a shop, in semis and a short terrace, surrounding a grassed square (Figure A.10). They were designed by Jack Gold, who used bricks from a demolished part of Sledmere House. The layout closely resembles that of Unwin's early twentieth century grouped buildings.

**Figure A-10: Castlegate Green Sledmere, 1946.**



**(Author 2011)**

It is clear that as Sledmere village was developed, semis provided a solution to the needs of the estate to house its workers, although some detached houses and two terraces were built during the heyday of the village. The semis are of varying designs and styles, reflecting the architectural fashions of their day. They are architect-designed, built of quality materials and are sited thoughtfully within the streetscapes. The criticisms commonly levelled at semis most certainly do not apply at Sledmere – its variety of semis adds immeasurably to the charm of the village.

Sledmere village is a conservation area, in which there are 36 Grade II listed buildings (Sledmere House is Grade I). There is one listed terrace building - the 1786 terrace of four dwellings for the gardeners. There are no listed semis.



**APPENDIX 2 - STATISTICS****Table 1 – English Dwelling Types**

<b>Dwelling Type</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Number ('000)</b>
End terrace	10	
Mid terrace	19	
Semi-detached	27	
Detached	17	
Bungalow	9	
Converted Flat	4	
Purpose-built Flat	14	
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>22,398</b>

(Department for Communities and Local Government, *Housing and Planning Statistics 2010*, Page 4)

**Table 2 – English Semi-detached Houses by Location**

<b>Location</b>	<b>Number ('000)</b>
City centre	782
Other urban centre	3,943
Suburban residential	13,710
Rural residential	2,402
Village centre	876
Rural	673

(Department for Communities and Local Government, *English Housing Survey: Headline Report 2010-11*, Table 12, Page 30)

**Table 3 – English Semi-detached Houses by Tenure**

<b>Tenure Type</b>	<b>Semis as a percentage of tenure type</b>
Owner/occupier	31
Private rental	16
Local Authority	17
Housing Association	19

(Department for Communities and Local Government, *English Housing Survey: Headline Report 2010-11*, Annex Table 7, Page 53)





### **APPENDIX 3 - BUYING A SEMI-DETACHED HOUSE**

([http://www.ourproperty.co.uk/guides/buying\\_a\\_semidetached\\_house.html](http://www.ourproperty.co.uk/guides/buying_a_semidetached_house.html)  
accessed 30 March 2012)

#### **Advantages**

Naturally, as semis vary so much in style, location and quality, it is difficult to pin down 'advantages' that apply to all. Nonetheless, the popularity of semis amongst British homeowners is in part down to the following factors.

- Buying a semi-detached house compares favourably with buying a detached house in terms of finance: you will pay more if your house does not share any of its walls, even if the neighbour only lives a few feet away.
- UK semis typically have a driveway or garage and sizeable garden, where terraced houses have to make do with yards and on-street parking.
- Noise pollution from neighbours is a lesser problem in semi-detached homes than in terraced homes.
- Semis often feel as if they occupy the relative privacy of a rural location...
- ...while preserving a certain social aspect of urban living, and avoiding the potentially isolated feel of a rural home.

#### **Disadvantages**

- Close proximity to your neighbours can be a problem for some. Not only will they be effectively in the next room but they will also, unless your garden fence is particularly high, be looking into your garden on a regular basis. The importance of a good relationship with those who occupy the other side of your semi cannot be overestimated.
- The advantages of a semi-detached home can also be disadvantages: suburban semis are characterised by a close relationship with your neighbour, as well as the high population density and relative lack of privacy of the city...

- ...yet remain some distance from a town centre, which can be a problem for workers or those who wish to live in a cosmopolitan environment.

### **What to look for**

- If you can, make a point of asking about, or even meeting, the neighbours.
- The advantage of a sizeable garden can be great even for those who are not keen gardeners. A large but badly-kept garden can offer an opportunity to raise the value of the property with very little effort. A little 'restructuring' of the garden can be extremely cheap, while an attempt to improve the value of a home by carrying out internal improvement or restructuring can be expensive – and stressful.
- Semis which used to be council-houses may not be particularly attractive, but they may be available to buy for very reasonable prices in terms of size and location.

### **What to avoid**

- Because semi-detached houses were originally developed as cheap housing schemes, it is important for the buyer to be on their guard against less-than-perfect workmanship. Within the massively-inflated UK housing market, buying a semi can constitute a canny investment- or it can be a disastrously pricey mistake.
- Meticulous attention to the surveyor's report is vital as some of the semi-detached homes built during the post-war period were cheaply built and now the cracks are starting to show – sometimes literally. Small problems should all be investigated and quotes for repair or modification of the property should be obtained before the sale goes through.
- It may be worth paying for the fullest type of survey possible, a Full Building Survey, which takes several hours and will ensure all aspects of the structure are scrutinised. Registered surveyors can be found online through the [Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors](#).

- Houses with thin dividing walls are something to look out for, as close proximity to neighbours means they will probably cause headaches, unless you always wanted to live on a commune.
- In the same way, if the neighbours seem noisy or difficult in any way, it's probably not worth tying up your capital in living next to them. Even if you're buying to let, responsibility for problems with the neighbours effectively rests with the landlord.

### **The buying process**

- One of the advantages of semis is that they are not unique – most are built as part of multiple-build schemes, and because of this, you can often feel safe about the relative value of your home by checking out the conditions and sale prices of similar – or even identical – homes.
- The Land Registry Residential Property Price Report, issued quarterly free of charge, provides information on average house prices, including county-by-county prices for semi-detached houses. The information is drawn from the large governmental database which keeps track of residential housing transactions. You can access the report and further information online on the [Land Registry website](#).
- Make sure your lawyer is thorough. Your lawyer is responsible not only to you but also to the seller and agent to ensure the contract is as it should be. If you can trust your lawyer, this will make the buying process a lot less risky and a lot more comfortable.
- Council and private multiple-build schemes mean that some – though by no means most – semi-detached homes are bought under leasehold conditions. This means that in effect you are purchasing the rent for the house and the land it is built on for a very long time – any number of years from 10 to 999. You may be leasing the house off your neighbour or off a governmental body rather than owning it 'freehold'.
- With leasehold properties, it is important to ensure you are familiar with all the terms and conditions of the 'tenancy'. Again, your lawyer is responsible for ensuring that everything is in order and that you understand all of the clauses.

- Mortgages are often confusing, to the first-time buyer in particular. Again, the variation in semi-detached homes and the circumstances of those buying semi-detached homes means it is impossible to make generalisations about mortgages on semi-detached properties.

However, as semis are so common in the UK and Ireland, there is a wealth of well-informed advice at hand which can be tailored to your conditions as the buyer of a particular semi-detached home. Fair advice should be obtainable from your bank, and there are a number of charities and websites offering unbiased advice to the novice. This government [website](#) gives basic guides to buying a home and has links to other websites.

- Finally, ask around for advice – friends, family and neighbours can be the most helpful resources when looking to buy a certain type of property. After all, almost everyone knows someone who lives in a semi-detached house.

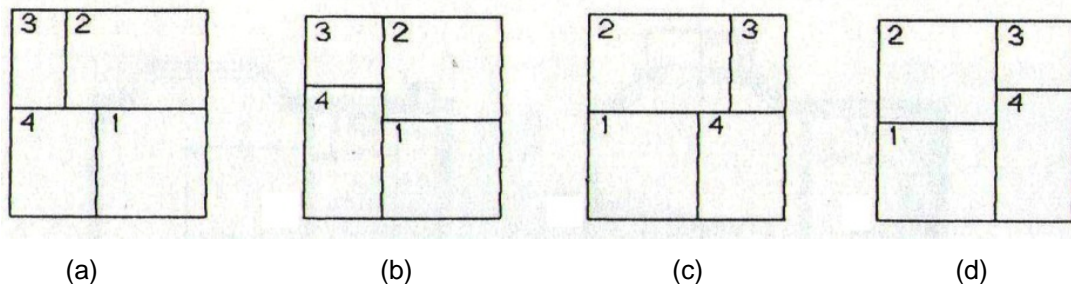
#### APPENDIX 4 – SPATIAL ANALYSIS OF PRIVATE INTERWAR SEMIS

Frank Brown's spatial analysis of privately- built interwar semis, using rectangular dissection, assumed a ground floor with four rooms – a living room (room 1), a parlour (room 2), a kitchen (room 3), and a hall (room 4), with the corresponding four rooms upstairs – three bedrooms and a bathroom. He incorporated constraints including adjacencies (for example, requiring the kitchen to be at the rear of the dwelling) and requiring access to rooms from a hallway, plus allowing for side or front access from the street. This resulted in 24 possible ground floor plans with front access and twelve with side access. Adding minimum room sizes and a minimum frontage of 20 feet reduced this number to four with access at the front:

- (a) Wide hall, narrow kitchen, entrance/hall/staircases each side of the building
- (b) Narrow hall, wide kitchen, entrance/hall/staircases each side
- (c) Wide hall, narrow kitchen, entrance/hall/staircases in the centre of the building
- (d) Narrow hall, wide kitchen, entrance/hall/staircases in the centre.

These floor plans are represented in Figure A.11.

**Figure A-11: Ground floor analysis for a semi with 8 rooms**



**The four solutions generated for the ground floor plan of a semi with 6m frontage (Brown 1990, 270).**

Of these, floor plans (a) and (b) are mirror images of plans (c) and (d). Plans (a) and (c) with a wide hallway and a very small, narrow kitchen do not use the internal space efficiently, and Brown noted that semis built from plans (a) or (c) are rare. This leaves plans (b) and (d) as the solutions to the three-bedroom/parlour semis with a small hall and a normal-width kitchen.

In plan (d) the front entrance and hallway/staircase are situated against the party wall, placing the living rooms and main bedrooms at the sides of the building. This provides separation and sound insulation for the bedrooms and living rooms of each dwelling, as well as allowing for side windows to those rooms. It also allows the builder to economise on the shared services and drainage at the rear of the building. Plan (b), with the entrance/hallway/staircase at the opposite sides of the building, has less sound insulation,

and less flexibility in the arrangement of the upstairs bedrooms and bathroom. The assumption could be made that the builders would favour plan (d) but the evidence in the suburbs shows that with few exceptions, plan (b) was used for what has become known as the universal semi.

An explanation for the widespread adoption of the less efficient plan for the universal semi is found in the social climate of the period. The middle classes wanted to be part of a recognisable street or community, with its associated status, but they also wanted a certain amount of individuality.<sup>19</sup> The builders were aware that anything which differentiated a semi from council semis (decoration), and also had some statement about individuality (each pair with its own prominent bay window) would appeal to their target market. By separating the front gates, front paths and front doors of a pair of semis, illusions of both privacy and individuality were created.

(Brown 1990, 270-271).

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<sup>19</sup> The nineteenth century notion that villas had to look like one large building had been replaced by the growing desire for individuality in an owner occupied semi.

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## APPENDIX 5 - DEFINITIONS AND TERMINOLOGY

There is a great deal of confusion surrounding the terminology of attached dwelling types. Many English people believe that semis are interwar dwellings, rather than a pair of attached dwellings which could be centuries old. Whilst a terrace is technically a building which contains three or more dwellings, in common usage the term “terrace” or “terrace house” is often used to describe one of those dwellings. Such dwellings were originally called terraced houses. Similarly the meanings of terms such as “villa” and “cottage” have evolved.

The blurring of terminology has accelerated since the real estate industry realised the cachet provided by a fashionable term. In this study, where possible the original terminology will be adopted where this will not cause confusion. The following definitions have been used:

- **Cottage** – originally the farm of an English peasant, it became the term for a small dwelling without land, usually in rural areas. It is now used in England to denote a relatively small dwelling, often in a rural or village setting, and often with picturesque features. A cottage can be detached, semi-detached or in a terrace.
- **Dwelling** - a self-contained unit of accommodation. Self-containment is where all the rooms (including kitchen, bathroom and toilet) in a household’s accommodation are behind a single door which only that household can use (2001 UK Census).
- **Party wall** - A wall severed vertically and longitudinally with separate ownership of the severed portions, and with cross easements entitling each of the persons entitled to a portion to have the whole wall continued in such manner that each building supported thereby shall have the support of the whole wall.
- **Semi-detached building** - a building containing two single dwellings which are attached by a shared party wall. Could also be called a pair of semis.
- **Semi-detached house (semi)** - one of the two dwellings in a semi-detached building. A semi has a shared party wall on only one side.
- **Quasi-semi-detached house** - a curious hybrid dwelling type which appeared during the late eighteenth century. A long row of terraced houses was “broken up” into pairs of houses joined by a smaller unit containing a coach-house or entrance porch.
- **Tenement** - a two or three storey building, divided vertically and horizontally into separate housing units, which are entered via shared staircases. Could be purpose-built (Figure D.1) or the result of subdividing a larger house into separately-occupied floors or rooms.

**Figure D-1: Tenement building in Leeds, 1901**

(Caffyn 1986, 136)

- **Terrace building (terrace)** - a building containing three or more dwellings which are attached by party walls. Could also be called a row of terraced houses.
- **Terraced house** - a dwelling in a terrace building. The end dwellings will have a party wall on one side, while those between them will have two party walls.
- **Back-to-back terraces** - For even greater economies of building materials and land, rows of cottages could be built back-to-back. Not only were the side walls shared, but the rear walls as well, all under a single roof. There are surviving examples from the late eighteenth century in Yorkshire (Figure D.2).

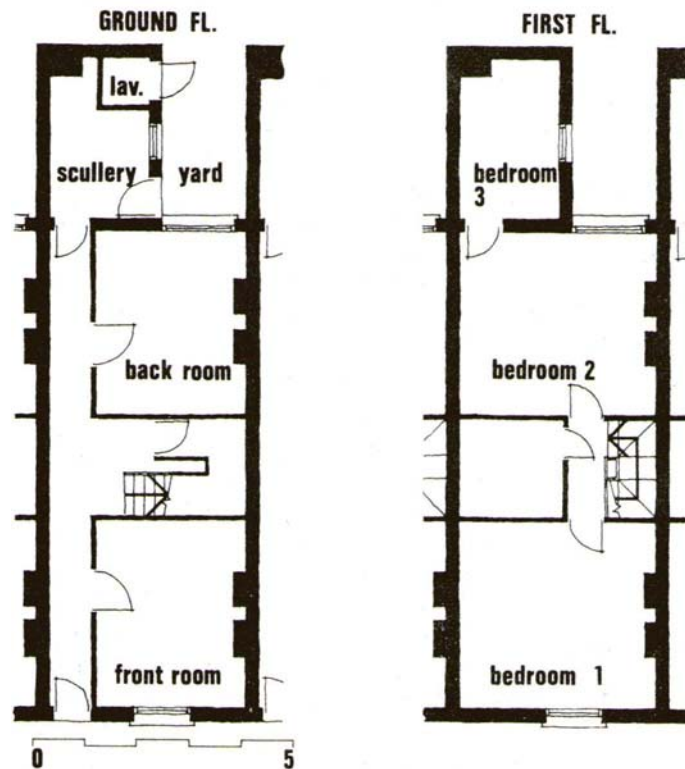
**Figure D-2: Back-to-backs in Leeds**

(Caffyn 1986, 107)



- **Tunnel back** - where a dwelling is more than two rooms deep, the rear rooms are narrower, to allow for fenestration on at least one wall (Figure D.3). Also known as a rear extension. Wider plots enable the tunnel back to be dispensed with.

Figure D-3: Tunnel back



This tunnel back contains a scullery and toilet on the ground floor, and a bedroom above (Burnett 1986, 163).

- **Villa** - The term "villa" (originally used by the Romans to describe a large isolated farmhouse, standing in its own fields) was adopted in the early seventeenth century to describe a large detached house, built on the fringes of a city or town, as a semi-rural retreat from the pollution and business activities of the city. Its use then was broadened to describe large semis in buildings designed to appear as one house. The term "villa" denotes a higher status than "cottage".



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