

Ph.D Thesis

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**The Architects' Revolutionary Council:**  
Architectural anarchy in Britain & Ireland in the  
1970s and how to destroy the R.I.B.A.

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# **The Architects' Revolutionary Council:**

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destroy the R.I.B.A.

By Michael Richard Coates

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# INTRODUCTION

## *“A movement that has not been called a movement”*

Out of the architectural establishment of nineteen seventies Britain came one of the most subversive and radical architecture pressure groups in British history. A group of architects, planners, renegades, and political radicals who sought the overthrow of the Royal Institute of British Architects and demanded that architects abandon their dance to the tune of big business and the governmental bureaucracies of the decade.

The Architect's Revolutionary Council, or ARC, was formed (depending on who you ask) in Ljubljana (Slovenia)<sup>1</sup> or Pula (Croatia)<sup>2</sup> in the then unified Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, in 1972 or 1973. This founding, wherever and whenever it occurred, was primarily the act of Brian Anson, a former Greater London Council planner, native of Bootle, Liverpool; and agent provocateur of architecture in Britain in the nineteen seventies.

The ARC set out to bring down the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) and to remake the architecture profession as a service provided to The People. As the archivist of the Architecture Association, Bedford Square, London; Edward Bottoms wrote in 2007:

‘In early 1974 a group of radical architectural students operating under the guise of the ‘Architects’ Revolutionary Council’ (ARC) announced their presence to the world, staging a dramatic press conference and publishing an inflammatory manifesto. Calling for the destruction of the RIBA and the

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Moloney, in conversation with the author, Greenwich, London, 27<sup>th</sup> June 2013.

<sup>2</sup> 00:14:47–00:15:02, Interview with Brian Anson by Duncan Crowley at EASA, Letterfrack, Co Mayo, Ireland. 16<sup>th</sup> August 2008. [Accessed 29<sup>th</sup> October 2021]

establishment of 'an international movement towards community architecture', the ARC emerged from the AA's Intermediate Unit 1, tutored by the charismatic Brian Anson.<sup>3</sup>



Figure 1. The Architect's Revolutionary Council, founding press conference at the Architectural Association, Bedford Square, London, 1974. Brian Anson (3rd left, in dark glasses) with George Mills to immediate his left.

The ARC was formed by Anson with his students to challenge the status quo in the architecture professions, to attack the RIBA and to dismantle the social class and hierarchy which gave architects their authority and influence in society.<sup>4</sup>

The formation of the ARC did not appear out of nowhere, it came into existence through the vision or disquiet or rebellion of one man, who was initially radicalised by his experiences of

<sup>3</sup> Bottoms, Edward. "If Crime Doesn't Pay: The Architects' Revolutionary Council". *AArchitecture*, Issue 5, Winter 2007/08, pp.14-19.

<sup>4</sup> Mills, George, & Moloney, Peter. 'The Architects' Revolutionary Council its aims and objectives'. *Building Design*, 297, (1976) 9.

the local government architecture and planning system in the Britain in the nineteen sixties. This key individual was Brian Anson (1935-2009), as will be explored in more detail later in this thesis Anson trained as a town planner in Dublin in the early-nineteen sixties. He began working for the Greater London Council in 1966 on the new project to redevelop the former Covent Garden Fruit and Vegetable Market, which was due to relocate to Nine Elms, Battersea, in the early-nineteen seventies. His experience on this project, the total disregard for the existing local community demonstrated by the local authorities and his colleagues, and the frustrating of his attempts to work with that community led to Anson's radicalisation. He abandoned a career as a planner, defecting to the side of the Covent Garden Community Association in 1971 and working with them to resist (successfully) the plans of the Greater London Council which were supported by the London Borough of Camden and the City of Westminster.

After the end of the Covent Garden struggle Anson began working at the Architectural Association (AA) Bedford Square, London, in 1971 having been offered a job by the then newly appointed Chairman, Alvin Boyarsky.<sup>5</sup> The AA, founded in 1847, has always been an outlier amongst architecture schools in Britain, it is a private school, not part of any University or the public education system. In the nineteen seventies and with the appointment of Boyarsky the AA took a markedly radical and left-wing turn becoming something of a hot bed of alternative practices, as is demonstrated by their prospectuses from this period.<sup>6</sup> It was at the AA that Anson met a number of students via the unit he

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<sup>5</sup> Sunwoo, Irene. 'From the "Well-Laid Table" to the "Marketplace:" The Architectural Association Unit System'. *The Journal of Architectural Education*, 2012, v.65, n.2, pp.24-41.

<sup>6</sup> 1975/76, 1976/77, 1977/78, 1978/79 AA Prospectuses. Author's personal collection.

established and the *Free Percy Street Atelier*, in the basement of 11 Percy Street, Fitzrovia, who went on to form the ARC with him.<sup>7</sup>

The two principal members of the ARC on whom I will focus in addition to Anson are George Mills and Peter Moloney. They were, along with other members such as Rob Thompson, Adam Purser and the tangentially related Louis Hellman, the key movers in the ARC in the early-nineteen seventies. Mills, Moloney, Thompson, and Purser were all students of Anson at the AA and will be studied in more detail in this thesis. I will however primarily concentrate on Anson, Mills, and Moloney as the principal movers in the ARC.

George Mills (1946–) studied at the Huddersfield Polytechnic in the late-nineteen sixties going on to the AA in London the early-nineteen seventies.<sup>8</sup> It was there that Mills became involved with Anson, and the founding of the ARC, appearing next to Anson at that first press conference at the AA in 1974 (see figure 1). Mills studied under Anson in the early-nineteen seventies and began working with him on his AA units between 1975 and 1980. Mills went on to develop the Colne Valley Project (see Chapter 8) as his major contribution to the ARCs work between 1976 and 1979, and later to be a founder of the well-known Manchester architecture practice Mills, Beaumont, Leavy, Channon (MBLC, later MBLA). Now retired Mills lives in Withington, Manchester; and has been active in his local community in the 2010s organising his neighbours to resist inconsiderate and unnecessary development of a multi-storey car park by the Christie Hospital NHS Trust<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Crowley with Anson, Op cit., 00:23:59–00:24:13

<sup>8</sup> George Mills, in conversation with the author, Withington, Manchester, 16<sup>th</sup> July 2014.

<sup>9</sup> Brooks-Pollock, Tom. 'Christie U-Turn: Hospital Ditches Car Park Plan for Cancer Research Centre', 10/01/2013, *Manchester Evening News*. [manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/christie-u-turn-hospital-ditches-car-682699](http://manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/christie-u-turn-hospital-ditches-car-682699) [Accessed 21st December 2021]

Peter Moloney (1951–) was born in Buncrana, Donegal, Republic of Ireland; his family moved a few miles across the Anglo-Irish border to Derry when Moloney was an infant, and then to London in 1959<sup>10</sup>. Moloney went to art school and then the AA in London, leaving in 1975, without qualifying as he describes it: ‘When I was in fifth year in architecture it was fairly evident that I wasn’t going to be an architect.’<sup>11</sup> Moloney worked in various jobs post the AA prior to beginning work for the London Borough of Hackney as a project manager responsible for social housing, notably the Trowbridge Estate, Hackney Wick; during its nineteen nineties redevelopment by Levitt Bernstein<sup>12</sup>. Now retired and living in Greenwich Moloney appeared in the press in both Britain and Ireland after bequeathing his vast collection of “conflict memorabilia” of The Troubles in Ireland to the Tower Museum, Derry, in 2018<sup>13</sup>.

I was fortunate enough to interview both George Mills and Peter Moloney on multiple occasions while researching this thesis. Both men also provided me with collections of documents, copies of letters, posters, and community newspapers concerned with the work of the ARC. This material appears throughout this thesis and a full list of the archival materials in my possession provided in the Appendix.

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<sup>10</sup> CAIN. “Collector: The Northern Ireland Political Ephemera Collection of Peter Moloney”, [cain.ulster.ac.uk](http://cain.ulster.ac.uk), *The Conflict Archive on the Internet [CAIN] Archive, Ulster University*, 02/08/2021, [cain.ulster.ac.uk/moloney/collector.htm](http://cain.ulster.ac.uk/moloney/collector.htm) [Accessed 14<sup>th</sup> October 2021].

<sup>11</sup> Peter Moloney, in conversation with the author, Bloomsbury, London, 15<sup>th</sup> May 2013.

<sup>12</sup> Davis, Juliet. “The making and remaking of Hackney Wick, 1870–2014: from urban edgeland to Olympic fringe”, *Planning Perspectives*, 01/03/2016, 31:3, 425-457.

<sup>13</sup> Newsroom, the. ‘Peter Moloney’s “Troubles Treasure Trove” Finds a Home at Derry’s Tower Museum’, 06/04/2018, *Derry Journal*. [derryjournal.com/news/peter-moloneys-troubles-treasure-trove-finds-home-derrys-tower-museum-1040188](http://derryjournal.com/news/peter-moloneys-troubles-treasure-trove-finds-home-derrys-tower-museum-1040188) [Accessed 21st December 2021]

## Outline

Throughout this thesis, I will demonstrate that the ARC's central place within a radical and subversive history of architecture in nineteenth century Britain helps to bring together the threads of an argument and ideas that led to the establishment of radical architecture movements in nineteenth century England. The ARC's campaigns and projects provide a re-reading of the history of architecture in nineteenth century England. I will explore my aims and objectives for this thesis and the various research questions in more detail as this section proceeds,

Part 1 of the thesis, entitled "The Architecture Establishment & Anarchism", sets out the theoretical and historical context of both the architectural profession(s) and anarchism in relation to the built environment. This provides the basis for my contribution made in later chapters of the thesis. Rather than take the form of a stand-alone literature review the secondary research material is presented throughout the first 3 chapters of this thesis to lay the groundwork for the setting out of the contribution in Chapters 6-11.

Chapter 1, "An anarchist approach: Methodology" deals with the anarchist theoretical context of the thesis and sets out my methodology for the following investigation. In Chapter 1 I also address examples of anarchist modes of organisation that occurred in Liverpool in the nineteenth century, specifically "The Blackie" (or Black-E) and the Granby and Corn Street Tenants Housing Co-operatives in Liverpool 8. These examples serve to set the definitions of the key anarchist terminology I am using throughout this thesis, specifically around cooperation, mutual aid, and temporary syndicates.

Chapter 2, "'A'rchitecture and 'A'rchitects: The Profession(s) and Others", addresses the formation of the concept of the Architect and the emergence of the profession as, we, that is to say, society at large, now conceive of it. This chapter will explore the architectural

history context of the thesis setting out my own approach to this as well as a survey of the extant literature from scholars such as Dana Arnold, Sir Howard Colvin and Linda Clarke. Latterly the chapter looks at alternative histories of the professions via the New Architecture Movement and Adam Purser. At this point I will also look in detail at some key examples from the industry journals of the time, citing the crisis of the profession and the radical and revolutionary ideas being developed within architecture in the nineteen seventies. The second part of this chapter looks at the 'Others', non-architects and how they have 'done architecture' and built buildings without or with the assistance of architects, but outside of the architecture establishment. Specifically, I will discuss the work of South London Housing Cooperative and the systems invented by Walter Segal. This chapters ends with an exploration of the notion of anarchist architecture and a brief survey, via Colin Ward, of the multifarious ways in which the people of these Islands housed themselves before anyone had thought of the idea of an architect.

Chapter 3, "Anarchism In Architecture" defines in detail the relevant anarchist theories and contexts, the lens through which I am analysing the given examples and the work of the ARC in the second part of the thesis. This will primarily be through an examination of the work of seminal British anarchist theorists Sir Herbert Read and Colin Ward and their key works. I will analyse their contributions to anarchism in a British context and apply these to the architectural and built environment context. This chapter will conclude with a brief examination of the Paul Dobraszczyk's recent book *Architecture and Anarchism: Building Without Authority* which provides an excellent analysis of the ways in which architecture can be anarchist. I conclude this chapter by assessing the relationship between the ideas of anarchism discussed here with the work and published politics of the ARC. This serves as a bridge to the second part of the thesis.

“The Architects’ Revolutionary Council” is Part 2 of the thesis and thus focusses on the ARC, their thinking and theories, and builds to the contribution to knowledge being made by this thesis.

Chapter 4, “The ARC is born” looks at the emergence of the ARC as a movement in British architecture in the nineteen seventies. It also however charts the radicalisation of its key protagonist, Brian Anson. We look at his journey from young town planner to enfant terrible of the architectural establishment. Particularly I will investigate, via Anson’s own words, the Covent Garden Campaign (1966-1974) which so radicalised Anson and led to the formation of the ARC. Though Anson’s time at the AA and the formation of the ARC in 1974, we will see how the various key actors of the ARC came together at the AA. I will also look at the role of the AA as an institution, and the culture fostered there by Alvin Boyarsky its Chairman (1971-1990), and how these contributed to the formation of the ARC. The second part of the chapter looks at the writings of the ARC, including their manifesto, their initial activity, the forming of their collective identity and their dramatic storming of the RIBA Congress in 1976.

Chapter 5 analyses the many writings of Brian Anson as Director of Policy and chief theorist of the ARC. Anson was a prolific writer and essayist, and through the kind cooperation of George Mills and Peter Moloney I have been provided with unique documents of Anson’s considerable portfolio. This is in the form of letters, policy papers, essays, speeches and draft journal articles. These documents provide me a unique source of previously unseen material, that form the backbone of the thesis and my contribution.

Chapter 6 then addresses Anson’s writings and the details set out in Chapters 3 + 4, to establish the basis of the ARC philosophy and provides us today with a valuable insight to the ideals of the ARC and Anson. This chapter will look at Peter Moloney and George Mills’



political and architectural philosophies as the other 2 key ARC-ers and provide us with anarchist and political context from which to explore the work of the ARC.

Chapter 7 introduces the case examples I will look at to assess the ARCs activity in the built environment which are set out in the following 4 chapters. Chapters 8, 9, 10 and 11 are the case studies looking at Ealing, Bridgtown, Colne Valley, and The Divis Flats respectively. These 4 case studies each do a slightly different job in illustrating the “real world” work of the ARC.

Chapter 8, “Ealing” focusses on the ARCs first project outside of the AA: beginning in 1975 the ARC were here able to apply their various ideas and ideals and had their first encounter with the kinds of obstacles, political, social, and architectural, that they would encounter through the next decade.

Chapter 9, “Bridgtown” was the ARCs first work outside of London, and their first experience with an (initially) more militant group of residents. Like Ealing it was a campaign to stop architecture being built rather than to build their version of a new architecture.

Chapter 10, “Colne Valley” is a significantly different project to all the others looked at in this thesis. Here a key member of the ARC, George Mills, set himself up under the auspices of ARC and the Joseph Rowntree Trust in an office in the valley town of Marsden. This was an effort by Mills and ARC to simulate activity in the valley to address its ongoing gradual decline from its textile industry heydays of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century.

Chapter 11, “Divis,” the final case study chapter, looks at one of the most controversial and arguably most successful of the ARCs campaigns, the 1983-1988 Divis Flats struggle in Belfast. Described as a “struggle” by both Anson and the people of Divis, it pitted them against the forces of the British state in Ireland both the RUC and the British Army, as well as the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and the Westminster Government of Margaret

Thatcher. Here the ARC and Anson more specifically had their most radical and most revolutionary moment and Davis provided the ARC with an almost ideal environment to advocate for a revolution in both architecture and the society of Belfast in the nineteen eighties.

Chapter 12 serves as a synthesis and analysis chapter for the case examples in and of themselves, and with reference to the various theoretical positions of the ARC. This is the final chapter, prior to the overall conclusion of the thesis.

### Alternative practices of doing architecture

This thesis will therefore look at radical architecture processes, methods, and motivations will provide me, and indeed now the world of architecture history and theory with an overall methodology for creating alternative ways of 'doing architecture' a term which will be central to my thesis. The concept of alternative ways of 'doing architecture'<sup>14</sup> only gains meaning when we think of it in relation to the status quo: in the case of this thesis in the context of the mass housing archetype so dominant in mid-twentieth century Britain.

It is perhaps difficult for us from the perspective of 2022 to conceive of the multifarious ways in which the peoples of these islands have built and housed themselves as 'alternative' unless we have a predominant model from which to dissent. That predominant model, i.e. mass housing is all-pervasive and has consequently all but come to mean 'housing' without the need of the word 'mass'. In this context, 'mass housing' is, as defined by N. John Habraken (1972)<sup>15</sup>, the industrial method of housing that arose with the mass expansion of

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<sup>14</sup> Awan, Nishat; Till, Jeremy, & Schneider, Tatjana. *Spatial agency: other ways of doing architecture*. (London: Routledge, 2011)

<sup>15</sup> Habraken, N. John. *Supports: An alternative to mass housing*. (London, Urban International Press, 1999)

the cities of modern England, and continues in our post-industrial age. Although the manifestation of 'mass housing' has clearly changed over the last 200 years, the political and socio-economic relationships it includes, political imperative to house people and the arguments around the best means of providing the same (e.g. public v. private) do provide some reasonable continuity over this long period. Socio-economic status is obviously a key driver in this arena as the need for public housing is now driven by poverty and lack of ability to house oneself. The opportunity to build one's own home is not the preserve of the wealthy and those who try to live and dwell in alternative ways are criminalised.<sup>16</sup> Thus, people without the socio-economic capital to own their own homes must rely on the State or state sponsored charities to provide this for them. The dweller has been thoroughly expunged from the housing process in the last 200 years.

### Outline methodology

My approach in the context of this study, whilst anarchist, specifically anarcho-syndicalist, does not seek to retrospectively apply anarchist motivations upon the subjects of study, but to trace and understand the ways in which anarchist modes of 'doing architecture' have been carried out in an unconsciously anarchist<sup>17</sup> manner.

The currency of this thesis is the notion of power and its accumulation by the elite social class of the architect and the architectural professions. Thus, my intention is to identify the means and moment by which such power has been distributed or seized by other traditionally minor players in the architectural process. The autonomous individual in society,

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<sup>16</sup> Smith, Luke. 'Priti Patel's War on the UK's Last Nomads', *OpenDemocracy*, 29/03/2021. [opendemocracy.net/en/opendemocracyuk/priti-patels-war-on-britains-last-nomads](https://opendemocracy.net/en/opendemocracyuk/priti-patels-war-on-britains-last-nomads) [Accessed 5 February 2022]

<sup>17</sup> Goodway, David. *Anarchist Seeds Beneath the Snow: Left-libertarian Thought and British Writers from William Morris to Colin Ward*. (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2006) p.2.

the anarchist individual as it were, is the focus of this argument, and therefore for me anarchism is the logical starting point to explore methods of disestablishing and redistributing power.

My methodological approach is therefore different in important ways from mainstream analyses of architecture which by-and-large are carried out by architects for architects.<sup>18</sup> I am not an architect, nor have I ever studied architecture, but a person concerned with architecture and most particularly its impact on people. My approach is more sociological than formalist and more qualitative than quantitative, it is based on analysis of the process, the “doing” and not the product of architecture, the “object”. My methodology for this thesis does not fall into an art or architecture historical canon either,<sup>19</sup> I have consciously chosen to use some elements of these approaches, combined with archival research and interviews, to accumulate the original “never before seen” material regarding the ARC, its aims and objectives, and the activities of its three principal players (Anson, Mills & Moloney) during the nineteen seventies. I see architecture and the products of the architectural profession, i.e. buildings, within their socio-political and socio-economic contexts, exploring the interrelationship between architecture, society, politics and the history and relevance today of these events, actions, and activism.

This is however still a thesis which is telling a history that has not yet been told. And whilst this story takes place within the field of architecture it is not a history of architecture, it is perhaps a history of architectures, or the ‘doing of architecture’, where process and politics are for more significant than products and design. The world of architecture is the context in which these events took place, architecture was the profession that the three main players

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<sup>18</sup> Arnold, Dana. *Reading Architectural History*. (London: Routledge, 2002) pp.42-44

<sup>19</sup> See Arnold (2000, 2002, 2006), Colvin (2008), Esher (1981), Hardy (1991), Harwood & Powers (1985), Kynaston (2008), Leach (2010), McKean (1989), Parnell (2012), Risebero (1982, 1992)

were involved in to one extent or another throughout their adult lives. Whilst George Mills qualified and went on to work as an architect is part of the story, both Brian Anson and Peter Moloney were not architects (town planner, and housing project manager respectively). More particularly Anson was primarily a political activist, a poet, a storyteller, an *agent provocateur*, before he was a member of the professions of architecture.

Brian Anson, George Mills, and Peter Moloney, represent three differing responses to the “problem of architecture” principally in the nineteen seventies but, as I will argue, also today in 2022, nearly a quarter of the way through the twenty first century. Anson was a political activist and revolutionary who happened to work in the field of architecture. A radical who wanted to flip the table, and start the game over again, putting people and places first and money and Architecture (with a capital A) second. Whilst Mills was a political bedfellow of Anson, at least in his youth, a left-leaning designer, architectural technician, but ultimately an architect. For Mills, the ARC and the necessary changes that took place within the architectural profession in the nineteen seventies, were an important part of his journey to become an architect. As a principal of MBLC (later MBLA) Mills was able to put into practice many of the same political ideas and ideals advocated by Anson. Unlike Anson though Mills was able, through compromise and “choosing his battles”, to realise these ideals in bricks and mortar, especially in the Hulme Guide to Development<sup>20</sup>, and the Homes for Change development, Hulme, Manchester.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> URBED, MBLA, etc. ‘Hulme Guide to Development’. (1991). *urbed.coop*. [urbed.coop/projects/hulme-guide-development-0](http://urbed.coop/projects/hulme-guide-development-0) [Accessed 21<sup>st</sup> December 2021]

<sup>21</sup> Fauset, Peter G. ‘The Hulme Estate and the ‘Homes for Change’ Development: Britain’s First Major Sustainable Housing Project’ pp.302-309. In Burton, Elizabeth, Jenks, Mike, & Williams, Katie. (Eds.) *Achieving Sustainable Urban Form* (1st ed.) (London: Routledge, 2000).

This thesis therefore is describing, in the words of Prof. Flora Samuel during her period as my PhD supervisor “a movement that has not been called a movement”. The ARC was a movement within British Architecture active between 1974 and 1979. They were not a movement in the sense of being part of the canon of architecture history, they do not fit neatly into the Modernist or Postmodernist boxes, they in fact did not build a single building. But they are a movement in the political sense, but here too do they do not fit into any clear political box, being arguably, revolutionary anarchists or Marxists, Trotskyists, Liberals, and Communists simultaneously. The architectural, social, and political ideas and ideals of the ARC went on to spawn many a subsequent group of radicals, activists, and pioneers in late-twentieth century British architecture (see Chapter 11). They achieved great change with their work, but you will not see it published in the history of architecture books. We will see in this thesis (Chapters 4–9) the ways in which they positively impacted the lives of thousands of ordinary residents (not architects or students) in diverse and downtrodden corners of Britain and Ireland. Most of all however they posed challenges to our ways of “doing architecture” in Britain. As they remained largely unanswered by the Architectural Establishment of the late-twentieth century, these remain just as relevant and pressing a concern now as we reach the end of the first quarter of the twenty-first century. The lessons that the ARC learned, the changes that they made, and challenges that they posed as the key contribution of the thesis set out on the following pages.

The reader is asked to note that some elements of this thesis have previously been published, first in ‘To Hell With Architecture: An architecture of anarchism’. In *Anarchist Studies*, (v.23 n.2, November 2015, pp.47-67). Secondly as ‘Chapter 30: The City, Urban Planning and Architecture’. In Adams, Matthew, and Levy, Carl. *The Palgrave Handbook of Anarchism*. (London: Springer International Publishing, 2019. pp.531-548.)

# PART 1

## THE ARCHITECTURE ESTABLISHMENT & ANARCHISM

# CHAPTER ONE:

## AN ANARCHIST APPROACH

As Stephen Parnell states below from his thesis *Architectural Design, 1954 – 1972: The contribution of the architectural magazine to the writing of architectural history* (2012):

‘Architectural history inherited from art history the art historians’ means of description and analysis, in particular the notions of periodization of styles, architecture as an object and the architect as author. However, there do exist other ways of writing architectural history, independent of the hegemony of art history’s progressive evolutionary approach’<sup>22</sup>

Here Parnell is describing a somewhat out of date characterisation of art history as a purely formalist approach but is nevertheless valid in terms of identifying architectural history’s origin and in large part current practice. My thesis will however engage in an alternative version of ‘doing’ history. Rather than treating history as a process of categorisation and periodization, my aim is in part to produce a history of radical nineteen seventies ‘doing of architecture’ in the Britain and Ireland. Again, not as an historical inquiry into the products and design processes and principles of Architects (with a capital ‘A’) and the Architecture (with a capital ‘A’) built in their period, as per a formalist, monographic, canon based History of Architecture. Rather I will, through the ARC, write a history of how the members of the ARC, along with The People and communities of the places in which they worked, engaged

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<sup>22</sup> Parnell, Stephen. *Architectural Design, 1954 – 1972: The contribution of the architectural magazine to the writing of architectural history*. Unpublished PhD Thesis, 2012, Sheffield School of Architecture, University of Sheffield.



with architecture as a verb, to misquote Colin Ward<sup>23</sup>. I am concerning myself with architecture as a political and social phenomenon, rather than a physical built product of the Architecture (with a capital 'A') profession. My aim is that this history, this retelling of an untold and largely lost story of resistance, radicalism, and revolution in architecture and Architecture will inform the present practice of alternative forms of 'doing architecture'.<sup>24</sup>

The ARC, and their fellow travellers in the nineteen seventies, and the subsequent groups, and movements, would see a contradiction at the heart of the Architecture profession(s), and the ways in which Architecture was established as that of 'art' versus 'money'. The designer or architect, more so than the artist, is beholden to the socio-economic circumstances in which they are obliged to work to realise their art. Due to the sheer financial expense they are unable to realise their "art" as an artist might through any means however modest: engaging in their creative practice is dependent on the availability of vast sums of money, thus either they or their clients are beholden to the socio-economic circumstances of capitalism.

Additionally, as Adrian Forty sets out, architects are not terribly reliable sources on the purpose, motivations, position of their profession or the value of their work.

'...there seems no particular reason why the often obscure and long-winded statements made by architects and designers should provide a complete or even adequate account of the buildings or artefacts they design.'<sup>25</sup>

Forty goes on to say in even more uncertain terms that the position of the architect or designer is a precarious one when it comes to claims of artistic liberty:

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<sup>23</sup> Ward, Colin. *Cotters & Squatters: Housing's Hidden History*. (Nottingham: Five Leaves, 2002) p.5

<sup>24</sup> Awan, Till, & Schneider, *Spatial Agency*. (2011)

<sup>25</sup> Forty, Adrian. *Objects of Desire: Design and Society since 1750*. (London: Thames & Hudson, 1986) p.239.

'It is the entrepreneur not the designer which decides which design most satisfactorily embodies the ideas necessary to the product's success, and which best fits the material conditions of production.

'To put the [design/society] paradox in the most extreme terms, how can designers be said to be in command of what they do, but at the same time merely be the agents of ideology...'<sup>26</sup>

The key issue behind many of these questions is one of power. Power in the architectural process; power economically, socially, and politically that allows architecture to manifest. All these power structures need to be reassessed, or destroyed, for true user control of the architectural process to develop.

These power relationships are, as Parnell illustrates citing Bourdieu and Foucault, relational: '...and therefore a result of relations between people and that is largely a product of unquestioned world views and beliefs that the dominant use to dominate.'<sup>27</sup>

In this context I would cast 'the dominant' as the architectural professions.

'Foucault emphasises that power works through knowledge and discourse... [and]... that power is ubiquitous and dispersed throughout society, beyond agency and structure, Bourdieu argues that power is culturally and symbolically created and legitimised through agency's relationship to the social structure.'<sup>28</sup>

I find myself adopting half of one and half of the other argument, as expounded by Parnell above. The first of Foucault's 'power works through knowledge and discourse' and the second of Bourdieu 'power is [...] created and legitimised through agency...'

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<sup>26</sup> Forty, *Objects of Desire*. p.241

<sup>27</sup> Parnell, *Architectural Design*, p.38

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p.39

This is the nature of the power relationship(s) between the architectural profession and the 'lay' person, those subject to the profession of architecture and its whims. If I am to be truly postmodern about it, if all building, whether bike sheds or Lincoln Cathedral (to misquote Nicholas Pevsner)<sup>29</sup>, were declared as architecture then the profession of architecture as currently defined, would cease to have any real meaning. As with any power structure, its solidity comes from its elevated status, its elite position in the broader social, political and economic hierarchy of a '...bourgeois democratic state like that of Britain'<sup>30</sup>. If these boundaries are blurred or dismantled entirely, the status goes with them? The status that the Architect achieves in society is awarded by the perceived skill and specialist knowledge of the Architect.



Figure 2. Helmut Bakaitis as 'The Architect' in *The Matrix: Reloaded* (2002) Dirs. Lana Wachowski and Lilly Wachowski.

The depiction of the Architect in popular culture or indeed in the Architecture establishments own "satire", is of a middle-aged or elderly white man (see figures 2 & 3). This is reflective

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<sup>29</sup> Cited in Davis, Howard. *The Cathedral and the Bicycle Shed*, 83<sup>rd</sup> ACSA Annual Meeting, History/Theory/Criticism, 1995.

<sup>30</sup> Risebero, Bill. *Fantastic Form: Architecture and Town Planning Today*. (London: The Herbert Press, 1992) p.34.

of both the nature of the Architect and the Global North's collective perception of those with status and influence in our patriarchal societies.

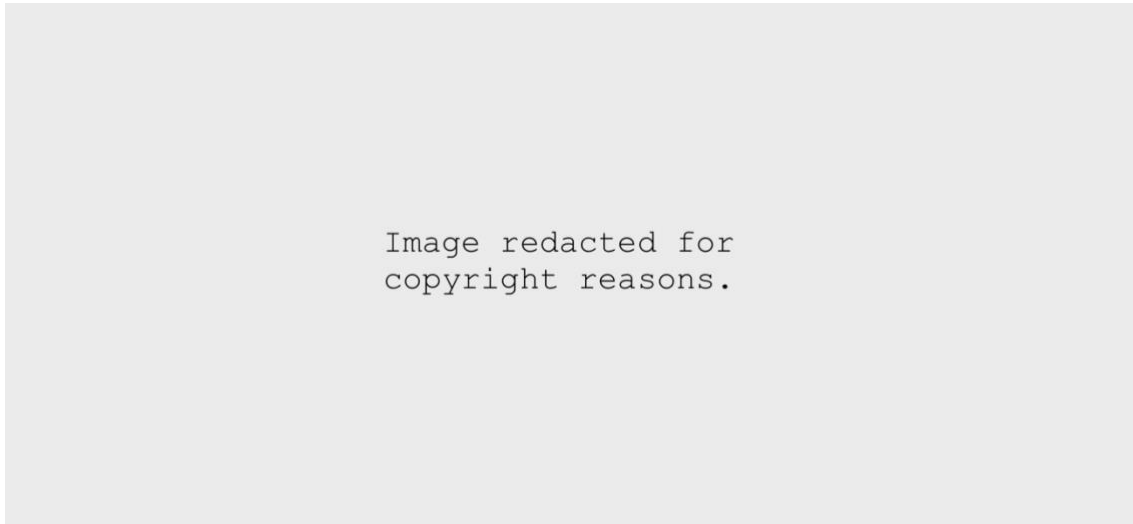


Figure 3. Cartoon of Architects through the ages

As Colin Ward wrote in 1996: 'Alan Bennett reckons that he understands them and provides an architect's profile in his book *Writing Home*: "grey hair, young face, bright tie and liberal up to a point (architects, like dentists, being the same the world over)." My experience has been the opposite. It's an occupation that produces a wider range of practitioners than any other. I've met more anarchist, pacifist and socialist architects than dissident members of most jobs, professions or trades.'<sup>31</sup>

Whilst Architect, with a capital 'A', refers to the professions of Architecture and therefore all the professionals within this process, including but not limited to: town planners, planning authorities, building inspectors, structural engineers, quantity surveyors and central and local government, and the architect, with a lowercase 'a'.

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<sup>31</sup> Ward, Colin. *Talking to Architects: Ten Lectures by Colin Ward*. (London: Freedom, 1996)

These professional bodies and legislative structures have been complicit in the establishment of the monolith we now know as Architecture. This is not to say however that various groups and individuals both Architects/architectural professionals and none, have not tried at various junctures to develop alternative ways of doing architecture.

The architecture I am interested in is architecture arrived at via a method that engages with all persons in the process in an equal footing or at least in a rebalanced power relationship. This is often referred to as mere building as opposed to Architecture which Rex Martienssen described as '...more than mere building. Architecture is the expression in concrete form of an ideal.'<sup>32</sup> I am not interested in the valorised status of the 'trained' Architect; the Architect as established above that takes his justification and his status from the construction of a history that enables him to claim a lineage. I say "him" above as architects are, in the vast majority of cases, male.<sup>33</sup> A lineage that is based on the establishment of practitioners, theorists, historians, and educators, indeed, some individuals inhabit all these roles.<sup>34</sup>

I will through this history of the ARC document the undocumented history and impact of a key alternative, anarchist, and radical moment in English architecture in the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century with view to assessing their impact, the coherence of their ideas, and the model this provides us with for destruction of the power of the architectural establishment.

### Anarchist, in principle

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<sup>32</sup> Martienssen, Rex, D. 'What is Architecture?' *South African Architectural Record*, (June 1925) p.43.

<sup>33</sup> Architects Registration Board, The; 'Equality & Diversity Data', *Architects Registration Board*, 2023. [arb.org.uk/about-arb/equality-diversity/data](http://arb.org.uk/about-arb/equality-diversity/data) [Accessed 10 June 2023]

<sup>34</sup> Arnold, *Reading Architectural History*.

Many of the activities and motivations of the subjects of this study can be characterised as anarchist. This is often a case of being ‘unconsciously anarchist’, not anarchist in motivation but ultimately anarchist in realisation. This implies that this behaviour, rather than being explicitly anarchist, is a natural mode of organisation. This term ‘the natural’ occurs in various sections of modernist thought, most notably anarchist theorists from the parallel disciplines of art and literary criticism. Sir Herbert Read and Colin Ward are for me exemplars of a very English Quietist mode of anarchist theory and critique. They are also important in understanding the role of anarchist thought in the critique and revolution of artistic production in an anarchist mode.

Anarchism and Quietism are often presented as polar opposites of each other, this will be more fully addressed in Chapter 3. However, it will suffice to say here as Jacob Weinrib describes succinctly in his chapter *Sovereignty as a Right and as a Duty* from 2017: ‘Quietism is the view that what imposes legal obligations cannot be unjust.’...and... ‘Anarchism is the view that what is unjust cannot impose legal obligations.’<sup>35</sup>

Read along with other British Anarchists of the inter-war period, such as Alex Comfort, were members of the Peace Pledge Union (PPU) which opposed all war. This extended to the Spanish Civil War despite Read’s full-throated support of the Anarchist Republican cause.<sup>36</sup> Ward, born in 1924, was conscripted in 1942, and his experience during World War Two turned him into a lifelong pacifist. Ward was known as “the gentle anarchist” and in the preface of their text *Autonomy, Solidarity, Possibility: The Colin Ward Reader*, Chris Wilbert and Damian White say:

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<sup>35</sup> Weinrib, Jacob, “Sovereignty as a Right and as a Duty: Kant’s Theory of the State”, 29/05/2017. In Claire Finkelstein and Michael Skerker (eds) *Sovereignty and the New Executive Authority* (Oxford: University Press, 2019), p.26

<sup>36</sup> Honeywell, Clarissa. *A British anarchist tradition: Herbert Read, Alex Comfort and Colin Ward*. (London, Continuum, 2011) pp.20+21

‘...this gentle anarchist bucked conventional wisdom by arguing that those who wish to see the emergence of a more compassionate, humane society need to think beyond the dogma of centralised state planning and the ‘free’ market.’<sup>37</sup>

Similarly, Honeywell writes: ‘The fundamental insight of an anarchist like Ward is that individual human autonomy is dependent upon and reinforces social ties, self-governing groups and community endeavour.’<sup>38</sup> Pacifists and those who wish to reinforce social ties know that anarchism cannot be achieved through violent revolution, a la Black Bloc, etc.<sup>39</sup>

The unconscious anarchism of people taking control of, and having a vested interest in, their built environments. In his seminal essay ‘To Hell With Culture’ (1941) Read refers to the natural as meaning something other than the conventional organisation of society, what Risebero called ‘...bourgeois democratic state’...<sup>40</sup> more akin with anarchist modes of production and organisation. In ‘To Hell With Culture’ Read says:

‘If we follow this natural order in all the ways of our life, we shall not need to talk about culture. We shall have it without being conscious of it. But how are we to attain this natural order of things, which is my particular concern in this essay?

Obviously, we can’t make things naturally in unnatural surroundings. We can’t do things properly unless we are properly fed and properly housed. [...]

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<sup>37</sup> Wilbert, Chris. and White, Damian F. (eds.) *Autonomy, Solidarity, Possibility: The Colin Ward Reader*. (Oakland, CA.; Edinburgh: AK Press, 2011), p.vii

<sup>38</sup> Honeywell, Carissa, ‘Colin Ward: anarchism and social policy.’ *Anarchist Studies*, vol. 19, no. 2, (2011) 69.

<sup>39</sup> Walia, Harsha. ‘10 Points on the Black Bloc’, *The Anarchist Library*, no date. [theanarchistlibrary.org/library/harsha-walia-10-points-on-the-black-bloc](http://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/harsha-walia-10-points-on-the-black-bloc) [Accessed 18<sup>th</sup> January 2022]

<sup>40</sup> Risebero, *Fantastic Form*, p.34.

In other words, before we can make things naturally, we must establish the natural order in society, which for my present purposes I assume is what we will mean by democracy.<sup>41</sup>

By 'democracy' and 'natural' here I see it as evident that Read means anarcho-syndicalism, a form of direct democracy, as Rudolph Rocker defines it:

'Anarcho-syndicalists are convinced that a Socialist economic order cannot be created by the decrees and statutes of a government, but only by the solidaric collaboration of the workers with hand and brain...'<sup>42</sup>

In such a society the individual builder, or more likely, a group of autonomous individuals working in a co-operative, i.e. '...solidaric collaboration of the workers...' would be the mode of 'doing architecture'. This serves as both an illustration of previous modes of architecture as well as present and potentially future versions of house building.

However, the professionalisation of architecture has created a gulf between itself, its products and the rest of society and this gulf seems almost unbridgeable. Read (and to a lesser extent N. John Habraken [see Chapter 3]), argue that this is two-way. It is not just the Architectural professions and those within them withholding all power, but also the unwillingness of people who are not part of these professions to engage with architecture. This is an issue I will return to later in the thesis when discussing examples of non-Architects engaging with architecture.

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<sup>41</sup> Read, Herbert. "To hell with culture", (1941) in \_\_\_\_\_ *To Hell With Culture and Other Essays on Art and Society* (London: Routledge, 1963; 2002). p.14

<sup>42</sup> Guérin, Daniel. *Anarchism: From Theory to Practice*. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970) via [theanarchistlibrary.org/library/daniel-guerin-anarchism-from-theory-to-practice](http://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/daniel-guerin-anarchism-from-theory-to-practice) [Accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2015]



The anarcho-syndicalist organisation of the process of doing architecture does, however, necessitate the replacement of the Architectural professions and the social stratum that they occupy with another mode of 'doing architecture'.

### Liverpool Co-ops as anarcho-syndicalist organisation

To take one example, the activities of the Corn and Yates Streets Co-operative in Liverpool in the nineteen seventies can be seen as acts of unconscious anarcho-syndicalists.<sup>43</sup> These examples of work being carried out in Liverpool under co-operative principles come from the Granby General Improvement Area and the Corn and Yates Streets Co-ops in Liverpool 8. Liverpool 8 was, at this point, a notorious area of the city in which Building Societies would not give mortgages; therefore, owner occupation was not an option for the residents of these designated General Improvement Areas<sup>44</sup>. Tom Clay documents the process by which these housing co-ops established themselves in the late-nineteen seventies, he notes:

'The Liverpool Co-ops have their origins in a Shelter project, SNAP, set up in 1969. SNAP helped a group of residents of the Granby General Improvement Area, distressed by the inadequate rate of house improvements in their area, to set up a co-operative housing association.'<sup>45</sup>

Clay describes how the Granby Co-operative Housing Ltd. and the Canning Housing Co-operative Ltd. pooled resources to establish the nation's first secondary housing co-operative, Neighbourhood Housing Services (a housing NHS) in 1973, to manage the ever-expanding task of urban inner city regeneration in the Granby General Improvement Area.

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<sup>43</sup> Clay, Tom. "The Liverpool Co-ops". *Architects' Journal*, v.168 n.27, 05/07/1978, pp.37-8.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, p.37

<sup>45</sup> *ibid*

Neighbourhood Housing Services employed an architect and a secretary to help manage the co-operatives and, in an echo of Ralph Erskine's now famed 'office in a funeral parlour' at Byker, Newcastle-upon-Tyne in the nineteen sixties,<sup>46</sup> NHS themselves set up in a former cobbler's shop on Granby Street.<sup>47</sup> By the time of writing his article, Clay noted that:

'...NHS [National Housing Services] now had 25 staff including a design team of eight... Design schemes are prepared to satisfy both the specific needs of the members who will be living in the properties and the policy of the co-operative, which reflects those needs.'<sup>48</sup>

By July 1978, there were 11 such co-ops in Liverpool that owned and managed 500 properties and that, additionally, modernised 120 per year. Clay goes on to debate the lessons that he feels can and should be learnt from the Liverpool experiences, which can be briefly summarised. As an involved membership of below 100 members per co-op, voluntary activities to the benefit of the co-op/individual not a nebulous "greater good", co-ops do more with the same, not more with less.<sup>49</sup>

These groupings were established by the residents of state owned and managed housing who organised themselves into a temporary syndicate, in this case a co-operative, to achieve a specific stated aim of improving their housing and living conditions. This syndicate was founded on the basis of vested interests and Mutual Aid.<sup>50</sup> The residents achieved their

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<sup>46</sup> McGuirk, Tony. 'McGuirk: "Housing for People in Need - the Big Void in Today's Thinking"'. *The Architects' Journal*, 15 July 2015, [architectsjournal.co.uk/practice/culture/mcguirk-housing-for-people-in-need-the-big-void-in-todays-thinking](http://architectsjournal.co.uk/practice/culture/mcguirk-housing-for-people-in-need-the-big-void-in-todays-thinking). [Accessed 14 July 2018]

<sup>47</sup> Clay, Op cit., p.37

<sup>48</sup> *ibid*

<sup>49</sup> *ibid*

<sup>50</sup> Kropotkin, Peter (1902) *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution*, *The Anarchist Library*, 2019. [theanarchistlibrary.org/library/petr-kropotkin-mutual-aid-a-factor-of-evolution](http://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/petr-kropotkin-mutual-aid-a-factor-of-evolution) [Accessed 25<sup>th</sup> February 2020]

aims, and the syndicate was disbanded, despite the suggestion from others that it be maintained the members of the Corn and Yates Street Co-operatives recognised that for them to arrive in another community and to do the job for them would be no more effective than the council or housing association doing the same. In the spirit of Mutual Aid, they however gave the other groups the benefit of their experience but did not involve themselves in the formation of this group. The people of Corn and Yates Street recognised some of the key anarcho-syndicalist principles; that the impetus for such modes must come from within the concerned group. It cannot come from outside, from local or national government or other concerned groups, nor from well-meaning or revolutionary architects, as none of these individuals have vested interests in the outcomes or processes, unlike the residents/occupants/users themselves.

It is necessary here to set out a little detail on Mutual Aid, and Kropotkin himself. Peter, Pyotr, or Pëtr Kropotkin (1842-1921) was born into an aristocratic Russian family but abandoned his life of nobility becoming a noted geographer, and later one of the godfathers of anarchism, alongside fellow Russian Mikhail Bakunin, and Pierre Joseph Proudhon. In 1902 Kropotkin published his seminal work *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution* In which Kropotkin argues that mutual aid is a natural human instinct that has been present throughout history and has contributed to the development of human societies.<sup>51</sup> He believed that mutual aid can be seen in various forms of cooperation among individuals and groups, ranging from the sharing of resources to the provision of support and assistance in times of need. Kropotkin was also noted for his criticism of the prevailing Social Darwinist

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<sup>51</sup> *ibid*

theories of the period,<sup>52</sup> which claimed that competition and conflict were the primary factors driving social evolution. Kropotkin counters, saying:

'In the animal world we have seen that the vast majority of species live in societies, and that they find in association the best arms for the struggle for life: understood, of course, in its wide Darwinian sense—not as a struggle for the sheer means of existence, but as a struggle against all natural conditions unfavourable to the species.'<sup>53</sup>

He argues that these theories were based on a flawed interpretation of nature and ignored the importance of cooperation and mutual aid in the development of human societies. In the same way that animals have adapted to and grown within their environments, and work in cooperation to achieve this balance, he argues so have humans: 'The individual himself is the product of his ancestors and surroundings, and mutual aid is one of the essential conditions for the maintenance of life, for the preservation of the species, and for the development of the individual.'<sup>54</sup>

Kropotkin says:

'All the great popular movements which have contributed to the growth of liberty, to the abolition of privilege, to the establishment of democratic government, to the attainment of the rights of man and of the citizen, have been based upon the principle of mutual aid.'<sup>55</sup>

Mutual aid is therefore not only a moral principle but also a practical one, as it contributes to the well-being and survival of individuals and communities. He believed that mutual aid

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<sup>52</sup> Wyly, Elvin. "Gentrification on the planetary urban frontier: The evolution of Turner's noösphere." *Urban Studies*, vol. 52, no. 14 (2015): 2515-2550.

<sup>53</sup> Kropotkin, Op cit.

<sup>54</sup> *ibid*

<sup>55</sup> *ibid*

could serve as an alternative to the hierarchical and authoritarian structures of government and capitalism and more pointedly the feudalism of Imperial Russia which he experienced first-hand, and could form the basis of a more just and equitable society.

This phenomenon can be seen in a multitude of urban planning and design concept from the time. Notably in a British context the New Town movements of postwar Britain, the Quaker model villages of Cadbury and Rowntree and most clearly the attempts as a bottom up structure in the Garden Cities Movement of Ebenezer Howard. The issues with Howard, and indeed with the Quaker model villages is that set out by the American anarchist geographer, theorist, and urban designer, Murray Bookchin (1921-2006)<sup>56</sup> in *The Limits of The City* in 1974:

'Howard's Garden Cities 'Neighborliness [sic] is mistaken for organic social intercourse and mutual aid; well-manicured parks, the harmonisation of humanity with nature; the proximity of workplaces for the development of a new meaning for work and its integration with play; an eclectic mix of ranch houses, slab-like apartment buildings and bachelor type flats for spontaneous architectural variety; shopping mall plazas and a vast expanse of lawn for the *agora*; or a lecture halls for the cultured centres; hobby classes for vocational variety; and benevolent trusts or municipal councils for self-administration.'<sup>57</sup>

The Quaker model villages had a different issue, but Howard replicated many of the above principles from them, so they are useful example. The key issue with Quaker village is they were of course Company Towns. These villages were designed to provide better living and

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<sup>56</sup> Gaia. 'Murray Bookchin', *Environment and Ecology*, [environment-ecology.com/biographies/502-murray-bookchin.html](http://environment-ecology.com/biographies/502-murray-bookchin.html). [Accessed 14 June 2023]

<sup>57</sup> Bookchin, Murray. *The Limits of the City* (New York, N.Y.; Harper Torchbooks, 1979:1974), p.120

working conditions for their employees and were based on Quaker religious principles of social justice and equality. The Cadbury family established Bournville, a village near Birmingham in 1879.<sup>58</sup> Bournville was designed to provide workers with high-quality housing, green spaces, and other amenities, while also promoting healthy living and social harmony. The village included a school, a hospital, a community centre, and other facilities, and was planned to ensure that workers' needs were met in a sustainable and equitable way. The Cadbury family also provided their workers with health care, pensions, and other benefits that were uncommon at the time.

Similarly, the Rowntree family established a model village called New Earswick near York, in 1902.<sup>59</sup> New Earswick was designed to provide workers with affordable, high-quality housing, along with access to education, health care, and other services. The village included a school, a library, a swimming pool, and other facilities, and was planned to promote social harmony and community involvement. The Rowntree family also provided their workers with health care and other benefits and were active in promoting social reform and political change.

Examples of mutual aid are of course not limited to the housing cooperatives here being addressed but we can see this in many areas, principally however it has emerged out of the need and thus from the working class of First World societies. Trade unions provide mutual aid to workers by negotiating better wages, benefits, and working conditions. Similarly community gardens are a form of mutual aid involving the sharing of resources such as land, tools, and knowledge to grow food collectively. Indeed the first Cooperative emerged in

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<sup>58</sup> Historic England. 'From Factory to Fireside: 6 Marvellous Model Villages'. *The Historic England Blog*, 31 August 2017, [heritagecalling.com/2017/08/31/from-factory-to-fireside-6-marvellous-model-villages](https://www.heritagecalling.com/2017/08/31/from-factory-to-fireside-6-marvellous-model-villages). [Accessed 4 June 2023]

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

Rochdale in 1844 when The Rochdale Pioneers, a group of weavers and other working-class people established the Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers. This was a cooperative society that aimed to provide high-quality goods at fair prices to its members, who were also its owners. The Rochdale Pioneers developed a set of principles for their cooperative society, which became known as the Rochdale Principles. These principles included democratic control by members, distribution of profits based on the amount of business done with the society, and education of members to improve their knowledge and skills. The success of the Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers inspired the establishment of other cooperative societies around the world, and the Rochdale Principles continue to be influential in the cooperative movement today.<sup>60</sup> The forms of mutual aid can vary widely depending on the cultural, social, and historical context, but the underlying principle of cooperation and collaboration remains the same.

In the Corn and Yates Street Co-operatives families who were generations of, by 1978, former dock workers - engaged in their own rehabilitation, maintenance, management, and purchase of their homes with the mutual aid of others. In our current system of the architectural profession outsiders do have (in most cases) expertise and knowledge of the hidden secrets of architecture, unlike the activist<sup>61</sup> these people must be concerned with surrendering that knowledge and power to the individuals with whom they work. Their knowledge is of course how these “experts” maintain their privileged status in society, the secret language of experts, academics and architects excludes others from the process making those ‘others’ reliant on them.

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<sup>60</sup> International Cooperative Alliance. Understanding Our History to Build a Stronger Future. ‘Our History’. *International Cooperative Alliance*, December 2021. [ica.coop/en/cooperatives/history-cooperative-movement](https://ica.coop/en/cooperatives/history-cooperative-movement). [Accessed 3 June 2023]

<sup>61</sup> Do or Die, ‘Give Up Activism’. *Do or Die*, n.9, (2001) 160-166.

The example of Corn and Yates Street Co-operative can be used again here, as an architect was employed at a later stage for “box ticking” purposes to adhere to legal restrictions and to satisfy building inspectors. Thus the status quo of Architecture reasserted itself insisting on “one of its own” being involved as assurance that everything was good enough. In these circumstances this is achieved through the application of the laws and regulations the powerful pass to protect their social status and wealth.

Thus, whilst the initial motivations of the residents of the Corn and Yates Street Co-operative were not the realisation of an anarchist utopia, but the much more real and present issue of improving their living conditions, they were markedly anarchist in realisation. Brought into being by the neglect of government (local and national) forcing individuals to seize control of their circumstances, in a way that would not, likely have occurred without the State’s neglect. My anarchist reading of these circumstances is both valid and useful in understanding the modes of practice that can be used by the ‘Other’, the non-Architect, non-Planner, non-Professional, is circumvent the existing power structures of architecture.



## The Blackie

The rehabilitation of the Great George Street Congregational Church, on the edge of Liverpool's Chinatown - known as the 'The Blackie' because of its formerly soot covered exterior - is another Merseyside example of anarcho-syndicalist organisation and self-build of an alternative kind. As *The Blackie Cooperative* say in the group authored article "The Contractor's Art" (1978):

'Generally speaking, artists expect other people to build the galleries, theatres, concert halls, studios and colleges in which they will work, display their works, or teach about their works.

For over three years artists at *The Blackie* have been putting on overalls and building their own home – a community cultural project...<sup>62</sup>

This was more than just a refurbishment project; however, it was, as they stated, effectively: '...a new building within old walls'<sup>63</sup>. Begun in 1975, *The Blackie* project was run by various artists from across Merseyside, and abroad they employed an architect, engineer, and surveyor as professional advisers. The artists themselves carried out the building labour and, to satisfy the Liverpool building unions and through a government Job Creation Project of the time, employed '...a workforce of older construction workers who provide the experience which makes the work of the whole team possible.'<sup>64</sup>

This co-operative and collectivist working process is engaged in a form of self-build using what were then cheap reclaimed materials from local demolished buildings '...the old Stork

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<sup>62</sup> Blackie, the, 'The Contractor's Art', *Architects' Journal*, v.168 n.28, (12/07/1978) 67-70.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, p.67.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*

Hotel and the old Davis Lewis Theatre'.<sup>65</sup> *The Blackie* example from 1978 still stands as a remarkable achievement in self-build and self-motivation in the face of central government inaction and cuts in arts funding and the rehabilitation and recycling of local community spaces to alternative uses. The team at *The Blackie* did not (and do not) see this as a singular project; they intended the project to stand as an example of what can be done by self-determined individuals.<sup>66</sup>

'It is also, most importantly, an experience which the Blackie proposes to share with others. Anyone determined to build their own home on this scale can turn to the Blackie for help.'<sup>67</sup>

The Blackie, which was renamed The Black-E in 2005,<sup>68</sup> still uses the former Great George Street Congregational Church and continues to operate as an arts and community centre.

The Liverpool Housing Co-ops, and the Blackie, were community executed. The use of architect, engineer and surveyor on the Blackie as professional advisers is presented as peripheral element of project completed by community labours and experienced builders. It seems likely that the 'professionals' in this case were recruited in order to meet the legal requirements of such an undertaking and were not involved in the realisation of the project. Here the 'other' has taken central position in the process, initiating, constructing and realising their project themselves. The value of the Architectural professions here is they are used to tick the box as required by the legal structures that guarantee these professions hegemony over Architecture, if not architecture.

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<sup>65</sup> Blackie, Op cit., p.67

<sup>66</sup> Ibid

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, p.69

<sup>68</sup> Black-E, the. 'Our Name', *The Black-E*, 2011. [theblack-e.co.uk/content/about-us/our-name](http://theblack-e.co.uk/content/about-us/our-name) [Accessed 31<sup>st</sup> March 2012]

As with the Blackie example, the Liverpool Co-ops reduced the role of the Architect to minimal significance. The 'other', again in the form of current residents frustrated with Council inaction, took control of their housing situation, managed and engaged in its improvement.

However, it is curious that, as the scheme to regenerate the housing of Liverpool 8 gained momentum, the establishment of the secondary housing association was deemed necessary. The development of the 'design team' (details of which are not provided) implies that, as the number of co-operatives increased, more hierarchy was introduced, and they further conformed to the Architectural profession's model of the how to 'do architecture'.

The recommendations made by Clay, however, do suggest that a reasonable cap in size would prevent the co-op becoming so unwieldy as to require such structures. National Housing Service as a secondary housing association seems to have been introduced to manage multiple co-operatives but one must ask why this was deemed necessary? Is this the Architectural status quo reasserting itself again? If so the maintenance of small syndicates to manage an individual co-operative would be more appropriate and ensure the 'other' maintains control of the process rather than subscribing to Architecture and its modus operandi.

The expansion of the co-op scheme it may seem logical if it was seen to 'work' at Yates Street and Corn Street. However, it would seem what worked at Yates Street and Corn Street was the local street management of the process of improvement, as carried out by the residents, merely expanding the co-operative (as the residents of Yates Street and Corn Street declined to do<sup>69</sup>) would lose this localism and encourage the establishment of management structures and bureaucracy. The other aspect of this example that requires

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<sup>69</sup> Clay, Op cit., p.37

problematisation is the notion of a General Improvement Area; an alternative to 'slum clearance', were deployed in many UK cities in the nineteen seventies.

'General Improvement Areas (GIAs) were introduced by the 1969 Housing Act. Run-down inner city areas were designated for conservation through improvement grants to individual owners and environmental grants to local authorities to upgrade the area as a whole. They ranged from 300–800 homes. Some were sold off at great profits to owner occupiers.'<sup>70</sup>

Liverpool 8 was an exception to this rule as the inability to buy, due to refusal of lenders to give mortgages in this area meant the co-operatives were established to gain access to funds for improvements.<sup>71</sup>

Vast areas of English inner cities were, effectively, written off by the deployment of GIAs. They were taken out of public hands and offered at reduced cost to sitting tenants. The designation of the General Improvement Area is it seems a rather opaque process but one which resulted, as Power and Mumford point out above, invariably in what we would now term gentrification. It can be argued that this is what occurred in Liverpool; however, the lack of owner-occupiers and the low standard of the housing stock at the time means, it is better characterised as rehabilitation. However, despite the General Improvement Area being seen as an alternative to slum clearance, Corn Street and Yates Street are the only two streets of houses dating to before the nineteen seventies in the Toxteth area today.

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<sup>70</sup> Power, Anne & Mumford, Katharine. *The slow death of great cities? Urban abandonment or urban renaissance*. (York: The Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 1999). p.vii

<sup>71</sup> Clay, Op cit., p.37

Corn & Yates St



Figure 4. The terraced houses of Corn and Yates Street, Toxteth, Liverpool, 2021, indicated by the yellow arrow. Surrounded by land cleared in the 1970s rebuilt as short terraces, and semi-detached social housing.

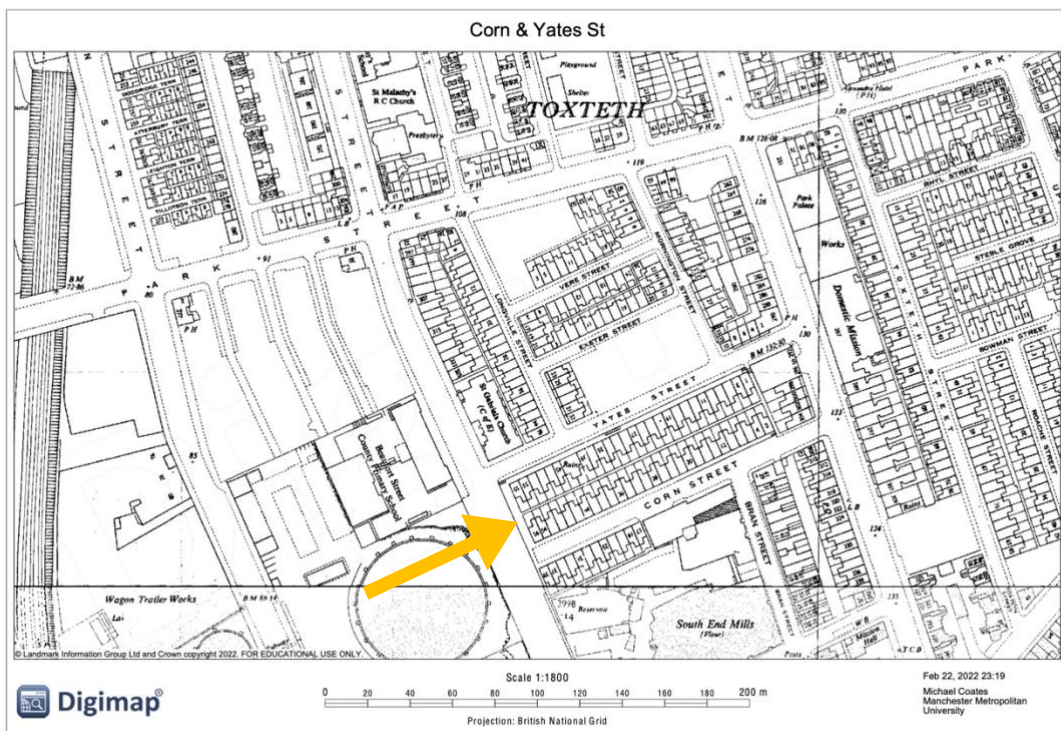


Figure 5. The terraced houses of Corn and Yates Street, Toxteth, Liverpool, as they appeared in the 1950s. It is obvious from these images the scale of the clearance that took place, some of it having begun at this point (see blank areas middle left of the image, to the north of Beaufort street County Primary School).

The advent of the General Improvement Area would have meant a marked change in attitude on the part of the 'others' in this case. From one of reliance, residents were '...distressed by the inadequate rate of house improvements in their area.'<sup>72</sup> to one of mutual aid and autonomy. In these circumstances, therefore, it is not the Architect but the broader establishment of Architecture, the local authority that created albeit unintentionally, an opportunity for the mass housing cultural logic to shift for one group of tenants. As Clay points out this mode of rehabilitation and tenure:

'...co-operative can provide a valuable alternative form of tenure in a severely depressed area like Liverpool 8 (unemployment is 30 per cent and rising), then a demand can probably be found in any area.'<sup>73</sup>

The period and location of my focus is the nineteen seventies, predominantly in England, a key period within which the architectural establishment in the form of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) was in crisis<sup>74</sup> and the organisation of factions within the profession of Architecture occurred.<sup>75</sup> This moment reflected a wider malaise in the country at large: the advent of "stagflation" (inflation and economic stagnation) mass strikes and industrial action.<sup>76</sup> The nineteen seventies in England are noted for the 1973-4 Oil Crisis, the Punk revolt of 1976-7, the 'Winter of Discontent' 1978-9 and the rise to power of Margaret Thatcher's Conservative Government. These dates are worth bearing in mind as one reads the following sections of this thesis as they suggest a correlation to wider socio-economic and political phenomenon with more prosaic English architectural considerations.

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<sup>72</sup> Clay, Op cit., p.37

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, p.38

<sup>74</sup> RIBAJ, (1975) "Rank and file dissent: the RIBA crisis 1971-72", *Royal Institute of British Architects' Journal*, v.84, n.2, pp.10-16.

<sup>75</sup> Karpf, Anne. "The Pressure Groups", *Architects' Journal*, (19/10/1977), v.166 n.42, 728-734.

<sup>76</sup> Beckett, Andy. *When The Lights Went Out: What Really Happened to Britain in the Seventies*. (London: Faber & Faber, 2009)

# CHAPTER TWO:

## THE ARCHITECTURE PROFESSION(S)

### AND OTHERS

The principal focus of this chapter is on the power relationships in 'Architecture' and, therefore, the relationship between 'Architects' (both capitalised to indicate the professions of architecture and architectural establishment) as opposed to merely the practice of creating architecture with a small 'a', buildings. The 'others' here indicates all those who are not part of the architectural establishment, including non- or anti-establishment architects. This chapter consists of two main parts, Part A will address the creation of The Architect. We will be looking at definitions of the invention of the profession and how we understand this historically and culturally This will be based on the analysis of the work of Sir Howard Colvin and Dana Arnold primarily. I will also look at alternative definitions of Architecture and the Architect from the ARC, and ARC members Adam Purser and George Mills on the crisis enveloping the RIBA and the 'Rank and File Dissent of the early-nineteen seventies which sets the scene for the ARC's emergence in 1974.

Part B will examine the 'Other' in this context, looking at how non-architects and architect enables, such as the South London (SOLON) Housing Co-operative and Walter Segal have enabled non-architects to engage with 'doing architecture'. And begin to define An Anarchism of architecture by looking at the multifarious ways in which the people of 'These Islands' have housed themselves and established land tenure from before the Early Mediaeval Period (5<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup> Centuries CE).

Most human beings occupy or are subject to architecture to some degree, most significantly housing architecture or dwellings of one sort or another. Even if one does not occupy a permanent dwelling, which can be defined as building, one is then defined by that fact by society at large; homeless, traveller, etc. The principal phenomena on which my thesis will develop are the moments in which the architectural process of housing people, or more pertinently people housing themselves, combines with the 'other' (either as groups or individuals) to realise architecture without architects. Not as Bernard Rudofsky (the original coiner of this term<sup>77</sup>) would have it but as the ARC and Anson would have it. The building or buildings, with the skills and abilities of the architecture, but outside of Architecture and the strangle hold of the RIBA, as we will see more later in this Chapter and Chapter 3.

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<sup>77</sup> Rudofsky, Bernard, *Architecture without architects: a short introduction to non-pedigreed architecture*. (London: Academy Editions, 1972)



## Part A

### Architect with a capital 'A' – the architectural establishment.

The definition of architecture can be simply put, as the South African architect Rex Martienssen did in 1925, as follows: 'Architecture is the expression in concrete form of an ideal.'<sup>78</sup> However, this broad definition could also be used for design, or indeed almost any form of making. Architecture is of course phenomenally more complicated than this and has been subject to many interpretations before and since Martienssen made his statement in 1925. The role of the architect and his emergence as a capital 'A' Architect is somewhat easier to chart and perhaps more valuable in the context of this thesis.

### Howard Colvin

Howard Colvin (1919–2007), or to give him his full title Sir Howard Montagu Colvin, CVO, CBE, FBA, FRHistS, FSA, was an architecture historian who wrote the seminal book *A Biographical Dictionary of British Architects, 1600–1840*, ostentatiously described by the Yale University Press as the '...authoritative and now classic work of reference on the history of British architecture.'<sup>79</sup> Colvin was a pillar of the British architectural establishment in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, and thus perhaps the most establishment members of the establishment that was British architecture at that time. In addition to his above listed titles and honours he served at one time or another in his life as Fellow of St John's College, Oxford, a member of the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England, a member of the Historic Buildings Council for England, and a member of the Royal Fine Art Commission. In 'The Practice of Architecture, 1600-1840' the opening chapter of his 1954 book *A Biographical Dictionary of British Architects 1600-1840* Colvin writes:

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<sup>78</sup> Martienssen, "What is Architecture?"

<sup>79</sup> Yale University Press. 'A Biographical Dictionary of British Architects, 1600-1840'. 2008. *Choice* (Chicago, Ill.), 46.03: 46-1225-46-1225.

‘...the history of British architecture is bound up with its own practice, and the careers of those architects and master workmen who figure in [the] Dictionary would scarcely be intelligible without some idea of the conditions under which they designed and built.’<sup>80</sup>

These 18<sup>th</sup> Century men, who defined the architectural profession, emerged from the building trades of London, predominantly. They emerged initially from the ranks of the master craftsmen and masons of London. Therefore, architects and architecture in England was indeed ‘mere building’<sup>81</sup> at least at first: ‘For in 1600 there were no architects in the sense which we understand the term today.’<sup>82</sup> Even the seven-year education of the modern architect, clung to so protectively by the Architects’ Registration Board (ARB) and RIBA, can be traced back to the master craftsmen of the City of London Guilds. These master workmen, as Colvin refers to them, ‘...served an apprenticeship normally of seven years, then worked as journeymen, and eventually achieved the status of independent master craftsmen.’<sup>83</sup> Thus this route devised by the London Guilds in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century still forms the basis for architecture education in Britain today in 2022.

As Colin Ward wrote in his 1987 article “Community Architecture: What a Time It Took for the Penny to Drop!”:

‘[Architects] never actually intended to become part of a professional conspiracy against the laity. Ordinary self-esteem and the imperative to be socially useful, as well as the fact that training for the profession takes seven

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<sup>80</sup> Colvin, Howard. *A Biographical Dictionary of British Architects 1600-1840*, 4<sup>th</sup> Edn., )1<sup>st</sup> Edn. 1954), (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2008), p.15

<sup>81</sup> Martiensen, Op cit., p.43

<sup>82</sup> Colvin, Op cit., p.15

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, p.16

years, convinced architects that they had something unique and indispensable to offer to the adventure of building.<sup>84</sup>

The seven-year training may be the origin of the myriad issues created by Architecture and Architects, not its justification, but its cause. This control of all building by the architectural profession(s) began longer ago than one might imagine. Colvin writes that by 1730 the Architect had begun to assert complete control over the architectural process of building buildings:

‘...from about 1730 it [craftsmanship] is doing the will of the architect to an extent which it had never done before. The pressure of this new architectural discipline was to increase until, by the end of the eighteenth century, the craftsman had sunk to the level of mere executant, dependent for every detail upon the working drawings supplied by the architect.’<sup>85</sup>

Here Colvin outlines the “beginning of the end” of the independent craftsman and later says that ‘...by the reign of George III...’<sup>86</sup> 1760-1820, rapid changes in architectural taste, driven by architects through their clientele in the upper classes, further imperilled the independence of the master craftsman. In parallel economic changes in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century led to a ‘...new type of builder who was more of an entrepreneur than a craftsman.’<sup>87</sup> and were by extension the speculators responsible for the construction of London’s West End in the first quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century as described by Bill Risebero,<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Ward, Colin. “Community Architecture: What a Time It Took for the Penny to Drop!” *Built Environment*, v. 13, no. 1 (1987): 7–14. p.8

<sup>85</sup> Colvin, Op cit., p.21

<sup>86</sup> Ibid

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, p.22

<sup>88</sup> Risebero, Bill, “Contrasts: Britain and American in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.” In \_\_\_\_ *Modern Architecture and Design: An Alternative History*. (London: The Herbert Press, 1982) pp.19-49

Gavin Weightman & Steve Humphries,<sup>89</sup> and Dana Arnold in her essential text on the subject *Re-presenting the Metropolis: Architecture, Urban Experience and Social Life in London 1800-1840* (Ashgate, 2000) Arnold is the next protagonist we will look at in this assessment of the development of The Architect.

### Dana Arnold

In *Re-presenting the Metropolis* this work Arnold sets out the development of

'The spread of London westwards from the early 18<sup>th</sup> Century stretched the shape of the city and as a consequence the City of London was subsumed into the expanding geography of the metropolis... The open fields which lay to the west of Westminster were ideally situated for development. This area was owned by key aristocratic families all of whom saw the potential for short- and long-term gain by building houses.'<sup>90</sup>

Two years after publishing *Re-presenting the Metropolis* the architectural historian Dana Arnold published the edited volume *Reading Architectural History* (2002). In this text which would become an invaluable introduction to many key ideas in the canon of architectural history she defines the Architect and their work within the canon as follows:

'The architect is the principal character involved in the design and gives the design its characteristics. Buildings in the post-medieval period are usually seen as more important if they have a named author, and if that author is recognised as part of the established canon of architectural history the building's status is

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<sup>89</sup> Weightman, Gavin, & Humphries, Steve. *The making of modern London: 1815 to the present day*, (London: Ebury Press, 2007)

<sup>90</sup> Arnold, Dana, *Re-presenting the Metropolis: Architecture, Urban Experience and Social Life in London 1800-1840*. (Ashgate, Aldershot, 2000), p.9

commensurate with that of its architect. In this way certain buildings become the principal work of their architects.<sup>91</sup>

Arnold acknowledges earlier on the same page that the question of Authorship is central to our understanding of the Architect. A concept taken as granted by the likes of Colvin or Sir John Newenham Summerson (1904-1992) to whom Arnold refers often, another prestigious architectural historian of the middle 20<sup>th</sup> Century, described by The National Portrait Gallery on their website thus:

'Summerson typified the professional Mandarinate that dominated government and the arts after the Second World War. Educated at Harrow and the Bartlett School of Architecture, Summerson turned to writing about architecture in the early 1930s under the pseudonym 'Coolmore'. He later wrote a number of books including *Architecture Here and Now* (1934), *Georgian London* (1946), *Ben Nicholson* (1948) and *The Life and Work of John Nash, Architect* (1981). In 1945 he became Curator of Sir John Soane's Museum in Lincoln's Inns Fields and remained in this post until his retirement in 1984, aged 80.<sup>92</sup>

He was also, notably for this topic of this thesis, the author of the authoritative history of the first century of the AA titled, *The Architectural Association, 1847–1947* (Pleiades Books, 1947).

These definitions of The Architect as provided by Colvin, Clarke and Arnold are key to understanding our definition of architecture or even the reliability of architectural history as a canon for recording the history of building buildings. Arnold writes:

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<sup>91</sup> Arnold, *Reading Architectural History*, p.37

<sup>92</sup> National Portrait Gallery, the. "Sir John Newenham Summerson", *The National Portrait Gallery*, no date. [npg.org.uk/collections/search/person/mp05802/sir-john-newenham-summerson](https://npg.org.uk/collections/search/person/mp05802/sir-john-newenham-summerson) [Accessed 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2022]

‘Yet the attraction of exploring architecture, or more specifically a building, through the life of its architect (author) remains a significant force in the construction of its histories. This is particularly the case when the architect has been identified as a major figure in the evolution of the architectural history.

Conversely, buildings without architects are pushed to the sidelines of history.’<sup>93</sup>

Arguably not only are such buildings ‘pushed to sidelines’, but totally excised from architectural history, forgotten entirely and eventually demolished as being of minimal importance. Similarly, the work of people within the field of architecture who are not architects or Architects, or are not seen as part of Architecture, is similarly excised from history. This the definition of The Architect is critical to the architectural historian. This is one of the various key questions of architectural history Arnold deals within this book. This thesis for example whilst definable as an architectural history (see Chapter 1) takes it as axiomatic that architectural history is not just about the products of the process of building buildings, Architecture does not equal architecture, and Architects are not the only people who can do architecture.

This question of ‘authorship’ is similarly crucial to understanding how we culturally conceive of who is and is not an architect, beyond a set of arbitrary professional accreditations. People recognised as the ‘authors’ of buildings are those who are canonised and who have myriad books written and lectures delivered on their work and genius. Michel Foucault and later Roland Barthes’ problematisation of the Authorship is also addressed by Arnold, writing:

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<sup>93</sup> Arnold, *Reading Architectural History*, p.35

‘An historian might have a thesis or method which drives his/her enquiry whereas a biographer has, perhaps, a particular view of an individual they wish to present.

Neither presents the truth, only an interpretation. This is not a new problem predicated on the writings of [E. H.] Carr or such theorists as Michel Foucault ... or Roland Barthes in the *Death of the Author*, which is concerned with how we read authorship. Indeed, the question can be traced back to antiquity as Plutarch differentiated between personality and historical events.<sup>94</sup>

Whilst Arnold sets out the problems associated with authorship, and says that works like Colvin’s, to which these pages of her book serve as an introduction, are particularly partial, writing: ‘Histories based on biographies can present a one-dimensional image of the architects involved...’<sup>95</sup> Inevitably the stature given to an architect and their work by architectural history is a marker of their importance to the future of architecture. The status and influence that ‘master architects’ such as le Corbusier, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Richard Rogers, or Frank Gehry, still hold over architectural history and architecture education is testament to this. These practices and attitudes mean that architectural history is significantly behind art historical definitions of authorship challenged by Foucault and Barthes amongst others. As Arnold writes the ‘...preoccupation with named architects is linked to the previously held view of the artist as genius/author in the discipline of art history. This view was challenged in 1970s ... But the idea of architect as genius endures...’<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Arnold, *Reading Architectural History*, p.35

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, p.41

This concept of the Architect, Genius is embraced by Architecture and the likes of the RIBA as it provides them with a constructed historical pedigree by which they can justify their elevated status in society. As Arnold ably and concisely illustrates:

'The preoccupation with identifying architects is also part of the process of recognising and defending the professional status of the architect. Here a chronological survey of the establishment of the professional, named architect over the amateur or anonymous craftsmen, is an independent historical enquiry...'<sup>97</sup>

Thus, we begin to see here from both Colvin, and to a greater extent Arnold, the assertion of the Architect as the sole arbiter of the process of 'building buildings' and the exclusion of the 'craftsman' from the decision making process of architecture in any meaningful way. The Architect as '...a professional *man* set aside from the building trade by education and specialised training...'<sup>98</sup> had begun to emerge and assert his specialised and gentlemanly credentials to elevate himself above 'mere builders', and by the 1810s the 'gentleman architect' was solidly established in The Society of Georgian London, as such is defined by Weightman and Humphries.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Arnold, *Reading Architectural History*, p.42

<sup>98</sup> Colvin, *Op cit.*, p.23

<sup>99</sup> Weightman, & Humphries, *Op cit.*, p.19



## A Gentleman Architect

One of the key means by which a profession can assert its exclusive right to a certain area of labour is through expertise, or the creation of an impression of expertise held by members of the profession. The professionalised capital 'A' Architect is born therefore as a gentleman, above the muckiness of the building trade, *he* is a professional artist not an artisan. This aloof separation continued into at least the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century when Nikolas Pevsner (famed Anglo-German architectural historian) said of Charles Francis Annesley Voysey. 'There is one more thing which must be said about Voysey and which places him further from Morris and close to us. He was a designer, not a craftsman. He could not in fact, ... work in any craft.'<sup>100</sup> By 'close to us' Pevsner is placing C. F. A Voysey as a truer Modernist than the other architects of his time. Voysey, Pevsner claims, did not "dirty his hands" with craftsmanship, or working on a building site, Voysey was a more distant, perhaps aloof and idealistic or even ideological architect, in the Modernist tradition.

Colvin cites the establishment of the Royal Academy in 1768 as representing '...the first official [Royal] recognition of the place which native artists and architects had created for themselves in the life of the nation. Five of the thirty-six original Academicians were architects.'<sup>101</sup> The establishment of the profession of the gentleman architect was furthered in 1791 by the founding of the Architects' Club (little more than a dining club) which, in 1796, adopted a resolution '...forbidding one architect from interfering in another's commission.'<sup>102</sup> Various other gentlemanly dining and drinking clubs ensued in the early years of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, leading eventually to the incorporation of the Institute of British Architects in 1835,

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<sup>100</sup> Pevsner, Nikolaus, "Pioneers of Modern Design, 1890-1914", in Chapter 1.1, Clark, Hazel, & Brody, David. *Design Studies: A Reader* (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2009) p.12

<sup>101</sup> Colvin, Op cit., p.30

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, p.31

gaining its Royal Charter in 1837, and renaming itself the Royal Institute of British Architects in 1866.<sup>103</sup>

From the perspective of this thesis the most damning definition of architecture as a profession designed to exclude others comes in the final page of Colvin's introduction:

'When the founders of the Institute of British Architects drew up their prospectus, they had no hesitation in decreeing that divorce between Architecture and Building which subsequent practice made absolute. No architect was to be eligible for membership who received 'any pecuniary consideration, or emolument, from Tradesmen, or who has any interest or participation in any Trade or Contract connected with Building'. Henceforth no architect would be able to supplement his income by speculative building, nor even by measuring and valuing works on behalf of builders.'<sup>104</sup>

This move to detach building from architecture is the beginning of the end of Architecture's relevance to the building of buildings (architecture) a process that has only accelerated since the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. This is precisely the argument that would be made by many critics both inside and outside of Architecture in the latter decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, as we will see in Chapters 4-6 with the exploration of the ideas of the ARC and its key pro/antagonist, Brian Anson. Colvin continues:

'But whatever he may have lost in financial opportunity, he gained in social status and respectability; for henceforth he would rank as a gentleman, a scholar and an artist, clearly distinguished from the 'mechanic' who called himself a builder.'<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Colvin, Op cit., p.36

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, p.35

<sup>105</sup> Ibid, p.37

In Colvin's survey of the profession, we see outlined the evolution of the architect as a gentlemanly professional placing himself above mere builders, and aloof from the trade, superior in social status. Whilst the profession has inevitably modernised socially in the past 200 years (if at a slower pace than the rest of society) it remains an "aristocratic" profession. The adherents of architectural professions (surveyors, structural and civil engineers, architects, planners, etc.) invariably emerge from the "red brick" or Russell Group universities, who on average recruit fewer than a quarter of their students from non-White ethnic groups.<sup>106</sup> In the United Kingdom architects are overwhelmingly able, straight, white, and male.<sup>107</sup>

Whilst Colvin states that the profession made a place for itself "in the life of the nation", Colvin fails to acknowledge that then, as now, architects concern themselves with servicing the rich and the upper echelons of society and large corporate interests; in 1791 when the Architects' Club was formed virtually no-one had contact with an architect, and virtually all building took place without their involvement, most pertinently, and importantly for the purposes of this thesis, in the form of the building of houses.

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<sup>106</sup> In the 2019 entry to Russell Group Universities over 70% of students were from White backgrounds at all the following institutions: Glasgow, Exeter, Edinburgh, Durham, Newcastle, York, Liverpool, Cardiff, Bristol, Leeds, Sheffield, Oxford, Southampton, and Cambridge. At Queen's University Belfast, that number is over 95%. Source: University and Colleges Admission Service. 'UCAS Undergraduate Sector-Level End of Cycle Data Resources 2019'. UCAS, 2019. [ucas.com/data-and-analysis/undergraduate-statistics-and-reports/ucas-undergraduate-sector-level-end-cycle-data-resources-2019](https://ucas.com/data-and-analysis/undergraduate-statistics-and-reports/ucas-undergraduate-sector-level-end-cycle-data-resources-2019) [Accessed 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2021]

<sup>107</sup> As of 8<sup>th</sup> November 2021, the Architects Registration Board (ARB) held Equality and Diversity data for 71.7% of their membership, of this cohort 82% are described as White, whereas 1% are described as Black or Black British. 71% of architects are male, and 79% of architects are heterosexual, and 93% are "not disabled". Source: Architects Registration Board, The; (2021) 'Equality & Diversity Data', ARB. [arb.org.uk/about-arb/equality-diversity/data](https://arb.org.uk/about-arb/equality-diversity/data) [Accessed 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2021]

There are suggestions, in the work of some Architect historians of architecture, that they can trace the origin of the Architect back to the Renaissance. Whilst this might be appealing to some (notably Andrew Saint) it is a touch fanciful when we consider the actual role of the architect in that period as compared to the nineteen seventies about which I write, or even today in the first quarter of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Saint almost demonstrates this self-awareness when he said in 2005:

‘...the modern idea of the architect as an artist and conceptualist, first clearly set out in Vasari [1511-1574]. Some diagnose a divorce between architects and engineers as originating out of the *disegno* revolution. That will only work if the architect is identified with the artist-conceiver of a project, and the engineer with its practical builder. But there is not much evidence for that view in Renaissance.’<sup>108</sup>

The architect of the 20<sup>th</sup> or 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, holds almost nothing in common with the *disegno* of Vasari’s age, beyond the belief that they are the “an artist and conceptualist”. The architect in the modern sense is a product of the industrial revolution, as Arnold and indeed Colvin writing in 1954, make very clear, and as we will shortly see next with Linda Clarke. Vasari’s “Architect” could never have survived the Industrial Revolution and the rise of global capitalism.

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<sup>108</sup> Saint, Andrew. “Architect and Engineer: A Study in Construction History.” *Construction History*, v.21 (2005-6): 21–30. [jstor.org/stable/41613892](https://www.jstor.org/stable/41613892), p.23 [Accessed 06 June 2023]

Linda Clarke

In the late 18<sup>th</sup> and into the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century Architects were in fact responsible for a very small amount of the actual construction of buildings, especially so as regards houses. The expansion of London during this period might be taken as an example of the practices most observed in British architecture. As Linda Clarke sets out in her book *Building Capitalism: Historical change and labour process in the production of the built environment* (1992) the professions of the people responsible for building London's new northern suburbs —the Southampton, Camden and Bedford Estates— were rapidly changing and involved almost no one considered an architect. The expansion of London's West End in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries led to a proliferation of houses, building methods, models, and associated trades.




Image redacted for  
copyright reasons.

Figure 6. "Octopium Landlordicuss" (1925) a Political postcard satirising the aristocratic estates of central London, many of which were still owned by the same families, then 100 years after they had been built in the 1820s, and remain in many of the same hands today, 200 years on.

To return to Arnold briefly, she writes:

'The spread of London westwards from the early 18<sup>th</sup> Century stretched the shape of the city and as a consequence the City of London was subsumed into the expanding geography of the metropolis... The open fields which lay to the west of Westminster were ideally situated for development. This area was owned by key aristocratic families all of whom saw the potential for short- and long-term gain by building houses.'<sup>109</sup>

These key aristocratic families, headed by peers such as Lord Southampton and the Duke of Bedford, began a process of 'measure and value' selling leases, usually of 99 years, for plots of land. The Bedford Estate reached north and west from the edge of London, then Tottenham Court Road, with Totten Hall itself, originally manor of William de Tottenhall, sitting approximately where Tottenham Court Road and Euston Road now cross<sup>110</sup>.

At this point (c.1770-1790) the process of 'measure and value' was the act carried out by architects, a role today more akin to that of a surveyor. As Clarke explains:

'...the architect or surveyor who supervised drew together the different drafts processes under the 'measure and value' system in the 18<sup>th</sup> century was not the same professional as the architect of the 19<sup>th</sup> century who was responsible for the designing buildings as commodities.'<sup>111</sup>

This arrangement of responsibilities was about to undergo a radical overhaul in the light of the development of capitalism and new labour processes, and the breakdown of the traditional guilds and the artisan system as set out by Colvin earlier in this chapter.

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<sup>109</sup> Arnold, *Re-presenting the metropolis*, p.9

<sup>110</sup> Walford, Edward. "Tottenham Court Road." In *Old and New London: Volume 4*. (London: Cassell, Petter & Galpin, 1878). 467-480.

<sup>111</sup> Clarke, Linda. *Building Capitalism: Historical change and labour process in the production of the built environment*. (London; New York: Routledge, 1992) p.3

Principally Clarke attributes this to the breakdown of the apprenticeship as the means of access into the craft trades. These transformative changes Clarke argues can be seen as an historical thread saying 'From the 1780s till its culmination in the 1830s, defence of the artisan system is one thread running through political action'<sup>112</sup> and citing the Gordon Riots of the 1780 as the start of this continuum of action. It is this process of the division of labour<sup>113</sup> that Clarke (citing E. Cooney) focusses on, between the master/artisan craftsman system and the emergence of the builder developer that really changes the nature of the built environment.

'Increasingly [1793] a division arose between, on the one hand master *craftsmen* confined to their own trade and contracting with other masters or workmen for the rest and, on the other hand *master builders* completing buildings through individual contracts and employing large bodies of labourers and workmen from all trades.'<sup>114</sup> [My italics]

'By the 1780s and 1790s, when Somers Town was built, such craftsmen-builders of very varying sizes virtually dominated the supply of housing [in London].'<sup>115</sup>

We can therefore see that during the final years of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century the nature of the building professions was changing radically. The process of the division of labour, as in later forms of capitalism, was beginning to assert itself and the developments of the master builder, begin to mirror Colvin's description of the emergence of the gentleman architect in the same period.

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<sup>112</sup> Clarke, Op cit., p.70

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> ibid, p.73

<sup>115</sup> ibid, p.74

More significantly for Clarke, and of relevance in the story of the development of the modern profession of the architect. 'The demise of artisan production and the emergence of a new class of capitalist builder were apparent in the development of Brill Farm...'<sup>116</sup> in Somers Town on the Camden Estate, London; an area ripe for development corralled between the railway lines running into Euston and St Pancras (see figure 6).



Figure 7. Somers Town, The Camden Estate, London 1870s

The early 19<sup>th</sup> Century saw the '...virtual disappearance of the craftsman-builder...'<sup>117</sup> but the development of Somers Town continued, after a brief hiatus. The capitalist builder, or speculative builder as is now the term, had by-and-large taken over from the craftsman-builder where Somers Town was concerned, a model to be repeated throughout the country over the following 100 years. The dominant craftsman-builder was one of the last examples of the process of building houses being directed, and to an extent controlled, by a large

<sup>116</sup> Clarke, Op cit., p.87

<sup>117</sup> Ibid, p.162



number of skilled working class individuals. The dividing up of control of the built environment between the all-controlling architect and the capitalist developer, was the almost inevitable result of a process of greater specialisation and a development of the Division of Labour. But why did the craftsman-builder disappear? One reason that Clarke provides are a series of bankruptcies during the Napoleonic Wars (1789-1816) of the craftsman-builders at Somers Town. We could infer this was a pattern that occurred elsewhere during this period. However, Clarke attributes the craftsman-builder's demise to something more fundamental and something that would have inevitably affected all craftsman-builders in London.

'If labour redundancies were one sign of the obsolescence of traditional organization so too was the declining value of apprenticeship, as well as journeymen, many masters... had not been apprenticed and thus as master practiced their trade illegally, 'Illegal masters' might be large employers with no allegiance to a particular trade of builder not classed in the apprentice trades.'<sup>118</sup>

We begin to see that the traditional boundaries between crafts guilds start to breakdown with these 'illegal masters' simply being men who acquired contracts or enough capitals to employ others to carry out works. People describing themselves in documents as merely 'builders' are cited by Clarke as an example of the '...virtual disappearance of the craftsman-builder in the 1790s.'<sup>119</sup>

Ultimately the end of the pre-eminence of the apprenticeship was the undoing of 'traditional trade organization', Clarke gives the repeal in 1814 of the Statute of Artificers as a clear moment of change.<sup>120</sup> '...this represented the dismantling of the political apparatus

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<sup>118</sup> Clarke, Op cit., p.165

<sup>119</sup> *ibid*, p.163

<sup>120</sup> *ibid*, p.219

conserving artisan organization' the preceding undermining of the apprenticeship as the mode of accessing the various building trades opened up the "closed shop" of the guilds making the traditional system all but impossible to maintain.<sup>121</sup>

Therefore, we can see the development of the capitalist builder and the parallel emergence of Colvin's gentlemen architect as interrelated. The capitalist builder with the means and men on contract to construct vast estates during the rapid industrial development of British cities in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century were sub-contracted by the gentlemen architects, working for the landed peers whose land was being developed. Clarke cites Somers Town as a case example of the demise of the last bastions of the craftsman-builder, and the rise of the professional architect and developer.

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<sup>121</sup> Clarke, Op cit., p.220

### The ARCs “A Short History of the Architectural Profession.”

In contrast to Colvin, Arnold or Clarke, Adam Purser of the ARC and NAM (The New Architecture Movement) gives us a rather more critical account of the development of the architectural professions in his *A Short History of the Architectural Profession* with the frontispiece showing it as published by New Architecture Movement in 1976 (see figure 7). Whilst this document was presumably distributed at the time, there is no record of actual publication. The version in my possession is a copy was given to me by Peter Moloney in 2013. The front and back covers sport images from Louis Hellman and a photo of the ARCs 1974 AA press conference along with an ad for the Morning Star (see figures, 8 + 9).

Most architecture in the world is vernacular all Architecture is either still vernacular or has emerged from the vernacular, as Chris Wilbert and Damian White cite regarding Ward.<sup>122</sup> Purser further makes this point in highlighting the fact that the demonstration of power requires a quantitatively different from of building, saying:

‘In a culture where men are not equal and where kings and lords wish to show their power, or that of their religions, large and impressive buildings are an ideal medium for their needs. In architectural terms, this means that while the vernacular traditions still continue for the majority of buildings, special buildings that needed to be uncommon were designed as a conscious choice of styles and systems, not necessarily related to the culture of the society for which they were intended.’<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Wilbert & White. *Autonomy, Solidarity, Possibility*, p.137

<sup>123</sup> Purser, Adam, and Architects’ Revolutionary Council. “A Short History of the Architectural Profession”, pamphlet produced by New Architecture Movement (1976), p.1

Purser here highlights the fact that immediately “special buildings” are created they divorce themselves from the normal day-to-day operation of the society from which they were conceived. These special forms then enter the mainstream of society due to fashions flowing down a social hierarchy, from Royalty to nobility, and nobility to the common man, until they become unfashionable, and Royalty redefines what is fashionable.<sup>124</sup> Architects were able to ride these waves of fashion to advance the status of their profession, at least initially.

Whilst the early years of the profession’s evolution (c.1750-1834) are addressed by Colvin, Purser however identifies the period after the founding of the Institute of British Architects in 1834 as when the architect as a gentleman professional ascended to his current social strata.

‘The period 1834 to 1870 shows the architect in his role as head of the building hierarchy working for the rich and powerful elite of society. By the 1880’s [sic] the industrial revolution had brought about a large and powerful bourgeoisie that was becoming both the controllers of technology and bureaucracy. Architects, being part of this class, were very much in tune with its desires and ambitions.’<sup>125</sup>

Thus, the Industrial Revolution’s creation of the bourgeoisie creates the bourgeois architect as well. The architect in the Industrial Age becomes a more technically proficient professional, partly as triangulation to avoid his position being eroded by the emergence of the Engineer, and partly following the money as ever in designing ‘...railway terminals, factories, warehouses, etc.’<sup>126</sup>

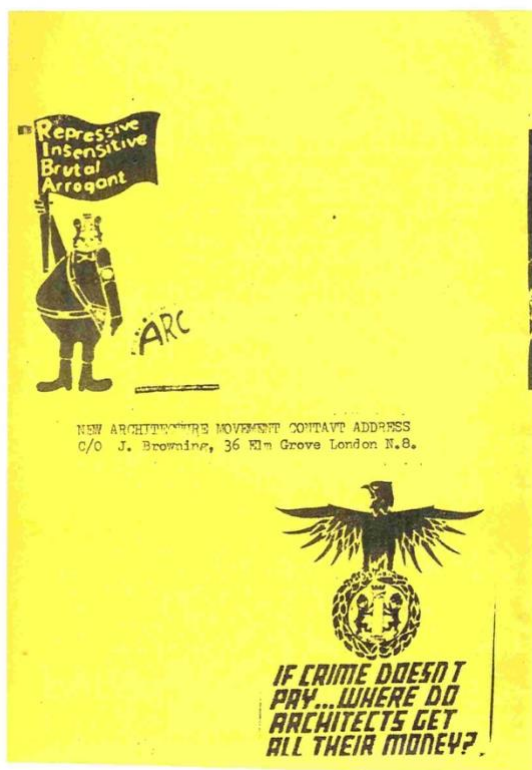
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<sup>124</sup> Purser and ARC, Op cit., p.2

<sup>125</sup> Ibid, p.6

<sup>126</sup> Ibid, p.7

The next significant step in the development of an architectural establishment for my purposes, and to bring us into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century the period of focus for this thesis, was the RIBA's effective stranglehold on architectural education. This was achieved through rather nefarious means in the nineteen-thirties with the advent of the Architects Registration Acts of 1931<sup>127</sup> and 1938<sup>128</sup>. These Acts of Parliament resulted in the establishment of the Architects Registration Council of the United Kingdom (ARCUK) (after 1996 known as the Architects Registration Board (ARB)) which in the 1938 Act gained control of the education of architects, ostensibly to ensure the quality of those training as architects.



Preface

The purpose of this thesis is to show the development of the architectural profession from its origins to the present day. With its development it has become obvious that to do the subject justice, it would need to be a book in its own right. Therefore, it is much regretted that too many issues are dealt with far too briefly, but I do believe that it is of sufficient credibility to be worthy of note, and a valuable introduction to the subject for people becoming interested in the profession for the first time. There is a short reading list at the end for those interested in understanding my source of material. I hope that within a few years it might be possible to create the book this subject demands.

My thanks to Brian Anson, George Mills and the year I spent as a member of the Architects Revolutionary Council, which enabled a concentrated study of the architectural profession. I hope that this study reflects a socialist perspective and I thank the Communist Party of Great Britain for improving my Marxist analysis, at which I am no expert.

I dedicate this work to the principle of the New Architecture Movement: "For all, a better environment".

Front illustration by kind permission of L. Hellman.  
Other illustrations courtesy of ARC.

Figure 8. Frontispiece and Preface.

<sup>127</sup> HM Government (1931), Architects (Registration) Act 1931 (Repealed 21.7.1997) [legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Geo5/21-22/33/contents](http://legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Geo5/21-22/33/contents) [Accessed 25<sup>th</sup> September 2018]

<sup>128</sup> HM Government (1938), Architects Registration Act 1938 (repealed 21.7.1997) [legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Geo6/1-2/54/contents](http://legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Geo6/1-2/54/contents) [Accessed 25<sup>th</sup> September 2018]

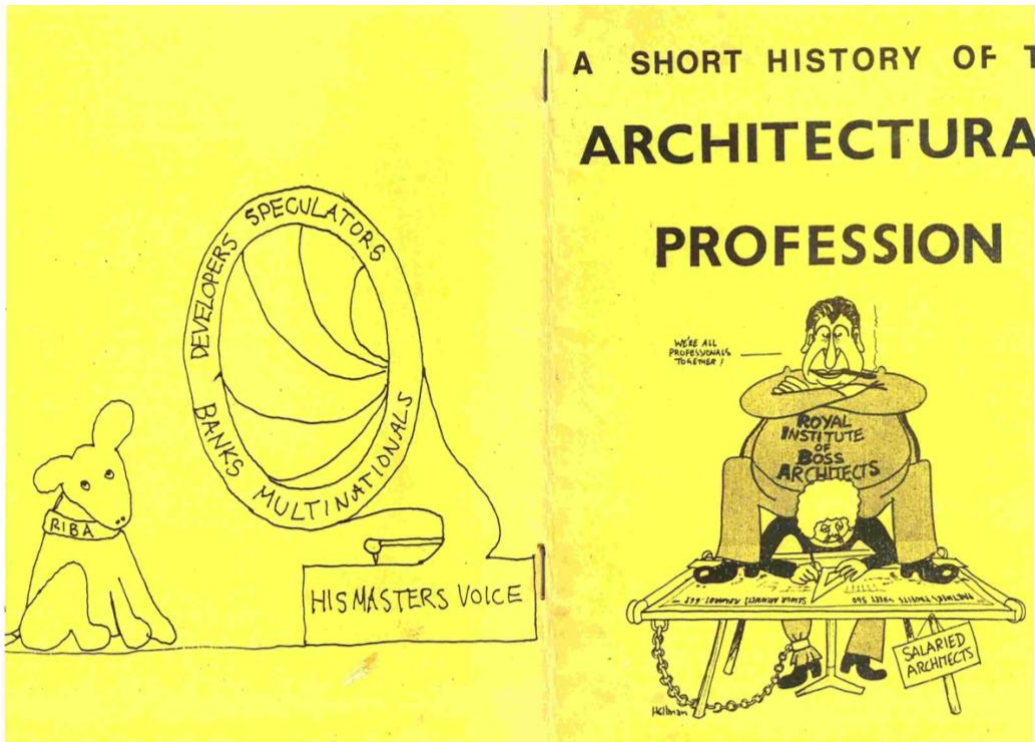


Figure 9. Front cover.

As Purser observes:

'The ARCUK Council could either conduct its own examination system, or recognise the courses run by other bodies as being of sufficient standards to qualify for registration. However the RIBA had its own Education Boards, which administered its own examination system and, by the use of the RIBA majority [on the ARCUK Council] it delegated the ARCUK Education Board responsibility for education to its own RIBA Board of Education.

The RIBA's acquisition of control of architectural education was a decisive step for it meant that all architects had to gain their qualifications through RIBA channels.<sup>129</sup>

<sup>129</sup> Purser and ARC, Op cit., p.10

Those people who see the need for national collective action must not move so fast as to isolate themselves from what politically is not a very advanced mass of architects.

However, it is already necessary to have some services provided for the movement as a whole, newsletter, liaison, conference organisation. Here it is essential to see these needs as services to the whole movement, there must be no domination by an executive body. As such, I would see any person acting in this capacity strictly as a servant of the movement.

This course of action must be the basis of the movement for some time, indeed it would be negation of my principles to suppose any other ideal, other than full individual participation in the movement.

We must all be aware that this degree of total decentralisation also has its dangers. Firstly, it may lack a competent approach to key issues that could be provided by collective resources. Secondly, it may produce different views on the same subject and so confuse an attack on some issues. What is essential is that the differing views lead to the best attack on a common enemy.

The tool of organisation is a double-sided weapon, lack of it advances confusion, heavy handed use of organisation reduces the participation of the membership at large and so decreases the strength of the organisation. In the future, the New Architecture Movement will have to develop a democratic process that promotes personal participation and collective action.

At present, the membership is informal and we rely on voluntary work to respond to as many of the issues as possible. As the movement grows, it will necessitate more action in a more concerted way on issues. Eventually, it will be taking on so many issues that it will only be effective if it is capable of day to day decisions, though this is some way away.

My commitment is to changing society and architecture. I have not set a deadline for this to be achieved, but I will do all I can to develop it in the best and most viable way possible.  
"For All, a Better Environment" and the Cornish motto, "One for All and All for One".

Books which may be of interest to you:

The Development of the Architectural Profession, Barrington Kay,

Architect and Patron, Jenkins.

Town and Revolution, Anatol Kopp

RIBA Journal, June 1975, Article on the Architectural Profession.

Adam Purser,

February, 1976.

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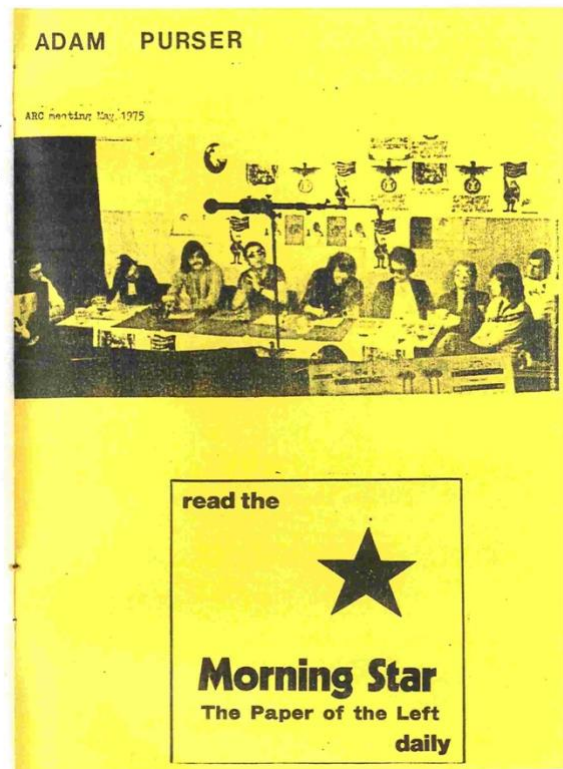


Figure 10. Back cover.

Therefore, due to the RIBA's majority on the ARCUK Council since its inception in 1931 the RIBA was able to seize control of architectural education to its own furtherance, and in an abuse of the spirit of the legislation<sup>130</sup> and to the detriment of the then other member of the ARCUK Council, the Architectural Association. Today all 7 representatives of the architectural profession on the 15 member ARB Board are Chartered members of the RIBA, and some are members of the RIBA National Council: the remaining 8 are appointees of the Privy Council and not architects.<sup>131</sup>

<sup>130</sup> Purser and ARC, Op cit., p.10

<sup>131</sup> The Architects Registration Board, 'Board Members', ARB, no date. [arb.org.uk/board-members](http://arb.org.uk/board-members) [Accessed 1st October 2018]

*Come on lads–get your balls back!*

At some point in the mid-nineteen seventies George Mills, founder member of the ARC and future co-founder of the renowned Manchester architecture practice Mills Beaumont Leavey Channon (MBLC, later MBLA) wrote an undated document from the ARC's base in near Huddersfield, Yorkshire. As the ARC did not have based in Yorkshire until 1976 we must presume the letter is after this point which is part open letter to the profession, part manifesto, part call to arms. Entitled “Come on lads–get your balls back!”<sup>132</sup> in what is a rather of its time and misogynist appeal to the “lads” of the architecture professions needing to “have balls” to deal with their unfair working conditions. This document serves as a bridge between the ideas set out by Purser and the ongoing crisis within the RIBA, which I will address in more detail in the next section in looking at its beginning with the rank-and-file dissent in the profession in 1971-72.<sup>133</sup>

As Mills writes at the start of his essay:

“Unqualified” people make up over 50% of the staff in architectural offices. This group of ‘all sorts’ - draughtsmen, people with ONC/OND's, members of SAAT (through either long service or examination) partially qualified architects/engineers and 'didn't bother to do my thesis' designers, are the mainstay of architectural practice in this country. It is irrefutable that they are regarded in every respect as second class citizens, by the bosses of architecture; real fodder,<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Mills, George and The ARC, “Come on lads–get your balls back!”, no date. Author’s personal collection.

<sup>133</sup> RIBAJ, (1975) “Rank and file dissent: the RIBA crisis 1971-72”, in *Royal Institute of British Architects’ Journal*, v.84, n.2. p.11

<sup>134</sup> Mills and The ARC, “Come on lads–get your balls back!”.



Whilst the qualifications mentioned here the Ordinary National Certificate and Diploma (ONC/OND, obsolete further education qualifications) and membership of SAAT (Society of Architectural and Associated Technicians, 1965-86) are unfamiliar to us today, the hierarchy of the profession is not. The division of labour evident here is all too familiar to many areas of labour in 2022, especially so in academia for example. This document sets out to highlight the disparities of the architects' office of the nineteen seventies and cast this division of labour as a clear part of the broader 'class war' so prevalent at the time in mainstream political discourse. Mills continues:

'The ARC is only too well aware that the architectural establishment has a vested interest in maintaining this class structure in architectural practice and education. In all honesty, in architectures present demise, the details and intricacies that are the sphere of the assistants and technicians, are the ONLY qualitative [sic] parts, the saving graces, of most buildings.'<sup>135</sup>

This comment reinforces the distinctions I make earlier in this chapter between Architecture and architecture, as whilst buildings (architecture) are of value, as are many of the skills involved in their design and construction, Architecture (with a capital 'A') is not of similar value. Similarly, the work of assistants and technicians is cited by Mills as being 'the saving graces of most buildings' at least that this point in the nineteen seventies.

Mills professes his, and one must assume the ARCs, view of the reality of the role of the Architect towards the end of the document:

'The reality is that architects are in a very vulnerable position when they profess to be masters on even students of their art. They are not, and they and their

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<sup>135</sup> Mills and The ARC, Op cit.

governing body should accept that and for the sake of society and architecture, face the reality. ARCHITECTS ARE NOT SUPERIOR IN THEIR WORKING SITUATION AND HAVE CEASED INTERPRETING SOCIAL NEED AND DESIRE CORRECTLY.<sup>136</sup> [original emphasis]

This clear statement that the superiority of architects is not warranted or justified is central to ARC's campaign. Their aims to undermine the architectural establishment, destroy the RIBA, and the social hierarchy, including the class system, which supports Architects and Architecture, whilst maintaining the skills and social value of architects and architecture.

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<sup>136</sup> Mills and The ARC, Op cit.

## Rank and file dissent: the RIBA in crisis

The Royal Institute of British Architects Journal (RIBA J) article “Rank and file dissent: the RIBA crisis 1971-72”, from June 1975 sets out what the RIBA J editor saw then as the basis for the ongoing crisis of the profession. The article breaks down what it calls ‘...The factors which caused the dissension of rank-and-file members in 1971...’<sup>137</sup> into four sections. These are briefly:

1. The public image of architects.
2. Local government reorganisation of 1974.
3. The Industrial Relations Act 1971 (No. 4) Order 1972.
4. The lack of representation by the RIBA of salaried members.<sup>138</sup>

Points 1 and 4 could easily be claimed as continuing issues for architects today, points 2 and 3 are clearly more specific to the broader industrial relations of their time but reflective of the position of architects both in society and of how they saw themselves, aloof from the concerns of the ordinary workers. The context of the profession was quite different from where architects find themselves today. As the first lines of the article sets out:

‘Only about a quarter of all architects are now principals in private practice, but it is a widely held belief, among both architects and outside observers, that the Institute remains an organisation primarily meant for private practices and run by principals for principals.’<sup>139</sup>

The above is illustrative of the fact that by the mid-nineteen seventies many architects worked in “official” practices, meaning they were employed by local and central government largely building housing. Indeed, State house building in England had peaked in the late-

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<sup>137</sup> RIBA J, “Rank and file dissent”, p.11

<sup>138</sup> *ibid*

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid*, p.10

nineteen sixties with over 350,000 units being produced per year, with a subsequent drop off to 150,000 in the early nineteen seventies and another rise to around 220,000 by the mid nineteen seventies.<sup>140</sup> These peaks and troughs map neatly onto the nature of central government at these times. The two Harold Wilson Labour administrations from 1964-1966 and 1966-1970, the Edward Heath Conservative administration, 1970-1974 and Wilson's final period as Prime Minister between 1974 and 1976. Little changed throughout the Tory administrations of Thatcher and later Cameron, where the focus was on the private sector providing the requisite housing units to meet the government policy targets. Even the Labour Blair/Brown administrations of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century private house builders remained the preferred option the end of mass state sponsored house building in the 1980 Housing Act maps neatly on to the time period under investigation in this thesis



Image redacted for  
copyright reasons.

Figure 11. Hellman cartoon (2014) comparing the statements on house building targets by former Labour Prime Minister Harold Wilson and then Tory Prime Minister David Cameron.

The nineteen seventies were a period of radical politics provoked by political and economic decline, and public resentment at central government's inability to deal with the crises of the

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<sup>140</sup> Fullfact. "House building in England." *Fullfact*, 22/03/2018. [fullfact.org/economy/house-building-england](http://fullfact.org/economy/house-building-england) [Accessed 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2019]

period. The Seventies were also the period in which the boundaries of social acceptability and norms of society, in relation to sex, gender, women's liberation, sexuality, which were pushed so hard in the nineteen sixties, became accepted, generally speaking. By the mid-nineteen seventies this radical attitude had found expression in the architectural professions also. As the journalist and author and, Anne Karpf noted in her article, for the *Architects' Journal*, "The Pressure Groups", in October 1977:

'Architects, recently, have abbreviated themselves. To the outsider, cryptic collections of capitals like SAG, NAM, ACA, ARC, AOA, AIC, suggest a secret uncrackable code. To the initiated, they – and other, more explicit titles – represent the plethora of architectural pressure groups, and are almost invariably associated with the strong vein of discontent which runs through the profession.'<sup>141</sup>

At the start of her article, Karpf refers to the Salaried Architects Group (SAG), New Architecture Movement (NAM), Association of Consultant Architects (ACA), Architects Revolutionary Council (ARC), Association of Official Architects (AOA) and Architects in Industry and Commerce (AIC). These are all associations set up in the economic downturn of the mid- to late-nineteen seventies in opposition to the architectural ruling classes, namely the RIBA. Members of some of these groups worked directly with residents in participatory practices of architecture, slum clearance, and community preservation. Many went on to form pressure groups and architecture practices that were occupant/user/resident focussed, as we will see in later chapters of this thesis, namely, SOLON, the New Architecture Movement (NAM), and later the Feminist Design Collective and later still Matrix.<sup>142</sup> A key point to make here however is that whilst SAG, NAM, ACA, AOA, AIC, etc.

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<sup>141</sup> Karpf, Op cit., p.728

<sup>142</sup> Ibid, p.730-732

were set up to reform or replace the RIBA, the ARC questioned the very existence of the profession of architecture. The basis of their argument is the superior social status associated with the title of architect. The Association of Official Architects (AOA) referred to, amongst others, by Karpf as one of the many 'cryptic collections of capitals'<sup>143</sup> was in fact established in 1960 as a negotiating body by the RIBA to act as a trade union.<sup>144</sup>

'The Association of Official Architects, though registered and active as a union, has never succeeded in attracting enough of its potential membership to make its voice at all powerful.'<sup>145</sup>

It is conceivable that this group representing 'salaried members' of the RIBA (along with SAG, AIC and ACA) set up to operate as trade union, a function that the RIBA is prohibited from fulfilling by charter, may have been a real threat to the supremacy of the RIBA. Especially given that:

'The ruling group in the RIBA has been self-perpetuating in the sense that private architects have continued to be attracted as candidates for election to the Council. The traditional non-political system of elections also tended to favour those who were already well known, which meant principals... 'An unrepresentative Council could peacefully survive only as long as it did not antagonise the majority.'<sup>146</sup>

This disassociation within The Profession can be taken to mean the RIBA and all affiliated Architects. For our purposes here this shall be rendered as The Profession, capitalised to

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<sup>143</sup> Karpf, Op cit., p.728

<sup>144</sup> Millerson, Geoffrey. *The Qualifying Associations: A Study in Professionalization*, (London: Routledge, 1964) p.293

<sup>145</sup> RIBAJ, "Rank and file dissent" p.11

<sup>146</sup> *ibid*

indicate that this is not a given architect, but rather the hegemony of the RIBA. The unnamed RIBA author believes, somewhat naively from our perspective in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, that the salaried architect could not be served by trade unions or anyone outside of The Profession, saying:

‘...salaried architects came to realise that their interests were not represented in dealings with institutions outside the profession...

‘Salaried architects in general, but those in large organisations in particular, were thus faced with the possibility that their own representative bodies might be denied a voice, while the only unions they could join were unsympathetic to professional attitudes.’<sup>147</sup>

This is one of number of observations made about trade unions at the time, the unspoken but obvious implication being that professional such as architects could find no common cause with: ‘...clerical, administrative or even manual workers.’<sup>148</sup> Indeed, as the RIBA goes on to describe:

‘Trade unions are rooted in the conflict between labour and capital, but professionalism is an ideology which stands outside the capitalist system insofar as it places emphasis on service to the client rather than profit.’<sup>149</sup>

The irony of this statement is, I hope, not lost on the reader today.

Under point 4, introduced above, the RIBA in pursuit of the same argument and, to my mind contradictorily, sees a fundamental crisis in the profession as being the division between the RIBA and the salaried architect (the former representing the Principals and the

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<sup>147</sup> RIBA, “Rank and file dissent”, p.11

<sup>148</sup> Ibid

<sup>149</sup> Ibid, p.12

latter being employed (and exploited) by them). The irony of the lack of need for trade unionism in Architecture is entirely evident here. The management v worker relationship of Principals/RIBA to the salaried architect is glaringly obvious in the author's own text, but they are apparently incapable of making this connection:

'4. At the heart of the problem was the position of the RIBA itself, for it has always attempted to embrace the entire profession without actually doing anything specifically for its salaried members.'<sup>150</sup>

The RIBA's apparent lack of ability, or perhaps more accurately unwillingness, to act for salaried members begins to explain the tensions within the profession at this point.

There was a general sense in the nineteen seventies that the powers that be were failing to address the problems created by what we would now refer to as "globalisation". Britain had surrendered all of its major colonial possessions by 1978 and was reorienting itself from being a global empire to a middle-sized nation in globalised economy. This inevitably difficult reorientation, including joining, in 1973, and reaffirming, in 1975, its membership of the European Economic Community (EEC) had significant social repercussions. At least part of this manifested as a rejection of existing Imperial orthodoxy, especially amongst the younger generation coming of age in the late nineteen-seventies.<sup>151</sup> The curious reaction to this failure of the old guard in Britain was a reversion to Conservatism with a capital 'C', with the landslide election of Margret Thatcher's Conservative government in May 1979. In architectural circles in Britain the obvious manifestation of the small 'c' conservative Imperial British orthodoxy was and is the RIBA. The profession is the obstacle to the true democratic

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<sup>150</sup> RIBAJ, "Rank and file dissent", p.12

<sup>151</sup> Kynaston, David. *Austerity Britain: 1945-51* (London: Bloomsbury, 2008)



and artistic endeavour of architecture, according to the ARC.

### But is Architecture really art?

A key distinction to be drawn here is between the art of architecture and the profession of Architecture, i.e. the structures and work of the Architecture Establishment as embodied by the RIBA, ARB, and Architectural education generally. Architecture, famously referred to by the American architect Frank Lloyd Wright as the 'mother art', it can be argued is the basis of our civilisations, or as Wright continued its soul: 'Without an architecture of our own we have no soul of our own civilization.'<sup>152</sup> Architecture therefore does stand alongside the production of artists per se as a key element of a society's culture. Like highly culturally valued art, valued architecture is preserved, glorified, and held up as an example of the cultural achievement of a civilisation. Architecture is however also a manifestation of society's politics and, as Bill Risebero explores, the hegemony of a culture:

'Architecture, like all other elements of the social superstructure, rests on our society's economic base, that is the capitalist mode of production, which determines its essential nature. [...]

Conversely, politics depend on culture. What Antonio Gramsci calls 'hegemony', that is, the ability of a bourgeois-democratic state like that of Britain to obtain and exercise power, depends not only on the coercive machinery of state itself but also on the participation of the people.'<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> No authoritative source exists for this quotation, it is consistently attributed to Frank Lloyd Wright, known as a phrase, used often in his public speaking. It appears in published form, most recently in Shearer, Benjamin F., *Culture and Customs of the United States*. (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2008), p.360.

<sup>153</sup> Risebero, *Fantastic Form: Architecture and Town Planning Today*, p.34

The participation to which Risebero and Gramsci are addressing of course is the same as that which Michel Foucault describes as ‘the invisibility of power.’<sup>154</sup> As the State apparatus has taken on new identity in the modern era it has moved from being visible to invisible. As Gordana Fontana-Giusti explains: ‘This model was now reversed: new disciplinary power imposes compulsory visibility upon those whom it subjects to discipline, while those in power remain invisible.’<sup>155</sup>

Architecture is, in this assessment, a tool of hegemony as whilst as an art, architecture may attempt to be revolutionary and seek to question of the *status quo*, Architecture is, due to the very nature of its realisation bound to the hegemony of its culture, and the vast sums of money necessary for its realisation.

As Risebero goes on to say:

“‘The ruling ideas of any age”, as Marx and Engels have said, “have ever been the ideas of the ruling class”<sup>2</sup> – and these ideas include architectural ones.’<sup>156</sup>

Is therefore the only logical way therefore to break these bonds is to abandon the high-cost high-spec “Art of Architecture” and work on a more *ad hoc*, vernacular level? Can modern architecture, all architecture since 1900, be “wrong”? That it has actively worked against the aims of society in merely ‘playing the numbers game’<sup>157</sup> building modernist mega-structure housing estates in the nineteen sixties and seventies, to the mass building of car dependent, privately built “executive housing estates” on the fringe of towns, Architecture and Architects have let us down.

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<sup>154</sup> Newman, Saul. (2019) "Postanarchism." In Adams, Matthew, and Levy, Carl. *The Palgrave Handbook of Anarchism*. (London: Springer International Publishing, 2019), pp. 293-303.

<sup>155</sup> Fontana-Giusti, Gordana. *Foucault for Architects*. (London: Routledge, 2013), p.87

<sup>156</sup> Risebero, *Fantastic Form*, p.34.

<sup>157</sup> Ward, *When We Build Again*, p.117

'Political plans for housing have always been dangerously misleading. The numbers game, the propaganda battle of housing start-and completion statistics has been played between the two major parties for decades.

The same political numbers game led to the demand from government for the high-rise system-built housing of the 1960s, with its incredibly expensive legacy of misery.'<sup>158</sup>

The rebellion that began in architecture in the nineteen seventies explored manifold ways of 'doing architecture'. Whilst (as we will see in Chapter 7-11) the ARC built no buildings, other contemporary groups of architects did, and engaged with communities at the grassroots to build what they wanted to be built one of the most prominent of these groups will be the subject of the remainder of the first part of this chapter.

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<sup>158</sup> Ward, *When We Build Again*, p.117

## Part B

### Others: non-Architects and their allies

#### SOLON

One group who were contemporaries of the ARC, are SOLON, a group of independent community architects operating in South London. SOLON worked on four major projects in South London between 1970 and 1978, all were community projects and three involved the rehabilitation of existing housing stock. In contrast to redevelopment of the time, one involved large-scale demolition or slum clearance and rebuild.

SOLON (standing for So-uth Lo-ndon) Housing Association that operated during the nineteen-seventies. In *the Architects' Journal* in 1978, Joanna Clelland details four of the most significant projects carried out by SOLON. Three involved the rehabilitation of existing housing stock for the more commodious use by the existing residents. These were Atherfold Road, Clapham (1975); the Brockley Co-op, Halesworth Road, Lewisham (1977); and the Tally-Ho Co-op of 33 Holden Road, Finchley (1975), confusingly, in north London. The fourth was the reuse of a disused church on St John's Hill, Battersea; St Paul's Church was redeveloped as a community space.<sup>159</sup>

SOLONs emergence in the nineteen seventies and much of its work was after the Housing Act (1974) was passed by Parliament, which provided a greater availability of funding for self-help or cooperative housing groups.

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<sup>159</sup> Clelland, Joanna. 'SOLON: One alternative', *The Architects' Journal*, Building Illustrated, CI/SfB | 81 | (W6), v.168 n.35, (30/08/1978) 377-389.

SOLON, therefore, seem to be an important development at this point in time and as such bears some detailed exploration.

‘Solon was set up by a mixed group of professionals, including architects, as a charitable housing association in 1970. For the first three years it was run on worker co-operative collectivist principles. The intention was to bring the various stages of a housing programme into one office, to co-ordinate the purchase of property and land, house conversion and design, the selection of tenants and the management and maintenance of tenanted properties.’<sup>160</sup>

Here Clelland is describing a remarkable organisation run along anarchist co-operative principles set up by unspecified ‘professionals’ for the rehabilitation rather than building of housing. This focus on rehabilitation is more unusual as the essential principle of local authority rehousing in the nineteen seventies was slum clearance and new build.

In her article, Clelland draws our attention back to the “Radical Alternatives” issue of the *Architects’ Journal*, from October 1977 citing Tom Woolley’s four-point definition of ‘alternative practice’:

- ‘1. Changed relationship between architectural worker; breaking down employer/employee alienation.
2. New sectors of work in which services are available to sections of the population, the actual building users as opposed to corporate clients.
3. New participatory techniques to demystify the status of expertise and to help lay people understand architectural problems more fully.

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<sup>160</sup> Clelland, Op cit., p.379.

4. Commitment to greater public accountability of the profession as a whole.<sup>161</sup>

Clelland states that these elements are descriptive of SOLON's ethos, but more importantly they are descriptive of the various themes in architectural thinking and idealism emerging in the late-nineteen seventies in England.

Additionally, SOLON's approach embraces the process of participation as two-way. Not only are the tenant's shareholders in the association and thus have a say on the running of the association the architects and other professionals are participating themselves in the process of rebuilding homes. SOLON is significant, however, because of the openly stated desire that the architects - as well as the residents - find the process fulfilling and have greater sense of ownership:

'One of the main motives of architects who work in Solon is that they are able to put their skills directly to the benefit of tenants. As opposed to the normal situation, where the only known client is the funding body, Solon architects are attempting to work according to the direct demands and needs of the users themselves...'<sup>162</sup>

Furthermore, it is telling that phrases such as 'greater public accountability' are being used to describe the profession of Architecture. This consideration that Architecture as a professional spectrum has responsibilities and duties to the recipients of its output is whilst not new part of the professional snobbery around the work of SOLON and other such practitioners.

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<sup>161</sup> Woolley, Tom. 'Alternative Practice', *The Architects' Journal*, v.166 n.42, (19/10/1977), 735-750. p.735,

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

'It is sad that many architects may discount Solon's attempts. Maybe some of the end products could have been better, but there is no simple correlation between process and end product. The real gains are of a different and maybe more valuable nature in the long struggle to ensure that the profession's skills and the nation's resources are applied to the satisfaction of the essential needs of the community as a whole.'<sup>163</sup>

Clelland points out that many of these critical Architects may have fallen into the trap of critiquing the Architecture. This is the judgement of the architectural journalist/critic on what may not in that context even qualify as "Architecture". It is not iconic, it is not grandiose; it is domestic, it is simple, and it is "honest". It does its job without pretensions to architectural tricks and metaphor; it is housing for people, not the housing of people. Indeed, as Clelland says the gains are of a more valuable nature.<sup>164</sup>

This was of course not just the responsibility of the architectural community as John McKean (1989) recounts Walter Segal designed a project for SOLON. Segal was a European émigré architect working in post-war England, I will discuss him in more detail later in this chapter:

'...in the nineteen seventies he [Segal] developed a "twenty house to the acre" project into the solution for a real client. This, houses for Solon Housing Association, was refused building permission on visual grounds.'<sup>165</sup>

In this case, the refusal came from the local authority rather than architects or residents. McKean, unfortunately, does not tell us which of SOLON's projects Segal was worked on; the fact, however, illustrates some of the interconnectedness of the work of the likes of SOLON and Walter Segal.

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<sup>163</sup> Clelland, Op cit., p.378.

<sup>164</sup> *ibid*

<sup>165</sup> McKean, *Learning from Segal*, p.62

Here, SOLON are serving as Architects or architects involved in the enabling of 'others' to partake in the process of 'doing architecture'. However, they are distinct in several ways: firstly, these individuals are working as housing association rehabilitating existing housing stock in concert with residents.<sup>166</sup> They are enabling 'others' to be involved in the design process to some degree; however, Clelland does not expand on this point so we cannot be certain to what degree.<sup>167</sup>

Despite SOLON's anarcho-syndicalist organisation and their engagement with residents, they were still in the rarefied position of Architect within this process. It seems that the residents in many cases were required to communicate with the Architects as a group, as opposed to working with the Architects as equals and individuals. As Clelland lays out in her conclusion, referring to three of SOLON's projects she writes:

'The strength and confidence of tenant/user groups appears to depend on how well organised they are and on the focus of their interest. ...it was the groups whose interest was focused on one common building (LARA, the church; Tallyho, the house) that managed to co-ordinate best their instructions to the architect. Tenants of Atherfold Road did not have to co-operate with each other in order for their houses to be improved.'<sup>168</sup>

Clelland seems aware of the risks of such an Architect-centric process going on to write:

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<sup>166</sup> Clelland, Op cit., p.380.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid, p.379.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid, p.387.



‘There is less danger perhaps that architects in Solon will design for themselves, rather than for those people who use their buildings, if there is consistently close contact with local people.’<sup>169</sup>

In this process there is a degree of the Architect surrendering some elements of their power to the residents/users of these projects. Yet this is still the Architect in the position of power, determining to whom and to what degree they will give up this power. Clelland appears to allude to this attitude when she makes comments such as:

‘Tenants can also be confused by their own choices. If making the right choice depends upon knowledge of what choices are, then architects are inevitably in a better position than the users.’<sup>170</sup>

This very much depends on the types of choices that are being made and in what context. If the context created is one of the Architectural status quo, as I see to be the case by-and-large with SOLON, then it is unsurprising that Architects can be the only ones to make the ‘right choices’. Architecture has created this context and does not involve ‘others’ in its required decisions. Thus the ‘rightness’ or otherwise of said choices are dependent on the cultural logic of the structures that have been created by Architecture, hence this judgement on the ‘rightness’ or otherwise of these choices is flawed.

As part of the establishment of Architecture, Clelland is critiquing this process from that vantage point; she is not, therefore, able to break from the cultural logic of the architectural process and the rightness or wrongness of decisions are seen through this lens.

In these projects, the ‘other’ is clearly characterised as the tenants/users of the buildings, all of which were still occupied or in use at the time of SOLON’s involvement. The ‘other’ in

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<sup>169</sup> Clelland, Op cit., p.387.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid

all cases was both client and intended tenant/user. SOLON's work is thus demonstrably more socially engaged than mainstream architecture where the client and tenant/user are distinctly different groups. However, the relationship cultivated by SOLON appears to still be more of an architect/client relationship. To enable a greater degree of involvement of the 'other' in the process the architect/client relationship would need to be discarded. The Architect would need to work directly with the user as user, not a client dealing with an Architect. I would argue that this approach would better integrate the Architect with the process of how their constructions would be used, as highlighted by Clelland above, and enable the user to become conversant with the decision making process of the Architect. This approach, of course, would constitute a significant transfer of power, in that the Architect would, in effect, be giving up some of the 'secrets of the trade', the ultimate diminution of power for any profession.

In the SOLON example the 'other' has gained some greater control over the process of Architecture as enabled by the Architects in this scenario. The 'other' has attained the status of client in the Architectural process, but we are still discussing the Architectural process. This is not a true alternative or a radical response to the need to house. The Architect still has control over the process and the 'other' has in effect been co-opted into that process. The truly radical alternative to this outcome would be the dismantling of the Architectural process as conceived by Architecture itself. This would require the dissipating or outright destruction of its power relationships, and a new process created in its place.

## The Segal Method

“I can’t say very much! ‘Well’ I said ‘this is your house, so you do as you think right’. So the carpenters were sent away, and the clients built it. Which, if you think that they were schoolteachers never having used tools in their lives, they did rather undertake a bold affair. But with their enthusiasm and motivation, there was no trouble and no difficulty and it succeeded quite astonishingly.”

That was the first “self-build”.<sup>171</sup>

The above are the words of architect Walter Segal (1907–1985), quoted by John McKean in his book *Learning from Segal: Walter Segal's life, work and influence* (1989) cited earlier. Segal is here recounting his modest response to the idea of self-build, on receiving a phone call from the clients who would turn out to be his first self-build clients saying they wanted to dismiss the carpenters Segal had advised they use to put up the frame of the house.

As one of many European émigré architects working in post-war England, Walter Segal had emerged from a childhood immersed in European Modernism, including Le Corbusier and Bruno Taut.<sup>172</sup> But Segal’s work in post-war England reflects his scepticism of European Modernism. The development of the ‘Segal method’ was undoubtedly a singular achievement but it was by no means unprecedented, nor was it truly intentional on his part. That said, from the perspective of this thesis the significant part of Segal’s work as an “enabler architect” is as regards his contribution to “self-build”.

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<sup>171</sup> McKean, John. *Learning from Segal : Walter Segal's life, work and influence = Von Segal lernen : Walter Segal's Leben, Werk und Wirkung*. (Basel : Birkhäuser Verlag, 1989), p.156

<sup>172</sup> Ibid, p.24

The 'other' here is the client who enables change, the schoolteachers in Segal's anecdote, or indeed Segal himself (albeit accidentally) who step outside of the norm of Architecture and the realm of the Architect into the realm of the architecture and the architect. They have, in this act, developed their own reasons and skills for achieving this; their motivations are not known, as they have been excised from the architectural history save for this anecdote, we do not know their names or the house that they built.

Segal's apparent modesty, along with the fact that these clients approached Segal to suggest the idea of self-building after the popular press brought his 'little house' to public attention,<sup>173</sup> is not however acknowledged consistently by McKean, making statements such as:

'Single-handedly, Segal invented the impossible idea of ordinary, non-skilled working class women and men from the waiting list for public authority housing, building their own homes. Lewisham self-builders have ranged from retired men in their 60s to single mothers; many are families with young children who constructively joined in creating their own home.'<sup>174</sup>

This is a grandiose claim that would sit uneasily with an apparently modest man who used to enjoy recounting a story of the self-builder who said 'Walter you couldn't do a thing without me - you may be able to draw things but you need me to carry them out.'<sup>175</sup> Segal provided a methodology, not a system, that enabled people; he did not 'invent an impossible idea' as McKean claimed. Housing oneself was the norm of the housing process until urbanisation of the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Segal's method did, however enable others to re-engage with the

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<sup>173</sup> McKean, *Learning from Segal*, p.136.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid, p.172.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

'natural relationship' as Habraken would have it.<sup>176</sup> McKean says late on in his book that the, '..."Segal method" is not an invented "system", but a design of assemblies'<sup>177</sup> this hardly fits with McKean's later claim that Segal invented 'an impossible idea.'

Thus, rather than being a radical architect in the model of the ARC, Segal was more a product of the time. Segal is nominally associated with a certain way of building, the use of prefabricated timber elements, and the notion of self-build in England, by the architectural establishment at least. Segal was not however a pioneer of great note, nor did he claim to be, most significantly he was not the only person thinking in these ways at this point in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

Colin Ward cited Segal in *Talking to Architects* (1996) saying: 'Walter's recollection in 1982 of the lessons of Lewisham. He said: "Help was to be provided mutually and voluntarily - there were no particular constraints on that, which did mean that the good will of people could find its way through. The less you tried to control them the more you freed the element of good will - this was astonishingly clear."'<sup>178</sup>

Segal here serves as an enabling Architect providing (accidentally) a system that could be used by 'others' to create their own architecture. Segal, one of the architectural establishment's 'own', is served up regularly by mainstream architecture history as a pioneer. This emphasis significantly over states Segal's importance in relation to the concept of 'other ways of doing architecture'. The 'other' of 'other ways of doing architecture' is defined against the status quo, which was not questioned by Segal. Those questioning the

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<sup>176</sup> Habraken, Op cit., p.13

<sup>177</sup> McKean, *Learning from Segal*, p.132

<sup>178</sup> Ward, *Talking to Architects*, p.34

status quo in this scenario are the schoolteachers, the anonymous 'other', who chose (against Segal's advice), to 'undertake a bold affair' and construct their own home.

The term 'Other' is of course relational and in this contest is juxtaposed with the Architect as establishment professional. The 'Other' is therefore the non-professional, and invariably in the context of this thesis we are talking about dwellers of council houses dissatisfied with the condition, speed of rehabilitation, management, etc. of such housing who take matters into their own hands.

The concept of 'other ways of doing architecture', in the context of this thesis only gains meaning when we think of it in relation to the mass housing archetype. Mass housing is all-pervasive and has consequently all but come to mean 'housing' without the need of the word 'mass'. 'Mass housing' as defined by N. John Habraken (1972) will be more fully addressed in Chapter 3, sufficed to say here we take it to mean the industrial method of housing that arose with the expansion of the cities of England from the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century, and thus spread across the modern world in the following two centuries. It is this form of Architecture which anarchist modes of organisation can arguably not sustain. So what is an 'anarchist architecture'?

## An “Anarchist” architecture

I have entitled this section An “Anarchist” architecture since the examples here illustrated, whilst clearly demonstrating the ways in which architecture has been carried out historically using forms of self-organisation, arguably anarcho-syndicalist (as defined previously by Rudolph Rocker<sup>179</sup>) in nature, are not overtly anarchist. In fact, examples of “anarchist architecture” as such are virtually non-existent. Anarchist modes of doing and organising can be reliably applied to these examples so even though the people engaged in these practices of doing architecture would almost certainly have not considered themselves to be “anarchists” we can analyse their actions from an anarchist position.

To understand the degree to which the building of buildings has been professionalised in Britain we need to look back to an earlier state of affairs. The pre-industrial period supplies manifold examples of the way people used to house themselves independently of any architect or, in many cases of any landowner. This mode of housing oneself has all but become extinct in industrialised and post-industrial societies. As Habraken said: “Man no longer houses himself: he is housed”<sup>180</sup>. The architectural process of creating a dwelling is now so well advanced that the dweller is not required until the very end of the process, to occupy and/or purchase the consumer object that the architectural process has created. Rather than housing themselves people now expect to occupy a complete house and sometimes a lifestyle to boot.

As Habraken says mass housing ‘...reduces the dwelling to a consumer article and the dweller to a consumer. For only in this way can it be expected that the consumer waits until

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<sup>179</sup> ‘Anarcho-syndicalists are convinced that a Socialist economic order cannot be created by the decrees and statutes of a government, but only by the solidaric collaboration of the workers with hand and brain...’ this thesis.

<sup>180</sup> Habraken, Op cit., p.13

he is offered a complete product. It need not surprise us if this approach proves wrong because individual human action forms part of the housing brief.’<sup>181</sup>

Because industrial architecture has become so all pervading that is not to say that we do not have a rich history of people, by-and-large working people, housing themselves by various non-massed methods. The oft-repeated legend of the right of a ‘man’ to ownership of a dwelling if he could construct said dwelling on common land in a night gives us some suggestion of this<sup>182</sup>. The skills of the architect/designer are not unique or rare. They can be taught and learnt by a myriad of people. Evidence of creative problem solving, design and adaption can be seen in all human societies on earth many without any profession even resembling the architect.

Habraken goes on to describe the nature of possession, and the following passage:

‘...possession is different from property. We may possess something which is not our property, and conversely something may be our property which we do not possess. Property is legal term, but the idea of possession deeply rooted in us...to possess something we have to take possession. We have to make it part of ourselves, and it is therefore necessary to reach out for it.’<sup>183</sup>

Within mass housing Habraken sees this ephemeral form of possession as being severely frustrated by the very nature of mass housing:

‘The inhabitants of an MH town cannot possess their town. They remain lodged in an environment, which is no part of them. To identify with such an

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<sup>181</sup> Habraken, Op cit., p.15

<sup>182</sup> Ward, *Cotters and Squatters*, p.5

<sup>183</sup> Habraken, Op cit., p.18



environment they will have to change; there is no other possible way. It is therefore said sometimes that the inhabitants 'are not yet ready for what is offered to them', and that they 'have to grow into it'. Such an assertion is a complete reversal of the intention of all housing...' <sup>184</sup>

It is against such a backdrop that we inevitably see a change, the development of alternative dwelling practices, or perhaps their rehabilitation after a century of more (by the mid-nineteen seventies) in hibernation.

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<sup>184</sup> Habraken, Op cit., p.18

### Cotters and Squatters: early “housing as verb”<sup>185</sup>

In his book *Cotters and Squatters: Housing's Hidden History* (2002) Colin Ward sets out this alternative history of dwelling production, pre-industrialisation in Britain. I will explore Ward's work and the centrality of his ideas to the arguments being made in nineteen seventies Architecture in Britain and Ireland more fully in Chapter 3. That said the examples cited in *Cotters and Squatters* are important here as it is illustrative of the myriad ways the peoples of these Islands have housed themselves.

In the first pages of the book Ward lists numerous examples of the “one night house” as it has developed in common law in countries including; Ireland, France, Italy, Peru, Turkey and various regions of Britain, specifically Wales, Cumbria, the West Country, and Cornwall. The term for many of these dwellings appears to derive from the concept of the one night house, as Ward illustrates with the Turkish example: “... anyone who finds a plot of land that is neither owned nor used can establish title to it, on condition that he erects a dwelling there in the space of a night (*gece* = night; *kondurmak* = find lodgings)”.<sup>186</sup>, resulting in the Turkish word *gecekondu*, along with other terms such as the *caban* or *tŷ unnos* (Cymraeg/Welsh), and the vague and seemingly ancient legal context from which this right springs, seems to suggest a “natural order” of things.

In such a society the individual builder, or more likely, a group of autonomous individuals working in a co-operative, i.e. ‘...solidaric collaboration of the workers...’.<sup>187</sup> This serves as

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<sup>185</sup> Turner, John F.C. and Fichter, Robert. (eds.), *Freedom to Build: Dweller Control of the Housing Process*, (New York: Macmillian Co. 1972)

<sup>186</sup> Ward, *Cotters and Squatters*, p.9

<sup>187</sup> Guérin, *Anarchism: From Theory to Practice*.

both an illustration of previous modes of architecture as well as present and potentially future versions of house building.

Similarly, Ward goes on to describe how squatting as a means of taking ownership of land has developed over the last millennia in England and Wales citing examples of cave dwellers in Nottingham from the 14<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> Centuries<sup>188</sup> and this occupation of Nottingham's caves being recorded as late as 1998.<sup>189</sup>

The legend of the *tŷ unnos*, literally “one-night house”, in Wales, and many parts of the Celtic fringe of England, Cornwall and the West Country more generally, provide us with a “origin myth” for the act of people housing themselves. Indeed as Ward says this is not merely an historical aberration: ‘The idea of the one-night house is woven into Welsh history, where it is seen as relating to the imposition of Norman land law’ in the 11<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>190</sup> Ward brings together numerous other examples of the legend of the one-night house from many parts of the British Isles. The legend has a noticeable preponderance in Wales and Ireland and other western areas of these islands. The inference is therefore that the practice of the one-night house goes back beyond the Roman conquest of Britain into earlier Celtic societies. What is evident from Ward’s considerable research however is that this was more than merely a legend, that one-night houses were built and landlords, even in feudal mediaeval England complied with the historic “lore of the land” regarding the rights of tenancy that constructing a house in one night bestowed. This is not to suggest that these dwellings were universally

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<sup>188</sup> Ward, *Cotters and Squatters*, p.16

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid*, p.17

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid*, p.41

accepted by locals or landowners. Quoting from David Jones, in *Rebecca's Children: a study of rural society, crime and protest* (1989), Ward recounts:

'They settled on land, under the old custom of *tŷ unnos*, whereby a person was entitled to the freehold of whatever shelter he or she could build in a night and of the land within a stone's thrown. Such encampments were not universally popular, for they cut across the rights of local farmers... Their homesteads became the source of 'ever-lasting quarrels', and of innumerable court cases.'<sup>191</sup>



Image redacted for  
copyright reasons.

Figure 12. A *Tŷ Unnos* now a self-catering holiday cottage in Penybont, Carmarthenshire.

It is important we reflect on these settlements with a clear historical perspective and not with rose-tinted spectacles for a simpler earlier time. It is undoubtedly the case that now such settlements can and of result in far more stringent legal challenges and the idea of 'wastes' as defined here is almost entirely lost in our time.

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<sup>191</sup> Ward, *Cotters and Squatters*, p.43

Towards the end of the book Ward cites forest historian Humphrey Phelps, in *The Forest of Dean* (1982) when discussing the relationship between architecture and “mere building” and the move from one set of circumstances to the other meaning the ending of the one night house, in this case in the Forest of Dean:

‘By the time of encroachments, when settlements were established and churches were needed, the art of architecture, as opposed to mere building, had been lost. Before the time there had been squatters; for forester believed he had the right to build so long as he got smoke going up the chimney before nightfall on the day that he built his cottage or cabin. If fortunate he stayed, if unlucky he was evicted.’<sup>192</sup>

The concept of “the commons” has become *en vogue* again recently, scholars such as Stavros Stavrides in *Common Space: The City as Commons (In Common)* writes a quite different definition of “the commons”, this is due some small degree of attention here. In the first pages of the introduction to the book Stavrides says: ‘Understood as distinct from public as well as from private spaces, ‘common spaces’ emerge in the contemporary metropolis. As sites open to public use in which, however, rules and forms of use do not depend upon and are not controlled by a prevailing authority.’<sup>193</sup>

It is quite evident in the above that the nature of the commons that Stavrides is addressing is not the same as the ‘wastes’ or commons that Ward is dealing with. Whilst Ward’s ancient historical examples are areas not owned by anyone (other than the general overlordship of the Crown in Britain) Stavrides is describing such relations as existing but in some ways not mattering. The book sets out an agenda from creating commons (appropriating land) and

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<sup>192</sup> Ward, *Cotters and Squatters*, p.84

<sup>193</sup> Stavrides, Stavros. *Common Space: The City as Commons*. (London: ZED Books, 2016)

creating my means of these collective actions a form of holding “in common”. But this does not change the legal definition nor ownership of the land, unlike the examples cited by Ward. As Ward explores further below, the question of ownership was reversed from that which Stavrides addresses. In that ownership in common was the normal at the time of these examples, (before The Enclosure Acts in England and Wales, which began in 1604<sup>194</sup>) and the enclosure of land and creation of “public” v “private” was being created. As Gregory Clark and Antony Clark set out in “Common Rights to Land in England, 1475–1839,” (2001) enclosure of common land did not take place to any great degree until after 1750.<sup>195</sup> They additionally they state that even at the start of the period of enclosures (1604-1914) ‘...property rights in most of English agriculture was “modern” as early as 1600.’ and that ‘...after 1600, the major vehicle of institutional change in English agriculture was the Parliamentary enclosure movement of 1760–1820.’<sup>196</sup> This clearly demonstrates that the forms of common land and wastes to which Ward here refers is a much earlier form of tenure predating the 19<sup>th</sup> Century this most obvious when one considers that over 3 million acres of land in England and Wales was enclosed in the first 2 decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>197</sup> Thus the process of enclosures after this point is what created the modern day mode of land ownership in England and Wales. The forms of tenure Stavrides is addressing, and his work seeks to subvert, are based on this.

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<sup>194</sup> Wily, Liz Alden. ‘The Global Land Grab: The New Enclosures’. *Wealth of the Commons*, no date. [wealthofthecommons.org/essay/global-land-grab-new-enclosures](http://wealthofthecommons.org/essay/global-land-grab-new-enclosures) [Accessed 1 June 2023]

<sup>195</sup> Clark, Gregory, and Clark, Anthony. “Common Rights to Land in England, 1475–1839,” *The Journal of Economic History*, vol. 61, no. 4 (Cambridge University Press). December 2001, 1009-1036. p.1033.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid, p.1035

<sup>197</sup> Murray Bookchin further reinforces this point saying: ‘Although the enclosure movement extended over two centuries, it reached its high point in the early 1800s. From 1800 to 1820, more than three million acres of English countryside were enclosed, an area nearly as large as all the enclosures which occurred during the seventeenth century. These sweeping dispossessions of villagers and tenant farmers flooded the cities...’ *The Limits of the City*.

These stories and histories of non-architect and anti-landlordism building or buildings, 'doing architecture' provide us with a useful historical context from which to proceed into Chapter 3. The question of "what does anarchist architecture look like?" and who is building it is not one for this thesis but will be addressed via those who have gone before me and are cited in the next chapter. Sufficed to say as the above demonstrates whilst The Architect and Architecture are well entrenched in our society, they are a "Johnny come lately" when compared to the work on the non-architect in British history. Cotters and squatters have been 'doing architecture' and changing the power dynamic between rich and poor since the Early Mediaeval period. We need to image how to live without the Architecture Establishment or the Architect, the model already exists for us, in history. The question is how this, perhaps accidental, anarchism can manifest in architecture, and has done so, this is what we turn to in Chapter 3.

## CHAPTER THREE

### ANARCHISM IN ARCHITECTURE

Anarchist thought as an alternative idea for the operation of society has understandably concentrated on the process of change, whether that be revolutionary and violent or gradual and pacifist and the nature of any future anarchist society. This has naturally concentrated on social and political structures and the reforms required to achieve these changes. Architecture theory in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century largely ignored anarchist theories of the organisation of society as antithetical to the controlled and highly professionalised process of Architecture. There are however several exceptions to these generalisations from within architecture and cultural theory.

This chapter will start with a canter through various forms of anarchism in a UK and wider context in the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century. We will look firstly at the brief history of forms of anarchism as set out by Ruth Kinna in *The Government of No-One: the theory and practice of anarchism* (Pelican, 2019) and David Goodway's *Anarchist Seeds Beneath the Snow: Left libertarian thought and British Writers from William Morris to Colin Ward* (PM Press: 2012). Similarly, we will address the more vociferous areas of architect thought and action in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century UK as relevant to the politics and philosophy of the ARC (as we will see later). Of use to us in this will be Tom Vague's *Anarchy in the UK: The Angry Brigade* (AK



Press, 1997) as an exemplar of an almost forgotten period of violent anarchist attempted insurrection in Britain in the nineteen seventies.

The second part of this chapter will look more specifically in detail on the key tenets of anarchism in Britain, and England specifically, in syndicalist organisation as a key area of anarchist theory which I see as underpinning my own analysis of the ARC (see Chapter 4 onwards).

This final section of this chapter will deal with the anarchist and specifically anarcho-syndicalist ideas evident in much spatial practice, and we will address the work of urbanist and anarchist Murray Bookchin looking specifically at *The Limits of the City* (Harper Torchbooks, 1974) but with reference to *Urbanization Without Cities: The Rise and Decline of Citizenship* (Black Rose Books, 1992). Thus, as we reach the end of this chapter we will begin to look at how anarchism manifests in architecture and other forms of building. Further to this goal we will look briefly at Paul Dobraszczyk's book *Architecture and Anarchism: Building Without Authority* (2021) by most particularly using Dobraszczyk's definitions and terminology in further defining the term anarchism in relation to architectural practice. Dobraszczyk sets out a thorough and well-illustrated catalogue of the 'doing of anarchist architecture' providing a hugely valuable resource for both this thesis and future study.

The final section of this chapter will discuss two key thinkers who are key to the definition of Quietism as Anarchism, which I will set out in this chapter. Quietism will be a significant part of this section as I will continue to argue throughout this thesis that the form of anarchism is the form of anarchism that best encapsulates and the actions and activities of those outside of the architectural professions (see Chapter 2) engage in consistently and without the label of 'Anarchist'. Thus the final sections of this chapter will address in depth the work, ideas,

and influence of Colin Ward (1924-2010), a British architecture and anarchist theorist;<sup>198</sup> and Herbert Read (1893-1968), British art historian, critic, philosopher, and co-founder of the Institute of Contemporary Arts.<sup>199</sup> Ward and Read, within their differing disciplines, provide us with positions that demonstrate the validity of accidentally or quietist anarchist arguments as applied to the fields of creative production generally and architecture and the built environment specifically. Read's work is important in articulating the relationship between humanity and the made environment, along with the work of Nicholas John Habraken<sup>200</sup> whose contributions in developing alternative modes of building dwellings from the nineteen sixties and onwards, who I addressed in more detail in Chapter 2.

Carissa Honeywell in "Colin Ward: anarchism and social policy." (*Anarchist Studies*, 2011) and *A British anarchist tradition: Herbert Read, Alex Comfort and Colin Ward*. (Continuum, 2011) writes convincingly on the work of Colin Ward placing him, and indeed Read, in their proper context as significant contributors to the development of anarchist thinking in Britain in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. My focus here is on the relevance of Ward and Read's ideas a critique of cultural production and architectural production specifically. Whilst Read did not write directly about architecture, his concern with art and design provides arguments that can be turned to a critique of modern and Modernist Architecture, which I will look at briefly through the lens of mid-century housing architecture, a key context for the work of the ARC as we will see later from Chapter 4 onwards.

### Approaches to Anarchism in England

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<sup>198</sup> Spatial Agency. "Colin Ward". *Spatial Agency*, no date. [spatialagency.net/database/colin.ward](http://spatialagency.net/database/colin.ward) [Accessed 29<sup>th</sup> March 2017]

<sup>199</sup> Institute of Contemporary Arts. "History". *The Institute of Contemporary Art*, 2017. [ica.art/about/history](http://ica.art/about/history) [Accessed 29 March 2017]

<sup>200</sup> anon. "Biography". [habraken.com/html/biography.htm](http://habraken.com/html/biography.htm) [Accessed 4 May 2017]

This section will address the various forms of anarchism which have developed and had significant effect in England over the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries. It is not and does not purport to be a comprehensive history of such movements. For that one should look to those being cited in this section namely Ruth Kinna, David Goodway, Colin Ward, Daniel Guérin, Clarissa Honeywell and Tom Vague. Sufficed to say we will look at the development of anarchist ideas in England and how these apply or impinged upon the general political situation in the nineteen seventies (as our principal period of attention) in Britain (specifically England) and thus co-existed with the activities of the ARC after 1974.

In her 2019 book *The Government of No One: The Theory and Practice of Anarchism*, Ruth Kinna sets out an unapparelled short-history of anarchist thought and tradition. I do not intend here to re-tread all the work Kinna has carried out, in exploring almost every conceivable form of anarchism. I will however here address the key relevant sections in relation to both the ARC its people and politics (see Chapter 4 onwards) and to my later definition of Quietist Anarchism to be addressed later in this Chapter.

In the first pages of the book Kinna puts her cards on the table, saying:

‘One of the attractions of anarchism is that it has no single moment of enlightenment, not before or after ‘science’. Connected to this is my view that anarchism has strong affinities with a wide range of non-anarchist ideas and practices: ...’<sup>201</sup>

This statement is crucial to my definition of Quietist and accidental anarchism which I will set out in this chapter, and indeed throughout this thesis. Anarchism is not a political credo,

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<sup>201</sup> Kinna, Ruth. *The Government of No One: The Theory and Practice of Anarchism*. (London: Pelican, 2019), pp.8-9

nor is it set of dogmas and positions to which one must subscribe. The central tenet 'No Gods, No Masters' can be traced back over 450 years,<sup>202</sup> and serves as perhaps the only universally accepted foundation stone of anarchism. Arguably, anarchism was most clearly defined by the ejection from The Hague Congress of 1872, the fifth congress of the International Workingmen's Association (IWA) of Mikhail Bakunin (1814-1876)<sup>203</sup> by the Marxists. In many ways the events of 1872 defined Anarchism by what it was not. It was not Marxism, or Statism, or any of the other forms of leftist State control that would emerge from Marxist theory. Indeed, the later work of fellow Piotr Kropotkin (1842-1921)<sup>204</sup> argued that:

'...anarchism was the politics of the people, and that the movements that appeared in the nineteenth century were only the most modern manifestation of a kind of politics that could be found in all parts of the world and in every historical period.

'...as a resistance movement against top down organisation, Kropotkin found examples of anarchistic movements in early Christianity and Buddhism.'<sup>205</sup>

The conflict between Marx and the Anarchists in the late 1800s is also addressed by David Goodway in his 2006 book *Anarchist Seeds Beneath the Snow: Left-libertarian Thought and British Writers from William Morris to Colin Ward*, with him saying that:

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<sup>202</sup> Guérin, Daniel. *No Gods, No Masters: An Anthology of Anarchism*. (Oakland, CA.: AK Press, 2005) p.1

<sup>203</sup> Carr, Edward H., and Alan Ryan. 'Mikhail Bakunin'. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 26 May 2023. [britannica.com/biography/Mikhail-Bakunin](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Mikhail-Bakunin) [Accessed 28 May 2023]

<sup>204</sup> Miller, Martin A., and Paul Avrich. 'Peter Alekseyevich Kropotkin'. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 19 April 2023. [britannica.com/biography/Peter-Alekseyevich-Kropotkin](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Peter-Alekseyevich-Kropotkin) [Accessed 28 May 2023]

<sup>205</sup> Kinna, Op cit., p.52

'Karl Marx took the initiative in conjunction with British liberal trade unionists in establishing the First International in 1864, but within a year or two they began to be challenged by the co-founding Proudhonist mutualists from France...' <sup>206</sup>

Key Anarchists such as Bakunin, Kropotkin, and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809-1865), the latter is believed to be the first thinker to use the term 'anarchist' to describe his work, are also touched on by Kinna and are worthy of some attention here as the key thinkers in the anarchist 'canon'. Whilst this term is itself problematic as Kinna acknowledges there is a canon of anarchist literature available to us: 'For all the suspicion that surrounds the attempt to describe anarchist politics, anarchists have produced a substantial body of literature to do just that.' <sup>207</sup>

As Kinna goes on to say regarding the work of the French mutualist, Proudhon, he: '...argued that Marx had misdescribed the character of economic and political power.' <sup>208</sup> This being the basis of the arguments after the First International. For Proudhon economic power: '...was derived from the possibility of claiming an exclusive right to property ownership. This was enshrined in law and enforced by the violence vested in the state (police, military, justice systems).' <sup>209</sup>

David Goodway sets out these disagreements led to clashes at the First and Second Internationals between Bakunin (presenting the libertarian anarchists) and Marx (representing the state socialist) all of which led to '...the permanent exclusion of anarchists by the state socialists from 1896.' <sup>210</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> Goodway, Op cit. p.6

<sup>207</sup> Kinna, Op cit., p.49

<sup>208</sup> Kinna, Op cit., p.16

<sup>209</sup> Kinna, Op cit., p.16

<sup>210</sup> Goodway, Op cit., p.7

This clash appears to define the arguments between the anarchists and Marx very succinctly, that the anarchists held that new thoughts and actions must, undermine established hierarchies. Importantly that such behaviour existed in all spheres, political, certainly but cultural, and social as well. As Kinna writes: 'Anarchy thus encompassed individual and collective actions in the arts, literature, and science alongside the economy. But it was no single one of these things.'<sup>211</sup>

### English roots?

Whilst political anarchism as discussed by Kinna originated in continental Europe in Russia, Germany, and France, anarchism in Britain has been patchy. It is suggested by Goodway and Vague that anarchism was largely popular in immigrant groups, and refugee communities (such as the Spanish anarchists who escaped Franco's fascist state after 1939). But anarchist ideas have been associated with much earlier origins England at least, with the attribution of 'basic principles amongst anarchists' to Gerrard Winstanley (1609-1676)<sup>212</sup> in the period immediately following the English Revolution (1640-1650). Winstanley was the founder of the Diggers who: 'The Diggers have since been seen as the forerunners of anarchism, socialism, environmentalism...'<sup>213</sup>. John Rees explores the 17<sup>th</sup> Century roots of anarchist thought in *The Leveller Revolution: Radical Political Organisation in England, 1640-1650*<sup>214</sup> which we do not have time and space to explore here, sufficed to say the roots of English anarchism are varied and contested even to the point as to which century

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<sup>211</sup> Kinna, Op cit., p.52-3

<sup>212</sup> Woodcock, George; Miller, Martin A.; Dirlik, Arif, and Rosemont, Franklin. "anarchism". *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 28 April 2023, britannica.com/topic/anarchism. [Accessed 31 May 2023]

<sup>213</sup> Wills, Matthew. 'What Did the Diggers Really Believe?'. *JSTOR Daily*, 10/11/2020, daily.jstor.org/what-did-the-diggers-really-believe [Accessed 1 June 2023]

<sup>214</sup> Rees, John. *The Leveller Revolution: Radical Political Organisation in England, 1640-1650*. (London: Verso Books, 2017)

such ideas start to circulate in England. However, Goodway argues, by the early twentieth century:

'In Britain anarchism as a social movement never amounted to much, except among the Yiddish-speaking Jews of East London and - for reasons still to be explained - on Clydeside where a tenacious libertarian tradition existed in the twentieth century among Glaswegian workers.'<sup>215</sup>

In the second half of his book Goodway provides a convincing history of the emergence of ideas in Britain in the twentieth century. He sets out early in the book eleven key protagonists of English anarchism, 3 of whom I will focus on, Goodway writes with reference to these three:

'Herbert Read (poet, literary and art critic, and educational theorist), Alex Comfort (doctor and medical scientist, but concurrently a poet and novelist) and Colin Ward (who had worked in architect's offices before becoming a writer on housing, planning and the environment) were forthright and influential proponents of anarchism.'<sup>216</sup>

However, various form of anarchism emerged in Britain in the twentieth century and I want to start with one of the most radical, dangerous, and least effective examples that occurred in the nineteen seventies and is thus contemporaneous with the ARC and their revolution in architecture in that decade. In the course of this section it will be necessary to dwell on the various acts of violence carried out by both the British state and those opposing them in this decade as well as those carried out by anarchists.

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<sup>215</sup> Goodway, Op cit., p.8. Goodway cites the Jewish *Arbeter Frait* group, covered by William J. Fishman in *East End Jewish Radicals, 1875-1924* (London: Duckworth, 1975).

<sup>216</sup> Goodway, Op cit., p.11

## Angry Anarchisms

Tom Vague's book *Anarchy in the UK: The Angry Brigade* (1997)<sup>217</sup> is a fascinating document which records Vague's involvement with, and a journal type history of, the operations of group of what can only be described as anarchist terrorists in Britain in the nineteen seventies. The reportage that Vague provides is shocking and is also absent from common histories of Britain from this period. If we were to look at common living memory of the nineteen seventies, we will hear recollections of the beginning of The Troubles in the north of Ireland, notably The Bloody Sunday Massacre (1972), the Balcome Street Gang's attacks in southern England (1974–75) including the Birmingham, Guildford, and Woolwich Pub Bombings (1974), the wrongful conviction of the Guildford Four and the Birmingham Six (1975), and the assassination of Lord Mountbatten (1979)<sup>218</sup> are all held as common knowledge of the war in Ireland and overarching sense of foreboding the nineteen seventies represented, in England at least. Similarly, the Miners strikes (1972), the Three Day Week (1973–74), The Grunwick Strikes (1976–78), and the Winter of Discontent (1977–78) are all held up as the examples of workers uprisings, of the mobilisation of the working classes albeit via the auspices of trade unionism, in this decade. All culminating of course in the rise for Margaret Thatcher and her landslide victory in May 1979 ushering in 18 years of right wing domination of British politics.<sup>219</sup>

Common-or-garden histories of this period (as few and far between as they are) such as Andy Beckett's *When The Lights Went Out: What Really Happened to Britain in the Seventies* (2009)<sup>220</sup>, despite its bold claim to reveal what 'really happened' does not have even mention of The Angry Brigade and their numerous attacks on people and property.

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<sup>217</sup> Vague, Tom, *Anarchy In The UK: The Angry Brigade*. (London: AK Press, 1997)

<sup>218</sup> Beckett, Andy. *When The Lights Went Out: What Really Happened to Britain in the Seventies*. (London: Faber & Faber, 2009)

<sup>219</sup> *ibid*

<sup>220</sup> *ibid*



For example, Dominic Sandbrook's two texts on this period, *State of Emergency: The Way We Were: Britain, 1970-1974* (2010) and *Seasons in the Sun: The Battle for Britain, 1974-1979* (2012) whilst dealing with many of the same examples of generalised discontent as Beckett, but to less critical degree, fail to give any detail to the terror being wrought on Britain (specially England) by the Angry Brigade and fellow travellers in this period. Sandbrook mentions them on 3 occasions in passing<sup>221</sup> in a book ostensibly about the general state of emergency that existed in Britain at the time, as Sandbrook says: 'the Heath government was forced to declare five states of emergency in barely four years. And at a very basic level, the power cuts and strikes of the 1970s, the hysterical headlines and predictions of disaster, were rooted in profound international challenges, from the collapse of the old colonial empires to the surging tide of globalization.'<sup>222</sup> This anxiety was all too evident in the policies of the Heath government, which lurched from one disaster to another in his less than 4 years in office.

A series of bomb blasts protests and other terrorising events were claimed by, committed by, or attributed to, members of the Angry Brigade were perpetrated throughout the early seventies. From 1969-1972 The Angry Brigade carried out at least 26 and possibly as many as 100+ bombings, fire bombings, and attempted bombings of property and people largely in London, but also Glasgow and Edinburgh.<sup>223</sup> The Angry Brigade as group of anarchists

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<sup>221</sup> Sandbrook's mentions of the Angry Brigade are with reference to *Frendz*, an anarchist magazine he notes as supporting them and the miners strikes of 1972. Second, a half line which reads "when a group of anarchists were found guilty of the Angry Brigade bombings, which had targeted banks, embassies, shops and the house of the Home Secretary, Robert Carr, it did seem that the state had crushed the spirit of rebellion." Incorrectly stating Carr was Home Secretary at the time of the attack in 1971, when he was in fact Employment Secretary. And finally, "A tiny minority, like the Angry Brigade, reacted by falling for the supposed glamour and efficacy of violence, like their far more effective and dangerous international comrades in the Baader-Meinhof Group and the Red Brigades." In Sandbrook, Dominic. *State of Emergency: The Way We Were: Britain, 1970-1974*. (London: Penguin, 2010)

<sup>222</sup> Sandbrook, Op cit.

<sup>223</sup> Vague, Op cit.

had grown out of the International 1<sup>st</sup> of May Group who bombed Bank of Spain, Liverpool; and the Bank of Bilbao, London; in early 1969 as direct attacks against the financial operation so the Fascist Spanish state, these attacks on Spanish or Spanish-linked groups and individuals would become a hallmark of the operations of the Angry Brigade and associated groups.<sup>224</sup> The International 1<sup>st</sup> of May Group members Alan Barlow and Phil Carver were arrested in March 1969 and charged with both explosions.

As Vague says the roots of The International 1<sup>st</sup> of May Group went back a little further to 1<sup>st</sup> May 1966:

'1st of May / The International Revolutionary Solidarity Movement come out of the CNT Spanish anarchist scene and had been active in England for some time. After the capture and execution of Francisco Sabate in 1960, Spanish anarchism becomes a more clandestine international affair, mostly based in Brussels. 1st of May start up on May 1 1966 with the kidnapping of a Spanish Embassy official at the Vatican.

... 1st of May arrive on the English scene on August 20 1967, with a drive-by machine-gun attack on the American Embassy in Grosvenor Square.'<sup>225</sup>

Here we get a very brief, but detail filled report on 1<sup>st</sup> of May, linking the group to the CNT and this Spanish anarchism and the Spanish Civil War. The name of Francisco Sabaté appears in this quote cited as his death being a turning point in the operations of 1<sup>st</sup> of May. Francisco Sabaté Llopart (1915-1960) (known as 'El Quico') joined the famed anarcho-syndicalist Spanish trade union Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (CNT) in 1931 and the

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<sup>224</sup> The fascist dictator of Spain installed by the Nazis and Mussolini, Francisco Franco, did not die until 1975 and Spain did not return to democracy until 1977-81 under King Juan Carlos I.

<sup>225</sup> Vague, Op cit., p.27

anarchist group Federación Anarquista Ibérica (FAI) in 1932.<sup>226</sup> The CNT-FAI alliance was one of the most noted groups resisting the overthrow of the democratic establishment of the Second Spanish Republic in 1931 resulting in the subsequent Spanish Civil War (1936-39) where the fascist, and future dictator of Spain, Francisco Franco took control of the country (with help from Nazi Germany and fascist Italy) murdering over 200,000 left wing Spaniards during the war and subsequent decades (including Sabaté Llopart and his brother, in 1960 and 1949 respectively) in a series of war crimes

These of course were not the only Leftist anarchist and paramilitary groups of the time. The Red Army Faction (RAF) and Baader Meinhof in Germany, who shared many of the same members and ideological influences. However, the RAF was a more organised and focused group that had a clear political programme and strategy, whereas Baader Meinhof was a looser and more spontaneous group that was characterized by its radicalism and militancy,<sup>227</sup> thus perhaps closer to The Angry Brigade. However, the Spanish anarchist connection is a significant one, as Helen Graham says in her book *The Spanish Civil War: A Very Short Introduction* (2005) the development of the CNT in Spain in the inter-war period was not coloured by the Bolshevik Revolution but by anarchist ideas:

'It was in urban Spain, however, that the resulting social protest seriously alarmed elite groups, who now viewed indigenous protest through the lens of the Russian Revolution. The epicentre of the threat was 'red' Barcelona. But for the Spanish establishment the spectre was not bolshevism but the city's powerful anarcho-syndicalist trade union movement, the CNT. It was committed to direct and often violent action.'<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>226</sup> LibCom. 'Sabate Llopart, Francisco, "El Quico", 1915-1960'. *LibCom*, 2006.

libcom.org/article/sabate-llopart-francisco-el-quico-1915-1960 [Accessed 25 May 2023]

<sup>227</sup> Hager, Robert P. "Baader-Meinhof Complexities: Ideology and the 'Root Causes' of Terrorism." *Democracy and Security*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2011, pp. 57–65. JSTOR, jstor.org/stable/48602682. [Accessed 14 June 2023]

<sup>228</sup> Graham, Op cit., p.5

It is in this context that the action of 1<sup>st</sup> of May in England in the late nineteen sixties need to be seen, the direct and violent action of the CNT-FAI and the virtual martyrdom of Francisco Sabaté Llopart were the inspiration for the activities of 1<sup>st</sup> of May and late the Angry Brigade.

One of the few scholarly articles which directly addresses the operations of the Angry Brigade is *The Party's Over? The Angry Brigade, The Counterculture, and the British New Left, 1967–1972*, (2015) by J Dan Taylor. In this article Taylor points out the important correlation of these attacks with the operations of the IRA:

‘...of the 120 recorded left-wing attacks against property that occurred between 1969 and 1972, and which overlap with the rise of more lethal Irish republican terrorism that began with the Official IRA’s Aldershot barracks bombing on 22 February 1972, and was followed by a devastating campaign by the Provisional IRA from March 1973.’<sup>229</sup>

The first was a machine gun attack on the US Embassy in London 1967. One source is a BBC documentary *The Angry Brigade* (1973) first broadcast on BBC1 on 20<sup>th</sup> July 1973, in which a dramatization of the US Embassy machine gunning is included at the start. The documentary continues with interviews, mainly with Stuart Christie, a Scottish anarchist, member of the Angry Brigade and author of a 3 part memoir of sorts, *The Christie File*.<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> Taylor, J. Dan. “The Party's Over? The Angry Brigade, The Counterculture, and the British New Left, 1967–1972.” *The Historical Journal*, vol. 58, no. 3 (2015): 877–900. [Accessed 18 May 2023] p.878

<sup>230</sup> Christie, Stuart. *Christie File*. (London: Cienfuegos, 1980)



Image redacted for  
copyright reasons.

Figure 13. "Leftists Disown Gunning." *The Times*, 22 August 1967.

Following the bombings of the Spanish banks in early 1969 a series of attacks then took place throughout the 1970s. More details can be seen in the thesis Timeline see p.427). A sustained period of attacks started on 4<sup>th</sup> May 1970 with the US Embassy in London being attacked again, this time firebombed by The Angry Brigade. After a further series of attacks aimed at Spanish interests, on 30<sup>th</sup> August the Home of Sir John Waldron, Metropolitan Police commissioner was damaged by bomb both planted by "The Angries". In October of 1970 the home of Attorney General, Peter Rawlinson, was also bombed and in 1971 the home of Robert Carr was attacked and this time the bombings made front page news across the UK. The BBC wrote:

'Two bombs have exploded at the Hertfordshire home of Employment Secretary Robert Carr causing serious damage. The first device went off soon after 22:00, near the kitchen of the house in Barnet...

The second went off a few minutes later. A policeman answering an emergency call after the first explosion was blown off his feet as he hurried towards the




Image redacted for  
copyright reasons.

Figure 14. The Stoke Newington 8, *Oz*, no.45, 1972

house. The explosions blew out windows and extensively damaged the ground floor of the house.<sup>231</sup>

No one was killed or seriously injured in any of The Angry Brigade's attacks, and their many communiques issued during this period state this was never their intention.<sup>232</sup>

On 20<sup>th</sup> August 1971 police raid a flat at 395 Amhurst Road, Stoke Newington, London; and four members of the Angry Brigade are arrested, John Barker, Hilary Creek, Jim Greenfield, and Anna Mendelson. On 30<sup>th</sup> May 1972 the trial of Barker, Creek, Greenfield, and Mendelson began, alongside 4 others not named here as they were later acquitted, they were known as the 'Stoke Newington Eight' (see figure 14).

Their trial concluded on 6<sup>th</sup> December with 4 being convicted of "conspiracy to cause explosions" and sentenced to 10 years imprisonment. Another Angry Brigade member Jake

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<sup>231</sup> BBC. 'BBC on this day: 12 January 1971'. *BBC News*. [news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/january/12/newsid\\_2523000/2523465.stm](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-on-this-day/1971-01-12) [Accessed 23 May 2023]

<sup>232</sup> Vague, *Op cit.*

Prescott had earlier been sentenced to 15 years for “conspiracy to cause bombings”. With these convictions the war waged by the anarcho-syndicalist Angry Brigade ended. In 3 short years they had inflicted considerable damage on the confidence of the British state, but in the grand scheme of things they were a minor player.

The operations of Official IRA, and later Provisional IRA moved to the British mainland in late 1971. They began on 31<sup>st</sup> October 1971 with the “Kilburn Battalion” of the Official IRA bombing of the 33<sup>rd</sup> Floor of the then named General Post Office Tower in Fitzrovia, London (fig.15).<sup>233</sup>



Figure 15. Bombed 33rd Floor of the General Post Office (GPO) Tower, Fitzrovia, London.

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<sup>233</sup> BBC. 'BBC on this day: 31 October 1971'. BBC News. [news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/october/31/newsid\\_2464000/2464143.stm](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-on-this-day/1971-10-31) [Accessed 23 May 2023].

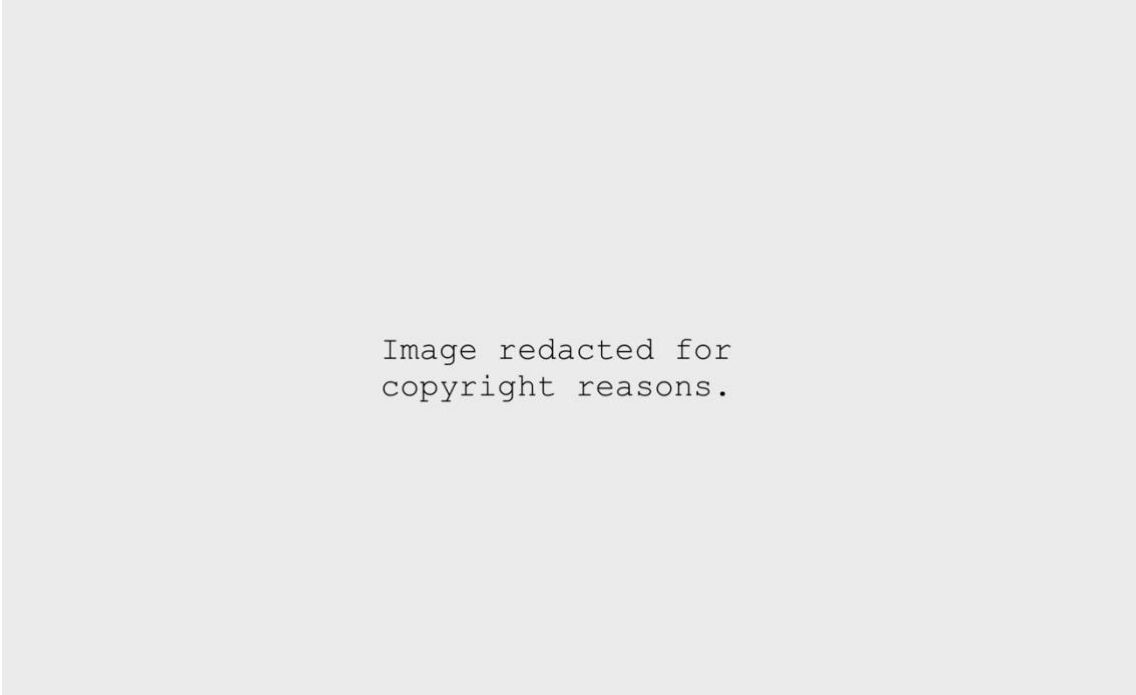


Image redacted for  
copyright reasons.

Figure 16. Aftermath of the IRA attack in Aldershot, Hampshire; February 1972.

Then on 22<sup>nd</sup> February 1972 we see the attack by the Official IRA on the Officers Mess of the 16<sup>th</sup> Parachute Regiment in Aldershot, Hampshire (see figure 16).<sup>234</sup> This attack was in revenge for the Bloody Sunday Massacre of 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1972, carried out by elements of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Parachute Regiment (1 Para) and the Ballymurphy Massacre also carried out by 1 Para in August 1971,<sup>235</sup> the Paras killing 25 civilians between them in the two massacres.

Yet the work of these violent revolutionary anarchists (and the operations of the IRA) provides a useful context into which we must place the ARC (see Chapter 4 onwards) given they were all living and working in central London from 1971 to 1981. Anson was working at the AA in Bedford Square only 700m from the GPO Tower at the time of the IRA attack.

The terminology which I will apply to the ARC in trying to determine their ideologies later in

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<sup>234</sup> Skitt, Natasha Reneaux Laura. 'Aldershot Bombing: The First IRA Revenge Attack against British Army on English Soil'. *Forces Network*, 2, Summer 2023, [forces.net/heritage/history/aldershot-bombing-first-ira-revenge-attack-against-british-army-english-soil](https://forces.net/heritage/history/aldershot-bombing-first-ira-revenge-attack-against-british-army-english-soil) [Accessed 28 May 2023]

<sup>235</sup> Ballymurphy massacre.com. (n.d.) 'The Massacre'. *Ballymurphy massacre.com*, [ballymurphy massacre.com/cms/massacre](https://ballymurphy massacre.com/cms/massacre) (Accessed 28 May 2023)



the thesis will try to address their apparent refusal to use the term anarchist, when so many of their actions and the actions of those with whom they worked, can easily be described in this way.

As the title of the Jonathon Green 2001 film put it *The Angry Brigade* were the 'The Urban Guerrillas Britain Forgot'. The activities of Prescott, Barker, Creek, Greenfield, and Mendelson, et al seem to have been almost purposely forgotten in British history of this period. The protagonists who were sentenced to years in prison for the attacks have since refused to comment on events.<sup>236</sup>

### Other Anarchisms

As said in the introduction to this chapter Ward and Read are central to the version of anarchism I am both advocating for and will illustrate in later chapters is present in the activities of others, as well as the ARC. They thus will receive particular attention in this chapter, however I will first look in brief at Alex Comfort as Goodway gives him some due attention here and his relationship to Ward and Read is not insignificant.

Goodway says that for him Comfort '...came to anarchism through pacifism' as opposed to through the writing of other anarchists, and certainly not through reading Kropotkin, Bakunin, etc., as is the received wisdom of anarchist "converts". Goodway quotes Comfort as saying '...“I write as an anarchist, that is, as one who rejects the conception of power in society as a force which is both anti-social and unsound in terms of general biological principle. If I have any metaphysical and ethical rule on which to base my ideas, it is that of human solidarity and mutual aid against a hostile environment...” Comfort's political theory

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<sup>236</sup> Pasvankias, Stephanie 'The Urban Guerrillas Britain Forgot— The Angry Brigade in the New Statesman', *PM Press*. 05/09/2019. [blog.pmpress.org/2019/09/05/the-urban-guerrillas-britain-forgot-2](http://blog.pmpress.org/2019/09/05/the-urban-guerrillas-britain-forgot-2) [Accessed 24 May 2023]

is simple but highly individual and original. The existing situation is one of social barbarism or irresponsible society, dependent on obedience.<sup>237</sup>

Comfort's 'highly individual' political theory perhaps places him more in the libertarian camp, than anarcho-syndicalist, but Comfort does not come to anarchist thought via this route. He was 'never a socialist'<sup>238</sup> and thus ignores any form of Marxist critique, or engagement with the "class war" thesis. The anti-war and pacifist origin of Comforts' anarchist ideas, which Goodway attributes to him, Comfort said in 1946: 'Every Government that intends war is as much our enemy as ever the Germans were.... Wars are not deplorable accidents produced by the perfidy of degenerate nations – they are the results of calculated policy" ...'<sup>239</sup>

Comfort's anti-war sentiment was so acute during World War II that he courted considerable controversy at the age of 22 in writing a letter to *Horizon*<sup>240</sup> in which Comfort (quoted by George Orwell) stated that he believed: 'As far as I can see, no therapy short of complete military defeat has any chance of re-establishing the common stability of literature and of the man in the street. ... When we have access again to the literature of the war years in France, Poland, and Czechoslovakia, I am confident that that is what we shall find.'<sup>241</sup>

Needless to say that Orwell, a veteran of the Republican cause during the Spanish Civil War, had very little truck with such ideas starting: 'What I object to is the intellectual cowardice of people who are objectively and to some extent emotionally pro-Fascist, but who don't care to say so and take refuge behind the formula 'I am just as anti-fascist as anyone, but—.'<sup>242</sup>

Comfort was conscientious objector during World War II, and given he was studying

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<sup>237</sup> Goodway, Op cit., p.245

<sup>238</sup> Ibid, p.253

<sup>239</sup> Ibid, p.245

<sup>240</sup> *Horizon* was published from 1940 to 1950 and was a London-based magazine which published short fiction, essays on literature and art, and book reviews. See, 'Horizon: Review of Literature and Art'. *Open University*, no date. [open.ac.uk/researchprojects/makingbritain/content/horizon-review-literature-and-art](http://open.ac.uk/researchprojects/makingbritain/content/horizon-review-literature-and-art) [Accessed 1 June 2023]

<sup>241</sup> 'O.Dag' 'George Orwell: Pacifism and the War', 1942, *Orwell*, 2000.

[www.orwell.ru/library/articles/pacifism/english/e\\_patw](http://www.orwell.ru/library/articles/pacifism/english/e_patw) [Accessed 1 June 2023]

<sup>242</sup> Orwell, George. 'Pacifism and the War'. *Partisan Review*. August-September 1942.

medicine at Cambridge it may have been that we was able to continue his studies, but it is unclear what role he performed beyond this during the war in place of military service.<sup>243</sup>

Ironically, Comfort is arguably better known today as “Dr. Sex” thanks to his work as the editor of the *Joy of Sex* book series rather than an anarchist thinker.<sup>244</sup> As something of a polymath later life Comfort did not work at all in anarchist circles but his sense of the sanctity of individual liberty is certainly present in his sociological, “sex-ological” and indeed zoological work.<sup>245</sup>

### *Architecture and Anarchism: Building Without Authority*

Paul Dobraszczyk’s recent book provides us with a rich resource of examples of the manifold ways in which people have engaged with architecture and their dwelling practices in anarchist ways, or in ways which can be described as anarchist. As such a significant body of research exists that illustrates the methodologies and the products of this way of ‘doing architecture’. I will therefore not dwell unduly on the individual examples here, save to direct your attention to the ways in which Dobraszczyk defines the relationship between anarchism and architecture in his work.

In the introduction to the book Dobraszczyk begins by, in an echo of Read describing the commodification of architecture writing as the first line:

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<sup>243</sup> Honeywell, *A British anarchist tradition*.

<sup>244</sup> Comfort wrote: *The Joy of Sex: A Gourmet Guide to Lovemaking*, (1972; 1986), *More Joy of Sex: A Lovemaking Companion to The Joy of Sex*, (1973; 1987), *The New Joy of Sex: A Gourmet Guide to Lovemaking for the Nineties*, (1992)

<sup>245</sup> Comfort was a lecturer in the Department of Zoology at University College London, 1951-2

‘As architecture in cities in the Global North becomes increasingly commodified, sterile and elitist - ... there us a pressing need to transform what is meant by value in building.’<sup>246</sup>

Dobraszczyk here goes back to the issues raised by Ward, Read, Habraken, and Risebero, that the vast majority of people (i.e. those of us who are not architects or The 1%) have no connection to, or see very little value in, most architecture.

Another very useful set of definitions further down this same page further reinforces the points made in Chapters 1, 2 and 3 of this thesis, as regards the process of ‘doing architecture’, as Turner would have it ‘housing as verb’, and the definition of anarchism in the context of architecture. What Dobraszczyk writes is worth repeating in full here:

‘...architecture isn’t so much a discreet activity derived from professional expertise, but rather a whole field of opportunity for the many, an arena of possibilities rather than one for the implementation of formal plans. This is architecture that promotes liberty for the many rather than the few.

It is what this book called an ‘anarchist’ architecture, that is, forms of design and building that are motivated by the core values held by ‘mainstream’ anarchism’ since its emergence as a distinct kind of socialist polities in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. These are autonomy, voluntary association, mutual aid, and self-organization through direct democracy. As will become evident there is a vast range of architectural projects that can been [sic] seen to reflect some or all of

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<sup>246</sup> Dobraszczyk, Paul. *Architecture and Anarchism: Building Without Authority*. (London: Paul Holberton Publishing, 2021), p.11

these values, whether they are acknowledged as specifically anarchist or otherwise.<sup>247</sup>

Thus, a parallel definition of architecture and architects, rather than Architecture and Architects to my own, as defined in Chapter 2 along with the criteria for defining any of these examples as anarchist, and the acknowledgement of the 'accidentally anarchist' as I have defined it. Architecture is not the province only of Architects, or even architects, it is the province and common heritage of everyone in the Global North, the term Dobraszczyk uses throughout his book.

The defection of Architecture into the realm of global finance is driven by greater complexity, which is driven by higher demands for better, bigger, bolder, and more ostentatious displays of wealth than before. Think Dubai, Hong Kong, Manhattan, the City of London, or the myriad of almost instant Chinese cities that have sprung up in the last quarter century. These are the demands that the ARC voice most loudly, for Architecture to be destroyed and for architecture to emerge an architecture for the people, the 99%.

Dobraszczyk goes on to discuss various thinkers, writers, and architects who have contributed to this narrative of anarchist architecture, including David Graeber,<sup>248</sup> who coined the term 'small "a" anarchism', Ruth Kinna,<sup>249</sup> Patrick Geddes,<sup>250</sup> Jane Jacobs,<sup>251</sup> even Charles Jencks!, specifically his 1972 book *Adhocism*, writing: 'There's nothing inherently surprising about this – after all, only around 5 percent of the built environment is

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<sup>247</sup> Dobraszczyk, Op cit., p.11

<sup>248</sup> Graeber, David. "The new anarchists." *New left review*, v.13, no. 6 (2002): 61-73.

<sup>249</sup> Kinna, Ruth. "Anarchism and the Politics of Utopia." In Davis Laurence, and Kinna, Ruth (Eds.) *Anarchism and utopianism*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009).

<sup>250</sup> Surhone, Lambert M., Mariam T. Tennoe, and Susan F. Henssonow (eds.) (2010) "Patrick Geddes (1854-1932)", *National Library of Scotland* (Betascript Publishing) [Accessed 11 February 2022]

<sup>251</sup> Jacobs, Jane, and Epstein, Jason. *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary edition, 2011 Modern Library Edn. (New York: Modern Library, 2011).

actually designed by architects;...<sup>252</sup> This fact does not detract from the central thesis I am making, as Dobraszczyk himself said, as cited previously, architecture is not the sole product of architects. It is so the rest of the world. But architecture is about more than just the qualified architect, as Dobraszczyk said it is '...a whole field of opportunity for the many.'<sup>253</sup> Additionally as a profession the Architect is just one of many professions who work in the field of the built environment, the Architect the person with the RIBA approved qualification and registration with ARB, is not the person of interest necessarily. Nor were they, individually, necessarily the target of the ARC ire, as we will see, but the power structures which clog arteries of the RIBA and the rest of their hierarchical establishment.

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<sup>252</sup> Dobraszczyk, Op cit., p.15

<sup>253</sup> Ibid. p.11

## Quietism as Anarchism

Quietism is predominantly defined as a religious concept that first emerged in the 17<sup>th</sup> century via the writings of Catholic mystic Miguel de Molinos (1628–1696), who was described by Bernard McGinn as ‘the arch-heretical of mystical error in Roman Catholicism.’<sup>254</sup> Molinos *Spiritual Guide* published in 1675 recommended utter passivity in the face of God. Molinos courted controversy for his teachings and was arrested by the holy Office of the Inquisition on 18<sup>th</sup> July 1685 on the order of Pope Clement X on suspicion of heresy.<sup>255</sup> Similarly Quakerism in England develops or adopts a version of religious Quietism as Pink Dandelion states at the start of their article "Guarded Domesticity and Engagement with "the World": The Separate Spheres of Quaker Quietism.":

‘The Quietist era of Quakerism in the eighteenth century is characterized, in the work of many scholars, as a separation of the Quakers from worldly engagements and, at the same time, an attempt within the Religious Society of Friends to preserve purity through the “disownment” of unfitting behavior[sic].’<sup>256</sup>

But the term also has distinct definitions in both philosophy and politics. John McDowell sets out a philosophical definition in his article from 2009 Wittgensteinian “Quietism” its philosophical roots are somewhat different to those of de Molinos, saying:

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<sup>254</sup> McGinn, Bernard. "Miguel de Molinos and the Spiritual Guide: A Theological Reappraisal", pp. 21–39. In Baird, Robert P. (ed.). *The Spiritual Guide. Classics of Western Spirituality*. (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 2010). p.21

<sup>255</sup> Baird, Robert P. Introduction. In \_\_\_\_\_(ed.). *The Spiritual Guide. Classics of Western Spirituality*. Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, p.16

<sup>256</sup> Dandelion, Pink. "Guarded Domesticity and Engagement with "the World": The Separate Spheres of Quaker Quietism." *Common Knowledge*, vol. 16, iss. 1, Winter 2010, 95-109; p.95

‘...Wittgensteinian quietism is absolutely not a recommendation of a kind of idleness, a practice of leaving necessary tasks to others, out of some distaste, which is left looking like a mere quirk in the style of reading I am objecting to, for the sorts of activity that go into performing them. Quietism does indeed urge us not to engage in certain supposed tasks, but precisely because it requires us to work at showing that they are not necessary.’<sup>257</sup>

Here McDowell makes clear that the philosophical issue of Quietism is not the total passivity recommended by Molinos in 1675, but that Wittgenstein is arguing about what are necessary and unnecessary tasks. The action here is to show why these are not necessary, not to idly reject such actions altogether. This ‘showing that they are not necessary’ is a significant part of the theory of Quietist Anarchism I am advancing here. The forms of anarchism embodied by Ward and Read are precisely those of demonstrating that the actions and activities of authorities, governments, and in Reads case, cultural critics and ‘taste makers’ is unnecessary. That human being are capable and indeed better at organising themselves in mutually supportive (see Kropotkin and Mutual Aid, Chapter 1) ways without the intervention of any of the ‘authorities’ we might normally expect to be necessary.

The key definition of Quietism I want to explore here however is that of the political Quietism, a term almost universally seen as regressive and an insult. I, however, wish to rehabilitate this term, and in aid of that aim I will be relying on the work of Lesley Chamberlain most

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<sup>257</sup> McDowell, John. Wittgensteinian “Quietism”, *Common Knowledge*, vol. 15, Iss. 3, Fall 2009, pp. 365-372; p.371,



succinctly addressed in their 2009 article “Quietism and Polemic: A Dialectical Story”. On the first page of this article Chamberlain says:

‘To be called a “political quietist” is no compliment. The term, which in contemporary usage entails passivity, indifference, and apathy, has been negative in every citation included in the Oxford English Dictionary since its first use in 1798. Averse to political action, quietists are regarded by the politically active and committed as even worse than moderates.’<sup>258</sup>

Elaborating on the following page that: ‘Quietism first appeared as a term of abuse in an age of political activism. The date of first use in English, 1798, reveals a signifier operating in the shadow of the French Revolution.’<sup>259</sup> We see the roots of this term, still labouring under negative associations from the heretical views of Molinos from over 100 years before the French Revolution, and even still today over 400 years later.

Chamberlain goes on to link these ideas to the left in Britain in the next page saying: ‘... the Marxist historian E. P. Thompson (1924–1993)<sup>260</sup> faulted the quietism of W. H. Auden’s poem “September 1, 1939.” ... which Chamberlain describes as ‘...the giving up of political action and the embrace of a quietist acquiescence in the status quo.’<sup>261</sup> The 1st of September 1939 being the day that Nazi Germany invaded Poland, instigating less than 2 days later the declaration of war upon Germany by the United Kingdom and France with which World War II had begun. The accusation by E. P. Thompson of ‘acquiescence in the

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<sup>258</sup> Chamberlain, Lesley. “Quietism and Polemic: A Dialectical Story”. *Common Knowledge*, vol. 15, iss. 2, Spring 2009, 181-196; p.181

<sup>259</sup> Chamberlain, Op cit., p.182

<sup>260</sup> Thompson, E. P., *The Making of the English Working Class*. (London: Penguin, 1963)

<sup>261</sup> Chamberlain, Op cit., p.182

status quo' by Auden, who as the poem indicates was living in New York at the time,<sup>262</sup> is at best contestable and at worst contemptible. Thompson, a soldier in the war, was almost certainly affected by the same belief expressed in Britain that Auden's departure in January 1939 for New York, was some form of a betrayal, given the coming storm of World War II.<sup>263</sup> With the *Anschluss* in March 1938 and the Munich Agreement of that September, it was already clear to many these were signs that war with Germany was inevitable.<sup>264</sup> Thompson was later a member of British Communist Party, until the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, and after his break with British Communism a founder of the British New Left in the early 1960s,<sup>265</sup> he represents a particularly British Left establishment view of Auden's Quietist attitude. Indeed, as Chamberlain says: 'Where political tensions ran high and commitment was expected, to be called a quietist could be ruinous.'<sup>266</sup> E. P. Thompson was similarly dismissive, in a way that has echoes of Brian Anson (see Chapter 4), of the English work class, condemning them as quietist as well. As Chamberlain goes on to highlight, citing Kate Soper (1994) however:

'Thompson, who accused the English working class of quietism, was later hoist by his own petard in a radical obituary linking him to a "...left-liberal tradition of dissent with its own forms of quietism and elitism.'<sup>267</sup>

It is worth pausing here to look at Goodway has to say on E. P. Thompson and anarchism, citing Thompson, one of the founding fathers of the British New Left at the time, in

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<sup>262</sup> Burt, Stephen. "'September 1, 1939' Revisited: Or, Poetry, Politics, and the Idea of the Public." *American Literary History*, vol. 15, no. 3, 2003, pp. 533–59. JSTOR, [jstor.org/stable/3568085](https://www.jstor.org/stable/3568085). [Accessed 3 June 2023]

<sup>263</sup> Carpenter, Humphrey. *W. H. Auden: A Biography*. (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1981)

<sup>264</sup> Faber, David. *Munich, 1938: Appeasement and World War II*. (London: Simon & Schuster, 2010)

<sup>265</sup> Bess, Michael. 'E.P. Thompson', *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 30/01/2023. [britannica.com/biography/E-P-Thompson](https://www.britannica.com/biography/E-P-Thompson) [Accessed 25 May 2023]

<sup>266</sup> Chamberlain, Op cit., p.184

<sup>267</sup> Ibid, p.183

'Revolution Again! Or Shut Your Ears and Run' in *New Left Review* (1960) Goodway says Thompson:

'...stressed the need to break through our present political conventions, and help people to think of socialism as something done *by* people and not *for* or *to* people, by pressing in new ways on the ground, believing:

"One socialist youth club of quite a new kind ... one determined municipal council, probing the possibility of new kinds of municipal ownership in the face of Government opposition; one tenants' association with a new dynamic, pioneering on its own account new patterns of social welfare - play-centres, nursery facilities, community services for and by the women - involving people in the discussion and solution of problems of town planning, racial intercourse, leisure facilities; one pit, factory, or sector of nationalized industry where new forms of workers' control can actually be forced upon management ... would immediately help in precipitating a diffuse aspiration into a positive movement".

This was a thoroughly libertarian programme, but since Thompson never advocated the abolition of the State and parliamentary institutions it fell significantly short of being anarchist.<sup>268</sup>

So, whilst Thompson might be useful to us as Chamberlin shows, in defining the appropriation with which political quietism was treated by many on the Left, he is no anarchist. The ideals and ideas of things being done by people to or for them is however crucial to the way anarchism manifested in the built environment, and England more generally, from 1970 onwards.

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<sup>268</sup> Goodway, Op cit. p.5

The Quietism so despised by Thompson et al, is not the kind of political, religious, or philosophical Quietism to which Chamberlain or I subscribe. But a Quietism that is inherently more anarchist in inspiration and execution as Chamberlain says on page 183, this quietism is not some “condition” from which people lacking conviction suffer: ‘...whether psychological or social — but [rather it is] a refusal to obey, or a tendency to ignore, specific ideological commands. Ideological definitions of right action, because they are emotionally freighted (and, in essence, commands), do not lend themselves to neutral semantic clarification.’<sup>269</sup> They must and are defined by a specific political credo and dogma whether that be Conservatism, Communism, Marxism, etc. Anarchism is, not a mere political credo, but a lack of political credo. Anarchists do not vote, do not engage in the representative “democratic” system as they do not see it as being democratic and voting legitimises a system purporting to be democratic. As Colin Ward set out in his article ‘The Case against Voting’, for *Freedom* in 1987:

‘Since anarchism implies an aspiration for a decentralised non-governmental society, it makes no sense from an anarchist point of view to elect representatives to form a central government. If you want no government, what is the point of listening to the promises of a better government?’<sup>270</sup>

Chamberlain proposes there are for them 3 potential definitions of Quietism what may be summarised as; a) “I choose neither” in response or reactionary or revolutionary politics, b) the tension between political pressures and personal needs, and c) perhaps the most useful for our purposes Chamberlain says:

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<sup>269</sup> Chamberlain, Op cit., p.183

<sup>270</sup> Ward, Colin. ‘The Case against Voting’, *Freedom*, vol. 48, no. 6, June 1987. via The Anarchist Library. [theanarchistlibrary.org/library/colin-ward-the-case-against-voting](http://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/colin-ward-the-case-against-voting) [Accessed 3 May 2023]

‘Regarded by others as an avoidance of participation and responsibility, quietism in this context is justified by the counteraccusation that all politics is about nothing more edifying than power and is always more or less corrupt.’<sup>271</sup>

Concluding that: ‘Fullbodied definitions of quietism and quietist would not obscure, ignore, or demean the kinds of personal conflict involved in rejecting revolution.’<sup>272</sup> Here Chamberlain goes on to discuss the relationship of the Quietist mode in German philosophy as direct foil to the revolutionary antics of the French in 18<sup>th</sup> Century. They discuss the German dramatist Johann Christoph Friedrich von Schiller (1759-1805), better known as simply Friedrich Schiller,<sup>273</sup> and philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) most noted for his development of a dialectical schema that encompassed the ‘...logical, natural, human, and divine’.<sup>274</sup> In much the same way, as we will see later in this chapter, Herbert Read sought to describe anarchism as a “natural” way of being, thus all encompassing.

‘Schiller and Hegel, taken together, represented Germany’s philosophical alternative to the French Revolution. Both saw political quietism as embedded in the complex of relations between the individual and the modern state,...’<sup>275</sup>

It is this complex of relations between the individual and the modern state with which all forms of anarchism wrestle. Anarchism seeks the abolition of the state, or any ‘archon’<sup>276</sup> of

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<sup>271</sup> Chamberlain, Op cit., p.186

<sup>272</sup> *ibid*, p.186

<sup>273</sup> Witte, William. ‘Friedrich Schiller’, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 05/05/2023. [britannica.com/biography/Friedrich-Schiller](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Friedrich-Schiller) [Accessed 8 May 2023]

<sup>274</sup> Malcolm Knox, T. ‘Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel’, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 28/04/2023. [britannica.com/biography/Georg-Wilhelm-Friedrich-Hegel](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Georg-Wilhelm-Friedrich-Hegel) [Accessed 3 May 2023]

<sup>275</sup> Chamberlain, Op cit., p.189

<sup>276</sup> Editors, The. ‘Archon’, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 13/11/2019. [britannica.com/topic/Archon-Gnosticism](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Archon-Gnosticism) [Accessed 24 May 2023]

any description, thus how can a voting democracy facilitate such an outcome. The early revolutionary *liberté, égalité, fraternité*, of the French Revolution gave way to *The Terror* of 1793–94,<sup>277</sup> just as surely as the Russian Revolution gave way to The Great Terror of Stalin.<sup>278</sup> Chamberlain here addresses the “elephant in the room” of early 20<sup>th</sup> century German philosophy, Nazism and its rise to power in the inter-war period in Germany. She says that one might see Quietism as akin to the famed aphorism “For evil to flourish, it only requires good men to do nothing.”<sup>279</sup> In support of this Chamberlain cites the Hungarian philosopher György Lukács (1885-1971).<sup>280</sup>

‘Lukács merged his Marxist retrospective analysis of the German mind with his Marxist antifascism to suggest that political quietism paved the way for Germany’s disaster in the twentieth century. In his view, quietist Germany never came to terms with the French Revolution.’<sup>281</sup>

Concluding that Lukács’ concept of the Proletarian *Bildung*<sup>282</sup> ‘... (or development of the individual sensibility), had left German intellectuals unprepared for political resistance to Hitler. Such became the common postwar[sic] wisdom, and in this context quietism was understood as a lack of political concern and commitment.’<sup>283</sup>

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<sup>277</sup> Tackett, Timothy. *The Coming of the Terror in the French Revolution*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2015)

<sup>278</sup> Conquest, Robert. *The Great Terror: Stalin’s Purge of the Thirties*. (London: Penguin, 1968:2018)

<sup>279</sup> Whilst often misattributed to Edmund Burke, Reuters states there is no evidence that Burke coined this phrase. Today, it is most associated with Nazi-hunter Simon Wiesenthal. See Reuters Fact Check. ‘Fact Check-Edmund Burke Did Not Say Evil Triumphs When Good Men Do Nothing’, 9 August 2021, *Reuters*, [reuters.com/article/factcheck-edmund-burke-quote-idUSL1N2PG1EY](https://www.reuters.com/article/factcheck-edmund-burke-quote-idUSL1N2PG1EY). [Accessed 3 May 2023]

<sup>280</sup> Editors, The. (2023) ‘György Lukács’, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, [britannica.com/biography/Gyorgy-Lukacs](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Gyorgy-Lukacs) [Accessed 24 May 2023]

<sup>281</sup> Chamberlain, Op cit., p.191

<sup>282</sup> Schmidt, James. ‘The Concrete Totality and Lukács’ Concept of Proletarian “Bildung”. *Telos: Critical Theory of the Contemporary*, 1975, 24:2. [philpapers.org/rec/SCHTCT-21](https://philpapers.org/rec/SCHTCT-21) [Accessed 26 May 2023]

<sup>283</sup> Chamberlain, Op cit., p.193

The dangers inherent in forms of passive quietism are here laid bare, the argument that passivity in the face of great evil (a la Wiesenthal) in unconscionable is a strong one, and yet that is not what quietist anarchism would hold to be true. Anarchism of any sort holds that the extant systems of hierarchical power structures are inherently 'unnatural' and opposed to human happiness. The fascism of Nazism or the soul-crushingly oppressive regimes of Communism, Stalinism and Maoism, would always be utterly opposed by any form of anarchism, Quietist or otherwise. As Chamberlain goes on to illustrate, with reference to Communist Poland, whether a mode of thinking or doing might be seen as more person conscience rather than radical political action is hugely dependent on context. With reference to Polish philosopher Leszek Kołakowski (1927-2009)<sup>284</sup> Chamberlain says:

'In the Stalinist 1950s, quietism was virtually synonymous, for Kolakowski, with individual conscience. Two decades later, the same quietist morality as Kolakowski outlined would underlay what Václav Havel called "living in truth." Yet when "living in truth" came under the spotlight of world attention, around 1977, Havel's nervous quietism was understood as its opposite — open dissent — and indeed these two are, or can be, companion feelings.'<sup>285</sup>

As Ward also pointed out in 'The Case against Voting' (1987) the truth of '...Kropotkin's observation, 75 years ago, that 'The state organisation, having been the force to which the minorities resorted for establishing and organising their power over the masses, cannot be the force which will serve to destroy these privileges.'<sup>286</sup> Thus the state in all its forms from Nazism to Stalinism, will always be opposed, subverted, and ideologically challenged by

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<sup>284</sup> White, Martin L. (2022) 'Leszek Kolakowski', *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, [www.britannica.com/biography/Leszek-Kolakowski](http://www.britannica.com/biography/Leszek-Kolakowski) [Accessed 24 May 2023]

<sup>285</sup> Chamberlain, Op cit., p.194

<sup>286</sup> Ward, Op cit, 1987.

anarchism. But the reality of existence in these political contexts in worlds away from the philosophising and theorising of Wittgenstein, Hegel, Schiller, et al. As Chamberlain concludes:

'...The life dramas of [people] caught up in the unforgiving absolutism of Marxist and totalitarian history cannot be captured in any dictionary's indications of how the term political quietism might apply.'

'...a consequence of the Bolshevik Revolution, morality came to be almost totally expressed through political choice in the twentieth-century West and that this was the context in which quietism emerged as a term of almost universal moral rebuke.'<sup>287</sup>

Thus, everyday Quietist forms of anarchism are those which effect people daily, and can be used to affect change where neither passive resistance nor engagement with representative democracy have achieved it, as we will see in the work of the ARC in Chapter 4. The theory of Quietist Anarchism has been explored by Jacob Weinrib<sup>288</sup> (see Chapter 1) in relation to the work of Immanuel Kant, and Weinrib attempts to chart a course between the two. In the work of Read and Ward we see this course, anarchist thought that is not bent on destruction and is about gradual change, but not Quietist in that it seeks not to rock the boat. The application of anarchism of the everyday, the 'natural' condition of things as read would have it, can be and is achieved throughout society every day. It is this example of Quietist Anarchism, of an 'anarchism of the gaps' to which I subscribe, and which can be most clearly seen in the work of Colin Ward and Herbert Read, whom I will address next in this

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<sup>287</sup> Chamberlain, Op cit., p.195

<sup>288</sup> Weinrib, Jacob, "Sovereignty as a Right and as a Duty: Kant's Theory of the State". (29/05/2017). Claire Finkelstein and Michael Skerker (eds) *Sovereignty and the New Executive Authority* (Oxford: University Press, 2019), p.26



chapter. The overlap between these individuals, Ward, Comfort, Read, and Bookchin, (plus more tangentially Morris and Orwell) is rather succinctly defined by Goodway when he says: '...Read became the admiring publisher and friend of the younger Comfort, who was, like Huxley and Orwell, very much an independent thinker and unobligated to others. Ward names Morris, Orwell and Comfort as significant influences.'<sup>289</sup> It is therefore necessary for me to address the work of many of these thinkers in this chapter.

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<sup>289</sup> Goodway, Op cit., p.11

## Herbert Read

Sir Herbert Read (1893-1968, Knighted 1953) was born in Yorkshire the son of a farmer, he left school at 16, and eventually studied at University of Leeds, his studies being interrupted by the outbreak of First World War. Read served in the British Army in France from 1915 to 1918. Read left the army a committed pacifist and became, over the course of the next 50 years, a noted literary and art critic, poet, and philosopher.<sup>290</sup>

As Goodway says of Read, he was:

‘...the most prominent British advocate for modern art as well as the best-known anarchist of his day. It was the impact of the Spanish Revolution that caused Read to declare for anarchism in 1937.’<sup>291</sup>

Read seems an unlikely anarchist having been born into a degree privilege in rural Yorkshire. The Spanish Civil War was a turning point for him, and this resulted in his anarchism, the pacifist Read was born out of World War I, and anarchist after 1937, these combining to form the quietist anarchist Read. Again, in Goodway’s words: ‘Read breaks with the classic anarchist political thinkers in just one way, but it is of decisive importance. This is his rejection of force. By 1930 he had concluded of 1914-18: ‘The whole war was fought for rhetoric - fought for historical phrases... Anarchism,’ he therefore believed, ‘naturally implies pacifism.’ He explicates further, in 1953, as a Gandhian: “Revolt, it will be said, implies violence; but this is an outmoded, an incompetent conception of revolt. The most effective form of revolt in this violent world we live in is non-violence.”<sup>292</sup>

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<sup>290</sup> Library. ‘Sir Herbert Read (1893-1968)’, *University of Leeds*, no date. [library.leeds.ac.uk/special-collections/research-spotlight/1520](http://library.leeds.ac.uk/special-collections/research-spotlight/1520) [Accessed 11<sup>th</sup> January 2022]

<sup>291</sup> Goodway, *Op cit.*, p.175

<sup>292</sup> *Ibid*, pp.189-190

'In the title essay of *The Politics of the Unpolitical* Read named the six modern "philosophers and prophets... whose message is still insistent, and directly applicable to our present condition - Ruskin and Kropotkin, Morris and Tolstoy, Gandhi and Eric Gill".<sup>293</sup> Read dedicated the reprint of *The Politics of the Unpolitical* republished under the new title *To Hell With Culture* (1963) to Gill's memory citing Gill as having used the phrase. Read's placing of Gill on a footing with Gandhi, Morris, Ruskin, and Kropotkin is obviously tainted today, due to the sexual abuse and rapes Gill commit against his daughters and sisters and thus Read's dedication is rather tainted.<sup>294</sup> But Gill aside, Read here demonstrates that he sees a clear and anarchist linkage between these six (or perhaps five) prophets of a new society. Read's anarchist society would thus not be achieved through violent overthrow of the state and the imposition of anarchy. Read believed anarchy was the natural state of being of humans not something that could or should be imposed. Read says: '...we must establish the natural order in society, which for my present purposes I assume is what we will mean by democracy.'<sup>295</sup>

Such a natural way of being read saw as having been educated out of people. That we are taught as part of living in an authoritarian system (the British Empire at the time of Read's writing was at its zenith) to obey, to learn by rote, and to follow the rules. Rules established by an imperial hierarchy that seeks to dominate the world. This for Read is not a natural way of being.

As Goodway writes, citing Read in *Education of Free Men* (London: Freedom, 1944).

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<sup>293</sup> Goodway, Op cit., p.193

<sup>294</sup> Sturgis, John. 'Airbrushing Claim as "Eric Gill Museum" Shuns Legacy of Artist and Sexual Abuser'. *The Guardian*, 18 December 2022, [theguardian.com/artanddesign/2022/dec/18/eric-gill-museum-artist-sexual-abuser](https://theguardian.com/artanddesign/2022/dec/18/eric-gill-museum-artist-sexual-abuser) [Accessed 8 June 2023]

<sup>295</sup> Read, Op cit., p.14

'Read is in effect calling on anarchists to bring about the social revolution by becoming schoolteachers, trained in the pedagogy of his freedom in education: "... a choice must be made which inevitably dictates the form which our society will take".'<sup>296</sup>

Read was knighted in 1953 and this led to him being ostracised by many in the anarchist community he is still today considered one of the foremost thinkers of British anarchism<sup>297</sup>.

Read's seminal essay 'To Hell With Culture' from 1941 is a forthright attack on product for consumption and profit and not use value, in which Read writes:

'If an object is made of appropriate materials to an appropriate design and perfectly fulfils its function, then we need not worry any more about its aesthetic value: it is automatically a work of art. Fitness for function is the modern definition of the eternal quality we call beauty, and this fitness for function is the inevitable result of an economy directed to use not to profit.'<sup>298</sup>

Above Read sets out his critique of architecture and art and the inter-relationship of these two concepts, and their place in a non-capitalist economy, an economy of 'use not profit'. According to Read's definition the work of Modernist and Brutalist architects such as the famed British duo Alison & Peter Smithson, or Chamberlin, Powell & Bon, can be classed as art. This architecture is often decried as ugly or cold and perhaps betrays Read's call for us not to '...worry any more about its aesthetic value', perhaps because pure Modernist architecture is considered by many to have no such value. As a purely functional, yet beautiful, way of building buildings it is perhaps the closest architecture comes to Read's conception of a "work of art".

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<sup>296</sup> Goodway, Op cit., p.199

<sup>297</sup> Goodway, Op cit., p.180

<sup>298</sup> Read, Op cit., p.18

But it is the economy of 'use not profit' which is vital here. Read is arguing that one of the reasons we cannot have or will not have successful Modernist architecture in Britain is the nature of our economy.

The ways in which the 'art of architecture' is further undermined by capitalism is depicted in an example that Read gives a page earlier in his essay. That of a chair, the analogy can be extended to buildings or entire towns, which are in and of themselves objects only differing in scale from the chair. Read writes:

'...the capitalist must progressively lower the quality of the materials he is using: he must use cheap wood and little of it, cheap springs, cheap upholstery. He must evolve a design that is cheap to produce and easy to sell, which means that he must disguise his cheap materials with veneer and varnish and other shams... Such is production for profit.'<sup>299</sup>

Whilst Read does not specifically name the Architect here, preferring instead to use 'capitalist' we can infer this. Perhaps the 'capitalist' here is the client or the rigid bureaucracies of central and local government (against which the ARC rail, as we will see in Chapters 4-5) but as the Architect is their servant, controlled by big business and corporate interests and thus complicit in this process of 'production for profit'. Thus, the rebellion of the architect, their abandonment of Architecture and their joining with the user and dweller, as in the field of self-build (see Chapter 2) would, we might conclude, be a fundamental part of the end of 'production for profit' in architecture.

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<sup>299</sup> Read, Op cit., p.17

Prior to our industrial age Architects, as we conceive of them today, did not exist. Read uses this example as representing a more democratic society when he claims that: ‘...the Middle Ages, is rivalled only by the Greek Age; but, oddly enough, it too was not conscious of its culture. Its architects were foremen builders, its sculptors were masons...’<sup>300</sup> As such the skills we now attribute to the Architect were the preserve of different group, the ‘master craftsmen’. Whilst they certainly had status in society, they did not occupy a rarefied stratum of the over-educated and culturally elevated professional, which the Fellows of the RIBA now do. The skill of the ‘master craftsman’ still exists in architecture but often now as an element of a lengthy and anonymised capitalist process for the most volume and at lowest price and a quality that can get away with, as with Read’s chair. Importantly this all said Read did not aspire (like Morris) to the abatement of the machine age, saying: “‘I am no yearning medievalist, and have always denounced the sentimental reaction of Morris and his disciples”.’<sup>301</sup>

This is sometimes at an extreme, as in the example of the volume private housebuilder, where the skilled craftsman is utterly divorced from the ‘totality of the work of art’, or *gesamtkunstwerk*,<sup>302</sup> and the end user as to make their presence meaningless. The ‘master craftsman’ role does manifest in the example of the self-builders building their own homes. Be that as a group of autonomous individuals in a co-operative or a single individual employing craftsmen to build for them. The self-builder has returned to what N. John Habraken called, in an echo of Read, ‘the natural relationship’. The natural relationship is at its most pure in the expression of individuality, Habraken writes:

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<sup>300</sup> Read, Op cit., p.11

<sup>301</sup> Goodway, Op cit., p.193

<sup>302</sup> Wilson Smith, Matthew. *The Urge for Totality. The Total Work of Art: From Bayreuth to Cyberspace* (London: Routledge, 2007) p.4.

‘[the natural relationship] all started at a primitive stage when this relationship expressed itself directly in the action of man who by himself, without any help, built his protective environment’<sup>303</sup>.

Clearly many degrees of separation now exist between the occupant and this direct expression of the ‘natural relationship’ in mass housing. It was the mass housing process that Habraken was railing against in 1972. The self-build thesis therefore presents an opportunity for the natural balance to be restored. It is necessary here to deal with this term natural or nature as Read and Habraken use it. Read says:

‘If we follow this natural order in all the ways of our life, we shall not need to talk about culture. We shall have it without being conscious of it. But how are we to attain this natural order of things, which is my particular concern in this essay? Obviously, we can’t make things naturally in unnatural surroundings. We can’t do things properly unless we are properly fed and properly housed.’<sup>304</sup>

By the natural order Read evidently means anarchism and in such a society the model of the self-builder as the individual, or more likely autonomous individuals in a co-operative, serves as a typeset for the future of housing and house building. Read rather modestly claims that ‘...there is nothing original in [my] outline of an anarchist community: it has all the elements of essential communism as imagined by Marx and Engels; it has much in common with Guild Socialism and Christian Socialism. It does not matter very much what we call our ultimate ideal. I call it anarchism because that word emphasizes, as no other, the central doctrine – the abolition of the State and the creation of a co-operative commonwealth.’<sup>305</sup> The abolition of the State and all associated hierarchies, must by logical

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<sup>303</sup> Habraken, *Supports: an alternative to mass housing*, p.25

<sup>304</sup> Read, *Op cit.*, p.14

<sup>305</sup> Goodway, *Op cit.*, p.189

extension include the procession of architecture, protected as it is by the law of the land in The UK still to this day.<sup>306</sup> The professionalisation of architecture is thus entirely contrary to the anarchist 'co-operative commonwealth' set out by Read above.

The resultant commoditisation of it as a form of cultural expression, as Read defines it, has created such a gulf between itself, its products and the rest of society that said gulf seems almost unbridgeable. Read argues this is in fact two-way, and this is a problem Habraken identifies too. It is not just the artists/architect that is withholding all power but the unwillingness of the populous to engage with "culture".

As Read writes:

'The more I consider people, the more clearly I begin to perceive that though there may be a minority who have been hopelessly brutalized by their environment and upbringing, the great majority are not insensitive, but indifferent. They have sensibility, but the thing we call culture does not stir them. Architecture and sculpture, painting and poetry, are not immediate concerns of their lives.'<sup>307</sup>

The alienation Read documents here, in a similar echo of the thesis of Morris, is about the exclusion of the user and dweller from the process of making, and the confining of this aspect of 'housing as verb' to the experts of the Architectural professions. The products of the Architectural professions in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century leave much to be desired. Their years of training and expertise resulted in what Ward described (as quoted earlier) as an '...expensive legacy of misery.'<sup>308</sup>

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<sup>306</sup> Architects Registration Board. 'What ARB Do to Regulate Use of the Title "Architect"'. *Architects Registration Board*, 29 March 2017. [arb.org.uk/public-information/before-hiring-an-architect/regulate-use-title-architect/](http://arb.org.uk/public-information/before-hiring-an-architect/regulate-use-title-architect/) [Accessed 6 June 2023]

<sup>307</sup> Read, Op cit., p.26

<sup>308</sup> Ward, *When We Build Again: Let's have housing that works!*, p.117



This 'legacy of misery' is evident in the Modernist project as manifested in social housing. But perhaps all the blame for the failure of the Modernist project does not lie with the Architects, at least Bill Risebero argues that the fate of Modernist architecture was due to a more fundamental flaw. He argued it was sealed because the society necessary for its success was not ushered in by the revolutions of the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Instead, capitalism of one sort or another took hold throughout the world. Risebero places this in an architectural context for us when he says:

'Under capitalism – eastern [The USSR] or western [The USA] - modernism is incapable of living up to its promise. A movement which comes to express only alienation, or actively oppose the society in which it exists, or to express social alternatives, cannot fully develop until that society is superseded. Any form of modernism that exists under capitalism is inevitably flawed: constrained by the logic of the capitalist mode of production and compromised by bourgeois ideology.'<sup>309</sup>

The ultimate abandonment of Modernist project in public housing in the form of the high-rise tower and concrete slab blocks of the nineteen sixties and seventies led to a different architectural form, certainly, but also a different socio-economic mode of 'housing the people.'<sup>310</sup> Housing as a concept had emerged in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century as a term for '...a process concerned with more than the construction of houses: a process in which financing, planning, construction, and administration of dwellings is thought of as a whole.'<sup>311</sup>

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<sup>309</sup> Risebero, *Fantastic Form*, p.7

<sup>310</sup> Nuttgens, Patrick. *The Home Front: Housing the People 1840-1990*, (London: BBC 1989),

<sup>311</sup> Nuttgens, Op cit., p.8

This definition effectively ceased to exist in the nineteen eighties. Housing has followed the path towards commoditisation, as defined by Read. The commodifying of houses and housing was introduced to public housing Thatcher's 'Right to Buy' via the 1980 Housing Act which made it significantly easier to obtain mortgages on council houses and simplified the process for local authorities to sell the same to long term residents at a discounted price.<sup>312</sup>

This was not the start of the process though, the demise of the post-war social project of providing decent publicly owned housing for all, not just the working classes, in fact began in 1977. The project had begun to be eroded by the Labour administrations of Prime Ministers Harold Wilson (1964-1970 & 1974-6) and Jim Callaghan (1976-9). It was dealt a crippling blow by The Housing (Homeless Persons) Act (1977) cited as a positive change by the homelessness charity *Crisis*: '...It set out how local authorities must make accommodation available to certain categories of homeless people.' and it '...also strongly reinforced an ongoing shift from council house allocations based on *desert* (judged by various moral criteria) to ones based more clearly on housing need.'<sup>313</sup> The Act had the perhaps unintended consequence, of making social housing a temporary arrangement. This was an insidious change that meant people needed to leave public housing as soon as their economic circumstances improved, council housing was thereafter seen as being of second rate, and a place where one 'ended up', not chose to live.

It was in this socio-economic environment, the devaluing of social housing, the economic slumps of the nineteen seventies, collapse of public landlordism (which began with the 1977

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<sup>312</sup> Ibid.

<sup>313</sup> Crisis. 'Chapter 13 Homelessness Legislation', *Crisis*, [crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/the-plan-to-end-homelessness-full-version/solutions/chapter-13-homelessness-legislation](https://crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/the-plan-to-end-homelessness-full-version/solutions/chapter-13-homelessness-legislation) [Accessed 28 May 2022]

Housing Act) that many ordinary people, and architects, found themselves. The nineteen seventies became synonymous with social and political revolution across the world (notably, in the USA<sup>314</sup>, Australia<sup>315</sup>, and Iran<sup>316</sup>), but for the purposes of this study we will concentrate on how these changes manifested in a British architectural and socio-political context.

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<sup>314</sup> Altbach, P.G. 'From revolution to apathy — American student activism in the 1970s'. *Higher Education*, 8, 609–626 (1979).

<sup>315</sup> Arrow, Michelle. & Woollacott, Angela (2018) 'Introduction—How the Personal Became Political: The Gender and Sexuality Revolutions in 1970s Australia', *Australian Feminist Studies*, 33:95, 1-8.

<sup>316</sup> Moloney, Suzanne, and Razipour, Keian. 'The Iranian Revolution—A Timeline of Events', Brookings, 24/10/2019. [brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2019/01/24/the-iranian-revolution-a-timeline-of-events](https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2019/01/24/the-iranian-revolution-a-timeline-of-events) [Accessed 8<sup>th</sup> February 2022]

## Colin Ward

Colin Ward (1924–2010) wrote and lectured widely throughout his career on the relevance of anarchist ideas especially to the production of housing architecture. Ward is something of a giant in British anarchist and anarchist-architectural circles even still today. Goodway cites Ward in the subtitle of his book *Anarchist Seeds Beneath the Snow: Left-libertarian Thought and British Writers from William Morris to Colin Ward* and devotes a whole chapter to him. In which he says that Ward advocated all his life for organizational principles and a wider society based on:

'...functional, temporary, experimental, and based not on the formal democratic principle of votes, membership cards and so on, but on that of letting the people who are willing to undertake the work get on with it, [it] is in a way a model of the kind of organization we should be building in every held of life'.<sup>317</sup>

In Ward's many books such as *Tenants Take Over* (1974), *Housing: An Anarchist Approach* (1976) and *Talking to Architects: Ten Lectures by Colin Ward*. (1996) deal directly with examples of anarchist theory and anarchist action as they have been applied to, and manifested in, architecture, planning, and specifically the building and maintenance of housing in Britain.

However, I wish to start by returning to term I used earlier, 'housing as verb', this definition is one which Ward cites repeatedly and which he accredits to his friend and colleague John F. C. Turner (1927–).<sup>318</sup> One such citation by Ward appears in his book *Anarchy in Action* (1972) from the essay "We House, You are Housed, They are Homeless" in which he cites Turner as follows:

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<sup>317</sup> Goodway, Op cit., p.261

<sup>318</sup> Spatial Agency, "John Turner", *Spatial Agency*, no date. [spatialagency.net/database/john.turner](http://spatialagency.net/database/john.turner) [Accessed 29<sup>th</sup> March 2017]

'In English, the word 'housing' can be used as a noun or as a verb. When used as a noun, housing describes a commodity or product. The verb 'to house' describes the process or activity of housing.'<sup>319</sup>

This 'housing as verb' concept is central to my conception of anarchism in architecture because it is in this area of architecture that the 'non-Architects' is most active, and with which they are most concerned. As Habraken said in 1972: said:

'We have the need to concern ourselves with that which touches us daily. Through this concern it begins to belong to us and becomes part of our lives. There is therefore nothing worse than to have to live among what is indifferent to our activities.'<sup>320</sup>

Therefore, we can see the clear relationship of individual action, the '...need to concern ourselves with that which touches us daily', and user control or indeed takeover of municipal housing and the built environment more generally. Ward goes on to illustrate, in the above essay cited essay, that:

'As the pressure on municipal tenants grows through continuous rent increases which they are powerless to oppose except by collective resistance, so the demand will grow for a change in the status of the tenant, and for tenant control. The tenant takeover of the municipal estate is one of those obviously sensible ideas which is dormant because our approach to municipal affairs is still stuck in the grooves of 19<sup>th</sup> Century paternalism'<sup>321</sup>

The engagement of people, who do not work in the architectural professions, in the process of architecture is here motivated by vested interests of protecting one's home or bettering

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<sup>319</sup> Ward, Colin, *Anarchy In Action* (London: Freedom, 1973; 1988) p.6

<sup>320</sup> Habraken, *Supports*. p.17

<sup>321</sup> Ward, *Anarchy In Action*, p.7

one's personal circumstances. Indeed, vested interests, decried by some critics of Architecture, such as Brian Anson<sup>322</sup>, are a key motivator in people deciding to act in defending or improving their living conditions.

Ward explores the notion of anarchist modes of organisation in Architecture. in his 1966 article "Anarchism as a Theory of Organisation, the Architects' office has been a site of exploration of the modes of anarchist organisation", in which cites a report produced in 1962:

'...for the Institute of British Architects under the title *The Architect and His Office*. The team which prepared this report found two different approaches to the design process, which gave rise to different ways of working and methods of organisation. One they categorised as centralised, which was characterised by autocratic forms of control, and the other they called dispersed, which promoted what they called "an informal atmosphere of free-flowing ideas." This is a very live issue among architects. Mr. W. D. Pile, who in an official capacity helped to sponsor the outstanding success of postwar British architecture, the school-building programme, specifies among the things he looks for in a member of the building team that: "He must have a belief in what I call the non-hierarchical organisation of the work. The work has got to be organised not on the star system, but on the repertory system. The team leader may often be junior to a team member. That will only be accepted if it is commonly accepted that primacy lies with the best idea and not with the senior man."

And one of our greatest architects, Walter Gropius, proclaims what he calls the technique of "collaboration among men, which would release the creative

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<sup>322</sup> Anson, *I'll Fight You For It*, p.119

instincts of the individual instead of smothering them. The essence of such technique should be to emphasise individual freedom of initiative, instead of authoritarian direction by a boss... synchronizing individual effort by a continuous give and take of its members.<sup>323</sup>

Here, quoted at length, we can see Ward is arguing that the Architectural profession, whilst being a hierarchical organisation born, as so many professions in British society, of the British class system, harbours the potential to be a hot bed of anarchist organisation. This is not to suggest this is the current situation, but Ward is arguing that it is achievable, saying:

'I believe that the social ideas of anarchism: autonomous groups, spontaneous order, workers' control, the federative principle, add up to a coherent theory of social organisation which is a valid and realistic alternative to the authoritarian, hierarchical and institutional social philosophy which we see in application all around us.'<sup>324</sup>

Certain examples, which will be address later in this chapter, provide a template for groups of architects/architecture professionals who wish to organise themselves along the lines of the anarcho-syndicalist modes described by Ward above.<sup>325</sup>

Throughout *Housing: An Anarchist Approach* (1976), Ward illustrates how anarchist modes of organisation can apply readily to doing architecture (lowercase 'a') and indeed the built environment more generally. As he says:

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<sup>323</sup> Ward, *Anarchism as a Theory of Organization*.

<sup>324</sup> Ibid, p.10

<sup>325</sup> Coates, Michael. 'To Hell With Architecture: An architecture of anarchism'. *Anarchist Studies*, v.23 n.2, (11/2015) 47-67.

‘Anarchism – the political philosophy of a non-governmental society of autonomous communities – does not at first sight seem to address itself to the problems of the city at all. But there is in fact a stream of anarchist contributions to urban thought that stretches from Kropotkin to Murray Bookchin historically, and from John Turner to the International Situationists ideologically.’<sup>326</sup>

The anarchist approach then might be taken as an example that can be employed to cities and architecture, including housing, but has not been to any significant degree thus far. Indeed, the examples cited by Ward in 1976 confined themselves to Latin American *barrios*, the slums of East London, and squatter occupations, as examples of anarchist modes of seizing control of land and property. It is not really until nine years later, in his book *When We Build Again: Let's Have Housing That Works* (1985), that Ward sets out numerous modes by which occupants can engage in dwelling practices that enable them to work outside of the normal modes of Architecture.

### The cooperatives

One of the most common and easily recognised modes is that of the co-operative. Similarly, to definitions of syndicalism offered by Rudolph Rocker, the co-operative is a collective of autonomous individuals who come together to pool their abilities and labour to achieve an end, in this case building dwellings.

‘The argument for housing co-operatives is that it is a mode of tenure which changes the situation from one of dependence to one of independence, that it is one which, as the veteran co-operative advocate Harold Campbell put it years

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<sup>326</sup> Ward, *Housing: An Anarchist Approach*. p.87.



ago, “combines private enterprise and mutual aid in a unique form of social ownership which puts at a premium personal responsibility and individual initiative”.<sup>327</sup>

Importantly the co-operative model also addresses some questions around land tenure and the ultimate ownership of the dwellings when completed. The co-operative enables those who independently may not be physically or financially able to build their own homes to opt out of the status quo. The self-building or self-organised cooperative worker, self-build being a common mode of co-operative organisation in housing, therefore presents itself as the seemingly logical result of an anarchist mode of doing architecture. The wealthy do not require these forms of organisation as they can now as throughout human history employ others to build their homes to their own specifications and need not dabble in the housing market or work cooperatively with anyone.

The concept of a consumer/object relationship existing in the housing process was being advanced by others in the realms of architectural theory at the same time as Habraken made his arguments. Ward, and the American theorist John F. C. Turner, *Tenants Take Over* (1974) speaks of massed ranks of state authorities and the way in which they attempt to solve all ‘problems’ within the housing process during which he cites Turners work also:

‘Housing Problems Limited – the great industry of politicians, professional administrators, planners and academic pundits – has totally failed to grasp this elementary truth [that housing is a function not a thing]. For them, as my friend

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<sup>327</sup> Ward, *When We Build Again*, p.89

John Turner remarks in his beautifully argued essay on 'Housing as Verb', housing is a commodity:

“On the one hand we have supra-local agencies which plan for and provide for people’s housing needs, with the result that the people so planned for and provided for turn into consumers or passive beneficiaries. On the other hand, if housing is treated as a verbal entity, as a means to human ends, as an activity rather than as a manufactured and packaged product, decision-making power must, of necessity, remain in the hands of the users themselves, I will go beyond that to suggest that the ideal we should strive for is a model which conceives housing as an activity in which the users – as a matter of economic, social and psychological common sense – are the principle actors.”<sup>328</sup>

Turner’s essay, the extract Ward quotes is from the Turner and Robert Fichter edited volume, *Freedom to Build: Dweller Control of the Housing Process*, (Freedom, 1972), is by extension Ward’s theory. In this we see a startling parallel with Habraken’s thinking. We see the conception of housing as a process a combination of forces acting upon and against each other, rather than a “manufactured and packaged product”. Turner and Ward are arguing for much the same approach to addressing the housing situation as Habraken with the call that the; ‘...decision-making power must...remain in the hands of the user’. As Habraken contests throughout *Supports* the de-consumerisation of the housing process and the consequential transfer of power to the user or occupant will inevitably necessitate the end of the mass housing project for it, as we shall see from Habraken, cannot sustain either change in the very nature of housing provision. Ward’s huge contribution to both

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<sup>328</sup> Ward, *Tenants Take Over*. pp.9+10

anarchist thought in England and its application to the built environment cannot be overstated. His work serves as a significant corrective to the consumerist mindset and provides us with myriad examples of people taking an anarchist approach to housing, city planning, and architecture.

*Talking to Architects... but are they listening?*

'For me, the first principle of housing in any society, quite apart from the ideal for an anarchist society, is dweller control. We are fortunate that this principle has been very carefully enunciated by an anarchist architect, John Turner. Turner's key insight is this: "When dwellers control the major decisions and are free to make their own contribution to the design, construction, or management of their housing, both the process, and the environment produced, stimulate individual and social well-being. When people have no control over, nor responsibility for, key decisions in the housing process, on the other hand, dwelling environments may instead become a barrier to personal fulfilment and a burden on the economy".'<sup>329</sup>

Throughout his life Ward spoke to numerous architects, students or architecture and anarchist gatherings. Ward had significant influence on some of the Architecture professionals of the period nineteen seventies to the late nineteen nineties. In 1996 Freedom press published a select anthology of these addresses, *Talking to Architects: Ten lectures by Colin Ward* bringing together lectures given to the profession at Universities and

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<sup>329</sup> Ward, *Talking to Architects*, p.101

Architectural conferences between 1976 and 1996. There is notable preponderance of lectures from 1990 onwards. This suggests that the relevance of Ward's ideas was acknowledged as relevant then, 30 years ago, 20 years after first being published, as I argue they remain relevant now almost 50 years after first appearing.

One of the first talks listed in the book was delivered to the Sheffield School of architecture in 1979, here he refers to one of many anarchist architects with whom he interacted in this period. Giancarlo De Carlo, named by Ward as an advocate of "an architecture of participation." Ward recounts part of speech De Carlo gave on receiving gold medal of the Royal Institute of British Architects in which:

'...he talked about his first meeting with the anarchists in 1945: "I came to have a deep relationship with the group who published the journal *La Volantà* and, through them, the whole galaxy of Italian anarchism: exceptional people who have been the most important encounters of my life." In his address to the RIBA on 15th June 1993, he listed the writers who, he said, had shaped his view of the world. "They were Kropotkin, Godwin, Morris, Bakunin and Malatesta, Thoreau and Whitman, and of course Patrick Geddes."

His criticism of the architectural profession was for what he described as "the habit of taking the side of the powerful and leaving the weak to their fate".<sup>330</sup>

In Chapter 7, 'Unexpected pioneers of town and country planning in Britain', a lecture given at Geneva University on 27<sup>th</sup> September 1993 with reference to the work of Peter Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow: an intellectual history of urban planning and design in the 20th*

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<sup>330</sup> Ward, *Talking to Architects*, p.8

*century* (Blackwell, 1988) under the heading 'The Anarchist Roots of the Planning Movement', Ward says:

'...[some of] the early visions of the planning movement stemmed from the anarchist movement which flourished in the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first years of the twentieth. That is true of Howard, of Geddes and of the Regional Planning Association of America, as well as of many derivatives on the mainland of Europe... The vision of these anarchist pioneers was not merely of an alternative built form, but of an alternative society, neither capitalist nor bureaucratic-socialistic: a society based on voluntary co-operation among men and women, working and living in small, self-governing commonwealths.'<sup>331</sup>

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<sup>331</sup> Ward, *Talking to Architects*, p.66

## Murray Bookchin

It is worth addressing here the influence and ideas of Murray Bookchin. Ward cites Bookchin as being an influence on him as well as using his name in company of Kropotkin. Indeed, Goodway also draws Ward and Bookchin together saying,

‘During the second half of the [twentieth] century Colin Ward and Murray Bookchin, although in some significant ways opposites, developed this innovative anarchism, grounded in psychology, biology, ecology, anthropology, sociology, alternative technology: in contrast to 'Engels and economics.’<sup>332</sup>

This ‘innovative anarchism’ which Goodway attribute Ward and Bookchin is the quietist anarchism argued for earlier in this chapter. The original version of anarchism similarly includes Alex Comfort and can be traced back to Read as the predecessor of all three. Goodway argues that Bookchin is ‘...the most original anarchist theorist since Kropotkin’, and citing the fact that Bookchin himself gives credit to Read for inspiring his anarchism, when Bookchin said ‘...“It was Herbert Read's *The Philosophy of Anarchism* that I found most useful for rooting the views I slowly developed over the fifties and well into the sixties in a libertarian pedigree...”’<sup>333</sup> This web of influence is important in understanding how Ward, addressed previously and Bookchin as the key thinkers who applied anarchist thought to the built environment, stood on the shoulders of the likes of Read, and this clearly demonstrates the value of Read as the godfather of quietist anarchism in architecture.

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<sup>332</sup> Goodway, Op cit., p.254

<sup>333</sup> Ibid, p.189

### How to Build an Anarchist City?

In 1974 urban theorist and anarchist Murray Bookchin published *The Limits of the City* (New York, N.Y.; Harper Torchbooks) in which he claimed in the preface that 'Given its grotesquely distorted form, it is questionable whether the city is any longer the proper arena for social and cultural development.'<sup>334</sup> Bookchin proceeds in this relatively short but seminal text to set out the flaws and failures of the bourgeois city, built for commerce and profit, and put forward a philosophy which might enable a city of *communitas* as opposed to *civitas*.<sup>335</sup> The contemporary city of the early nineteen seventies, the city (in the form of London where the ARC were based and worked) had abandoned the people (*communitas*) and developed solely as a city for politics and economy (*civitas*). In the context of the ARC no better examples than Ealing (Chp.7) and Bridgtown (Chp.8), and before the ARC formation, Covent Garden (Chp.4). London has perhaps never been a city of *communitas*, or not since it was revived as England's capital by the Normans in 1066.

The root of this problem as identified by Bookchin is bourgeois society, or late-stage capitalism as we would call it in the first quarter of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. It, Bookchin states '...divides virtually all spheres of life against each other; it universalizes competition, profit, and the primacy of exchange value over mutual aid, art, and utility.'<sup>336</sup>

These impulses can clearly be seen in the driving forces behind all the urban development we will see the ARC fighting against, alongside the local communities, in Covent Garden, Ealing and Bridgtown in the nineteen seventies.

London in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century was the centre of the world, the largest, mostly densely populated, most dangerous and most product place on earth. The London of the nineteen

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<sup>334</sup> Bookchin, *The Limits of the City*, p.3

<sup>335</sup> Ibid, p.136

<sup>336</sup> Ibid, p.100

seventies, and or today in the late-stage capitalist society in which we now live, is not some gradual evolution of society, it, as Bookchin says in *Urbanization Without Cities: The Rise and Decline of Citizenship* (Black Rose Books, 1992). 'The market society we call "capitalism" ... did not "evolve" out of a feudal era. It literally exploded into being in Europe, particularly England, during the eighteenth and especially nineteenth centuries...' <sup>337</sup> Thus the British cities of the late eighteenth century (London, Manchester, Birmingham, Liverpool, Glasgow, etc.) grew exponentially, Manchester's population growing from 89,000 to 400,000 from to in just 52 years, 1799-1851. <sup>338</sup> Whilst London growing from 1.4 million in 1815 to 3.1 million by 1860, and 7 million by 1913. <sup>339</sup> In these circumstances, and in these cities, Manchester dominated by Industry and London dominated by trade, the city grew in response to the demands of capital. Thus, as Bookchin says, such a '...burgeoning market society cannot not be trusted to produce spontaneously a habitable, sanitary, or even efficient city, much less a beautiful one.' <sup>340</sup>, and nor did it. Frederick Engels's *The Condition of the Working-Class in England* (1844) based on Engels personal experiences of the rookeries and slums of industrial Manchester, and one of the precursors to Engels and Marx writing the *Communist Manifesto* in 1848, <sup>341</sup> describes these hells on earth saying:

'...in the courts which lead down to the [River] Irk,... contain unqualifiedly the most horrible dwellings which I have yet beheld. In one of these courts there stands directly at the entrance, at the end of the covered passage, a privy

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<sup>337</sup> Bookchin, *Urbanization Without Cities*.

<sup>338</sup> Griffin, Emma. 'Manchester in the 19th Century'. *The British Library*, 5 May 2014, [bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/manchester-in-the-19th-century](http://bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/manchester-in-the-19th-century) [Accessed 10 June 2023]

<sup>339</sup> Emsley, Clive; Hitchcock, Tim; and Shoemaker, Robert. "London History - A Population History of London", *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*. [oldbaileyonline.org](http://oldbaileyonline.org) [Accessed 10 June 2023]

<sup>340</sup> Bookchin, *The Limits of the City*, p.101

<sup>341</sup> Marx, Karl, and Engels, Friedrich. (1848) 'Manifesto of the Communist Party'. *Createspace Independent Publishing Platform*, 2017. [marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto](http://marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto) [Accessed 10 June 2023]



without a door, so dirty that the inhabitants can pass into and out of the court only by passing through foul pools of stagnant urine and excrement.

...the only entrance to most of the houses is by means of narrow, dirty stairs and over heaps of refuse and filth. The first court below Ducie Bridge, known as Allen's Court, was in such a state at the time of the cholera that the sanitary police ordered it evacuated, swept, and disinfected with chloride of lime.<sup>342</sup>

The linkages between the appearance of capitalism, the industrial cities and slums of Manchester and London, and the development of the ideas and ideals of socialism and communism are indisputable. The horrific living conditions eventually motivated the slow moving leviathan of Imperial Britain to respond to the public need for city planning, the building of major sewers and the introduction of sanitary standards.<sup>343</sup>

The emergence of English city planning in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century is perhaps best exemplified by the work of Ebenezer Howard and the Garden Cities movement. But Howard, rather than trying to save London, set about planning for new cities, the cities of tomorrow as the first version of his seminar work made clear, *Garden Cities of To-morrow* (1898). As Lewis Mumford said in his preface to the 1985 edition: 'Howard's proposals pose fundamental questions about urban structure. Specifically, are mass conurbations of many millions really the most necessary or desirable form of urbanisation.'<sup>344</sup> Bookchin argues that Ebenezer Howard '...had been strongly influenced by socialist ideas,' particularly Kropotkin, 'But as a

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<sup>342</sup> Engels, Friedrich. (1844) *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (Oxford: Oxford Worlds Classics, 1999) p.58

<sup>343</sup> See the London sewers designed by Joseph Bazalgette between 1865 and 1875. In Collinson, Alwyn. 'How Bazalgette Built London's First Super Sewer'. Museum of London, [museumoflondon.org.uk/discover/how-bazalgette-built-londons-first-super-sewer](https://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/discover/how-bazalgette-built-londons-first-super-sewer). [Accessed 10 June 2023]

<sup>344</sup> Mumford, Lewis, "Introduction". In Howard, Ebenezer, *Garden Cities of To-morrow*, (London: Attic Books, 1985;1898)

pragmatic man, Howard essentially divested his scheme [the Garden Cities] of its socialist and anarchist elements.<sup>345</sup>

Bookchin believes that Howard was given an impossible task whereby his:

'...design is assigned the task of achieving sweeping goals that involve revolutionary changes in the entire economic, social, and cultural fabric of bourgeois society. Compared to the metropolis, Howard's garden city is attractive enough

... the project is a structural design – and, as such, is limited in what it can offer. It may provide the basis for greater human contiguity... Nevertheless, it leaves undefined the nature of human contiguity, community, and the relationship between the urban dweller and the natural world.'<sup>346</sup>

This is for me the fundamental problem with the thesis that city planning, or architecture more generally can possibly address the problems of society. It can provide immediate physical fixes, whether this be Bazalgette's sewers, Howard's Garden Cities, or The Smithson's Streets in the Sky, but the problems of social inequality are so often made concrete in these plans.

'By itself, no structural design can reconcile the conflicting interests and social differences that gather beneath the surface of the garden city. These interests and differences must be dealt with largely on their own terms – by far-reaching changes in social and economic relations.'<sup>347</sup>

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<sup>345</sup> Bookchin, *The Limits of the City*, p.117

<sup>346</sup> *ibid*, p.118

<sup>347</sup> *Ibid*, p.119

## Anarchism in ARC

The relationship between Anarchist thought, architecture, and the work of the primary protagonists of this thesis the ARC may be, in some ways, difficult to see clearly. Dobraszcyk's work goes a significant way to illustrating the former, how anarchist thought, and action can exist in the 'doing of architecture', and Ward and Read demonstrate how anarchist theory and modes of organisation can be applied in architecture and culture more widely.

But the ARC themselves insisted repeatedly they did not have a specific credo politically, so how can I identify them as anarchist? Beyond being in favour of revolution and the destruction of the RIBA, as we will see in Part 2 of this thesis, the ARC did not name their political colours, specifically. However, certain comments and written positions from the group can be read as anarchist, perhaps in the 'accidentally anarchist' or Quietest mode as exemplified by Read and Ward. As Brian Anson said in an undated response to an undated paper by another ARC member, Rob Thompson.

'I'll gamble money on the fact that if ARC members look through history they'll find that the movements with which ARC would have had sympathy all had distinctive characteristics. The anarchists certainly; the poets the dreamers; the men of action in all movements. The things in fact that have always stirred the blood. Those who have always strived to 'awaken' the people because deep down they have sought to awaken themselves. That's the dilemma, that's the rub, but that's also the clue to what we are. Finding out who we are is the first step; the second step is wondering what we do with that self knowledge - the step of strategy.'<sup>348</sup>

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<sup>348</sup> Letter from Brian Anson. "Brian's Reply: A response to Rob's untitled and undated paper."

Additionally, Anson refers to the ARCs members as lacking 'a nice socialist analysis.' This places the ARC politically less in the revolutionary Marxist socialist camp and more in the anarcho-syndicalist camp of temporary syndicates formed for the purposes of solving specific problems or meeting specific needs.

As Colin Ward set out in 1966:

'...four principles behind an anarchist theory of organisation: that they should be (1) voluntary, (2) functional, (3) temporary, and (4) small.

They should be voluntary for obvious reasons. There is no point in our advocating individual freedom and responsibility if we are going to advocate organisations for which membership is mandatory.

They should be functional and temporary precisely because permanence is one of those factors which harden the arteries of an organisation, giving it a vested interest in its own survival, in serving the interests of office-holders rather than its function.<sup>349</sup>

These temporary syndicates and the description of permanence hardening the arteries of an organisation can be seen very clearly in the Architectural Establishment, and in bodies like the RIBA. But the abandonment of such an Architectural Establishment does not mean all the skills and abilities of the architect are abandoned as well. An anarchist mode of 'doing architecture' does not (necessarily) constitute an Arts and Crafts-esque reversion to hand building techniques. Rather it means that the process, architecture as a verb, must be again made an immediate concern to the lives of all. Machinery and modern building techniques can be and would need to be employed to build for the rapidly increasing human population.

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<sup>349</sup> Ward, 'Anarchism as a Theory of Organization', p.10

But this is not a contradiction as previously pointed out, and as Read wrote:

'...there is no need to become primitive in order to secure the essentials of democratic liberty. We want to retain all our scientific and industrial triumphs – [...] We do not propose to revert to the economy of the handloom and the plough...'<sup>350</sup>

It does however necessitate the destruction of the Architectural profession(s) as we currently conceive of them, and the elite social stratum that they occupy. Fortunately for us, we have a model from history at our disposal, The ARC, and they and their work in nineteen seventies Britain and Ireland forms the basis of the rest of this thesis.

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<sup>350</sup> Read, Op cit., p.25

PART 2:

THE ARCHITECTS'

REVOLUTIONARY

COUNCIL

# CHAPTER FOUR

## THE ARC IS BORN

At first glance the press conference held by the Architects' Revolutionary Council (ARC) in 1974 at the Architectural Association (AA), Bedford Square, London, may appear to be an isolated revolutionary moment that burst onto the scene during a period of uncertainty in architecture circles. This is apparent when one considers the RIBA "crisis" of 1971-1972<sup>351</sup> (see Chapter 2) in its dispute with salaried architects, and the attempts by various sectors of the profession to advance their agendas through the formation of pressure groups.<sup>352</sup> However, on closer inspection, the ARC is different in that it was not trying to put pressure on the architectural establishment, as embodied by the RIBA, to reform, but to destroy it, and the "profession" of Architecture, if not the practice of architecture.

The work of the ARC is a unique moment in the story of British architecture, they formed an architecture movement that has not, or not yet, been called a movement. The ARC was not just a momentary protest group,<sup>353</sup> nor was it designed to create some marginal reform for specific groups of workers or users of architecture in some circumstances. It was a movement in that it sought not reform but revolution and destruction of old ways. As David Harvey first observed in 1990 how could the ARC create a new world of architecture '...without destroying much that had gone before? You simply cannot make an omelette

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<sup>351</sup> RIBAJ, "Rank and file dissent"

<sup>352</sup> Karpf, Op cit.

<sup>353</sup> ibid

without breaking eggs, as a whole line of modernist thinkers from Goethe to Mao have noted.<sup>354</sup> The basis that the ARC is an 'movement which has not been called a movement' is the one on which I will proceed and that which the contribution set out in the following three chapters will argue.

### A movement that has not been called a movement

In the short article that first alerted me to the existence of the ARC, the archivist of the AA, Edwards Bottoms, wrote:

'...ARC became seriously involved in a number of important community issues between 1974 and 1977, mobilising on behalf of the Covent Garden Residents Association, the Ealing Alliance (opponents to Ealing Council's town centre plans) and the Pope Street Association of Bootle, Merseyside. A series of journals, *Red House*, *The Wild Duck* and *The Colne Valley News* were also published, featuring articles, critiques and reviews.'<sup>355</sup>

The momentum to establish the ARC in 1974 came principally from Brian Anson<sup>356</sup> and the evident frustration he felt from his involvement in the failed campaign to save the working class community of Covent Garden<sup>357</sup>. Covent Garden served, for those involved, as the springboard for the establishment of the ARC. As Anson said in an interview with Duncan Crowley at the 14<sup>th</sup> European Architecture Students Assembly (EASA) in August 2008, in

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<sup>354</sup> Harvey, David. *The Condition of Post-Modernity: An enquiry into the origins of cultural change*. (London: Blackwell, 1990), p.18.

<sup>355</sup> Bottoms, 'If Crime Doesn't Pay: The Architects' Revolutionary Council'.

<sup>356</sup> Rogers, Richard. Brian Anson: Obituary. *The Guardian*, 17/12/2009, [www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2009/dec/17/brian-anson-obituary](http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2009/dec/17/brian-anson-obituary) [Accessed 10<sup>th</sup> May 2021]

<sup>357</sup> Anson, *I'll Fight You For It*.



the town of Letterfrack, Co Mayo, Ireland. Anson concedes that the name Architects' Revolutionary Council might have been a bit over the top:

'I actually created, in Pula, in Croatia, myself and a Croatian <sup>[358]</sup> created the Architects Revolutionary Council which sounds a bit melodramatic now, but in actual fact it... and it's a bit embarrassing, you know a name like that ...we actually did very good work and communities invited us in to help them.'<sup>359</sup>

Crowley explained in an email to me in 2021 that he was part of EASA from 2002 to 2004. Crowley said of Anson that: 'I felt he lived a full life but there was frustration and perhaps a bit of anger there. I can relate to much of his view. Brian had set up the winter schools, from which EASA grew.'<sup>360</sup>

The ARC did not therefore emerge out of the ether, it was both a product of its time and of its location, and indeed of the key protagonist, antagonist, and "leader" (as much as the ARC might be said to have a single "leader") Brian Anson. Anson's radicalisation occurred from 1966-69 in London, as we will see in the next section, specifically about of the project to redevelop the Covent Garden Market on which Anson worked. Anson's radicalisation and his work for and then against the Greater London Council, London Borough of Camden, and City of Westminster's joint plan for the redevelopment of Covent Garden sets the scene for the birth of the ARC.

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<sup>358</sup> Other writings of Anson/ARC say this was a Slovenian architect, not a Croatian, we are unclear which of the constituent nations of Yugoslavia this unnamed co-founder was from. However, given the city of Pula is in present day Croatia, we might assume the above to be correct.

<sup>359</sup> Crowley with Anson, Op cit., 00:14:47–00:15:02,

<sup>360</sup> (2021) Email from Duncan Crowley (Duncan\_Crowley@iscte-iul.pt), 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2021.

On the following pages are several images documenting the planned redevelopment of Covent Garden by the Greater London Council, Camden, and Westminster.



Image redacted for  
copyright reasons.

Figure 17. the Covent Garden Redevelopment scheme, sketch.

Image redacted for  
copyright reasons.

Figure 18. Front cover of 'Covent Garden's Moving: The Covent Garden Area Draft Plan'.

Image redacted for  
copyright reasons.

Figure 19. Overall view of the scheme.

## I'll Fight You For It, Brian Anson!

Brian Anson's architectural radicalisation was part of the development of a community resistance to master planned redevelopment in the Covent Garden area of central London between 1971 and 1977. This campaign to prevent the Greater London Council, Camden, and Westminster's planned scorched earth policy of demolition and rebuild allied the last truly working class community in central London<sup>361</sup> with, in the longer term, the middle-class theatre crowd of the area. These two groups had wildly differing aims but an overlapping purpose, to stop the redevelopment plan. As Anson would put it in his 1981 retelling, *I'll Fight You For It: Behind the struggle for Covent Garden*, they were; '...united in only one thing – hatred of the brutal redevelopment scheme the Greater London Council was threatening in the area.'<sup>362</sup>

## Covent Garden Campaign 1961-1974

The struggle for Covent Garden began in 1961 and was instigated by the Covent Garden Market Act 1961<sup>363</sup>, which placed the fruit and vegetable market into public ownership. This was given greater urgency five years later with the passing of Covent Garden Market Act 1966 enabling legislation to move the market.<sup>364</sup> The market closed permanently, and moved to its current location in Nine Elms, Battersea, in 1974.

Anson became involved with Covent Garden when he joined the planning team at the Greater London Council in August 1966 and was set to work with five others planning the

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<sup>361</sup> Anson, *I'll Fight You For It*.

<sup>362</sup> Ibid, p.xiii

<sup>363</sup> Hansard (1961) 'Covent Garden Market Act 1961' [online] [hansard.millbanksystems.com/acts/covent-garden-market-act-1961](http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/acts/covent-garden-market-act-1961) [Accessed 10<sup>th</sup> August 2014]

<sup>364</sup> National Archives, the. 'Covent Garden Market Act 1966: enabling legislation to move the market', 1966. [discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C1457344](http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C1457344) [Accessed 10<sup>th</sup> August 2014]

redevelopment of Covent Garden for the departure of the market. Anson recounts how he became radicalised in his conversation with Crowley in 2008:

‘The big thing that tipped me over the edge was when I came to London in 1966. I was ... working in Dublin, and then I got this big job in London for ... the redevelopment of Covent Garden, [a] senior job. I was a deputy principal of an international team of designers, and I worked on that still believing that architecture could do something for the ordinary people.’<sup>365</sup>

In *I'll Fight You For It!* Anson describes how he ‘...began formulating ideas of a concept which I called ‘Immediate Environment Improvement’ and says that... ‘The consortium [Greater London Council, London Borough of Camden, and City of Westminster] should have fired me there and then because, banal though my own words appear to me now, they contained within them the full spirit of my revolt four years later.’<sup>366</sup> Anson’s revolt was catastrophic for the Greater London Council, Camden, and Westminster’s plans for Covent Garden; he took a vast quantity of copied documents and knowledge of the intricacies of the plan with him to the people of Covent Garden. His knowledge was then used in the working-class community’s campaign to save their area, with the founding of the Covent Garden Community Association (CGCA, see figures in 1971).

Former CGCA member, Penny Saunders, briefly recalled Anson as a principal influence of the setting up in the CGCA in a film made by Year 6 children at St Clement Danes Church of England Primary School, Drury Lane, Covent Garden in 2013. She recalled:

‘...there was someone called Brian Anson, he came from the Greater London Council, now he was an architect, worked for the Greater London Council

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<sup>365</sup> Crowley with Anson, Op cit., 00:03:13–00:03:38,

<sup>366</sup> Anson, *I'll Fight You For It*, pp.21+22

walked out one day and said “I’m not gunna work for these people! What they’re doing is wrong in Covent Garden”, and he came to Covent Garden and he was very strong part of why the CGCA was able to be set up.’<sup>367</sup>




Image redacted for  
copyright reasons.

Figure 20. The CGCA Offices in former market buildings, Covent Garden. still from cinecam footage from 1972.

Anson’s overall assessment of the working-class campaign to save Covent Garden was that it was a failure. In the post-mortem carried out towards the end of his book he says:

“Whether we would have got support for the Community struggle had the theatre fraternity no vested interests in Covent Garden is a debatable point.”<sup>368</sup>

Whilst Anson’s hostility to the “theatre fraternity” might be understandable, given his positioning within the campaign and his political affiliations, his distaste for “vested interest” is less comprehensible.

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<sup>367</sup> Year 6, St Clement Danes Church of England Primary School with digital:works, ‘The Battle for Covent Garden’, *Vimeo*, 16/02/2013, [vimeo.com/71588655](https://vimeo.com/71588655) [Accessed 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2021]

<sup>368</sup> Anson, *I’ll Fight You For It*, p.119




Image redacted for  
copyright reasons.

Figure 21. Brian Anson (bottom right), with Sammy Driscoll (bottom left) and John Toomey (top right) and other members of the CGCA, date unknown.

People of all classes must be motivated to act, a fact that Anson recognised but seemed to believe could be achieved through political rhetoric and appeals of comradely class solidarity. But self- or vested interests are one of the principal motivations for most people. It was vested interests that mobilised the working class community (just as much as the theatre fraternity) of Covent Garden as they did the residents of Yates Street and Corn Street in Toxteth, Liverpool. What Anson is, in fact, referring to is the ultimate outcome of the campaign. The public inquiry, predictably, sided with the Greater London Council joint scheme at its conclusion in mid-1972.

Anson concludes here, furthering his argument that the working-class community was excluded, or as Anson would have it had excluded itself through inaction, from the process:

'...masterly though the Community pamphlet [CGCA publication "Covent Garden - The World is Watching"] was it really gave little comfort to the old



working-class community. Instead it showed dramatically what the Community movement had become - a liberal, middle-class, conservation society.<sup>369</sup>

Anson repeatedly infers at the end of his book that he failed to mobilise the working class of Covent Garden and there is a sense of his guilt over the outcome. But Anson either through frustration or lack of compassion is quite derisory about the very people he professes to love. On the final four pages of the book, he repeatedly makes statements such as:

'I believe to this day [John] Toomey and the others don't realise the unique position they held in 1971. They were the heirs to all the rebellious spirits of past Covent Gardens...'<sup>370</sup>

And:

'Covent Garden was a failure, not because the struggle was lost but because, paradoxically, it was never waged. Those who claim success in the area are pathetically wrong and it is significant that most of them are either middle-class outsiders or recent colonisers of Covent Garden. Their sincerity may be beyond doubt, but they have no personal experience of real working-class oppression. They could never understand the dream that lay in the heart of a Sam Driscoll or a John Toomey and because of this ignorance they have led the people cruelly up the wrong path since 1971.'<sup>371</sup>

Finally, Anson, rather ostentatiously takes aim at himself and the "lambs" of Covent Garden, saying:

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<sup>369</sup> Anson, *I'll Fight You For It*, p.125

<sup>370</sup> Ibid, p.261

<sup>371</sup> Ibid, p.263-4

'But Covent Garden was also my personal failure. ... But the greatest tragedy of all is that the old community have allowed themselves to be defeated like lambs to the slaughter. Oppressed for so long in the centre of London, they have lost the will to fight for their land and culture.'<sup>372</sup>

This is somewhat contrary to Peter Moloney's memory of the situation he said in 2013:

'Covent Garden was the classic for that, where people there were surprisingly militant enough and surprisingly angry enough, and really probably the first time in England that in an architectural planning sense, that people had said "no!"'<sup>373</sup>

This "failure" went some way toward motivating Anson to found the ARC in 1974, the year after the Secretary of State for the Environment, Geoffrey Rippon, intervened and the Greater London Council, Camden, and Westminster scheme was finally dismembered through the granting of "protected historical architectural preservation status" to over 250 buildings in Covent Garden.<sup>374</sup> The physical fabric of Covent Garden was thus successfully retained, with a few exceptions, notably the buildings demolished in 1971 at the corner of Shorts Gardens and Drury Lane, once a Cooperage (barrel making) now occupied by the brutalist a Travelodge Hotel built in 1972 and credited to Geoffrey Spyer & Partners. The hotel features a ramp on the Short's Garden façade which would have served as an access point to the pedestrian upper level that would have covered Covent Garden had the redevelopment gone ahead.

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<sup>372</sup> Anson, *I'll Fight You For It*, p.264

<sup>373</sup> Peter Moloney, in conversation with the author, Bloomsbury, London, 15<sup>th</sup> May 2013.

<sup>374</sup> Bransford, Anne "The Development Battle: The Community's struggle to save Covent Garden". [web.archive.org/web/20220409235018/coventgardenmemories.org.uk/page\\_id\\_\\_37.aspx](http://web.archive.org/web/20220409235018/coventgardenmemories.org.uk/page_id__37.aspx) [Accessed 14<sup>th</sup> July 2014]



Figure 22. Travelodge London Covent Garden credited to Geoffrey Spyer & Partners

Anson says at one point that ‘...many powerful groups coveted the building, [Covent Garden central market building] including my own institution, the Architectural Association, which wanted it for its school of architecture.’<sup>375</sup> As discussed in more depth in Chapters 2 and 5, Anson, rather self-importantly blamed himself for the failure at Covent Garden, so we can assume that from Anson’s perspective things were really bad at this point in the early nineteen seventies, both architecturally and politically:

‘Things have to be really bad before one becomes committed to total change. I believe they are and particularly so in my own field of architecture.’<sup>376</sup>

But Covent Garden’s working class community was to be almost entirely killed off by the following twenty years of gentrification. Only one small area of social housing remains in Covent Garden at Odham’s Walk WC2. A remarkable piece of housing architecture built above street level atop shops on Neal Street and Long Acre, which has been described as

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<sup>375</sup> Anson, *I’ll Fight You For It*, p.249

<sup>376</sup> Anson, Speech: The Architect as Revolutionary. p.1.

having a 'strong sense of place' and being an 'oasis of calm' in a extremely busy part of central London.<sup>377</sup>

Thirty years later Anson still recalled the end of this campaign with the same mixture of success and failure, when he said to Crowley in 2008:

'...with a big battle and we won, and we lost, we saved the area physically, which is now one of the most famous tourist areas in the world. But we lost because we didn't save the people. So it, for me, it was a defeat.'<sup>378</sup>



Image redacted for  
copyright reasons.

Figure 23. Odhams Walk, Covent Garden, London. 2016. Photograph: Jorge Nagore.

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<sup>377</sup> Nagore, Israel. 'Odhams Walk, Covent Garden, London'. *Twentieth Century Society*. December 2016. [c20society.org.uk/building-of-the-month/odhams-walk-covent-garden-london](http://c20society.org.uk/building-of-the-month/odhams-walk-covent-garden-london) [Accessed 4<sup>th</sup> February 2022]

<sup>378</sup> Crowley with Anson, Op cit., 00:04:50–00:05:51



Image redacted for  
copyright reasons.

Figure 24. The former Odham's Printing press site, Covent Garden c.1965.

Referring to the early years of the Covent Garden struggle Anson says these were '...the crucial years, when the protest movement had a choice of directions and, in my opinion took the wrong one: to work for reform within the system instead of developing a revolutionary struggle against it.'<sup>379</sup> For radical revolutionaries such as Anson and the ARC, the peoples' lack of willingness to revolt openly led to the perpetuation of the status quo and existing power structures.

### The ARC's foundation

The ARC's emergence, from a nascent sense that Anson had whilst working at Covent Garden in 1966, that something was very wrong with Architecture, to its explosion into the world of the Architecture Establishment in 1974, took place during a period of significant social and economic upheaval. The 1973-4 Oil Crisis, stagflation, and worldwide economic downturn which accompanied these events is not unlike the economic and social situation

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<sup>379</sup> Anson, *I'll Fight You For It*, p.21

of the first quarter of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.<sup>380</sup> As I set out in Chapter 3 these challenges were manifold, the beginning of The Troubles in the north of Ireland with the mainland bombing campaign of the IRA beginning in 1972, this coupled with the Miners Strikes of that same year, the introduction of the Three Day Week in the winter of 1973–74.<sup>381</sup> As Dominic Sandbrook rather neatly summed the situation up in *State of Emergency*, the Government of Ted Heath between 1970 and 1974 ‘...was forced to declare five states of emergency in barely four years. And at a very basic level, the power cuts and strikes of the 1970s, the hysterical headlines and predictions of disaster, were rooted in profound international challenges, from the collapse of the old colonial empires to the surging tide of globalization.’<sup>382</sup>

It was into this turbulent first half of the decade some elements of the architectural profession in England was to try and reinvent the practice of architecture. Also, in some instances during this period the long ignored users of architecture also attempted to make their voices heard. In the footsteps of similarly motivated European architectural activists the ARC set out to destroy the architectural establishment, most pointedly the RIBA. Its disruption of the RIBA 1976 Hull conference and posters asking, “*If crime doesn't pay... Where do architects get all their money*” see (see figure 14) gives us a good sense of the level of animosity held by this group towards the architectural establishment.

ARC, rather predictably dubbed in 1977 by Karpf ‘...the *enfant terrible* of the radical architecture groups...’ was noted for its belief that ‘...“creative architecture should be

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<sup>380</sup> Economist. ‘Is the World Economy Going Back to the 1970s?’, *The Economist*. 09/10/2021, [www.economist.com/finance-and-economics/is-the-world-economy-going-back-to-the-1970s/21805260](http://www.economist.com/finance-and-economics/is-the-world-economy-going-back-to-the-1970s/21805260) [Accessed 13<sup>th</sup> January 2022]

<sup>381</sup> Beckett, Op cit.

<sup>382</sup> Sandbrook, *State of Emergency*, p.12

available to all people in society, regardless of their economic circumstances”, and it is “committed to revolutionary changes within the architectural establishment...”.<sup>383</sup>

### At the AA

Anson’s involvement with the Covent Garden Campaign placed him less than a mile from the Architecture Association (AA) in nearby Bedford Square. In 1971 the AA got a new Chairman, Alvin Boyarsky,<sup>384</sup> who offered Anson a job that same year. Anson was not an architect, he was trained as a planner in Dublin and was employed by Boyarsky in his role as a key activist in the Covent Garden Campaign, which had concluded around 1973/4. Whilst we do not see in the records where or what Anson did in his first two years working at the AA we might assume that the Covent Garden project was central to his work at the AA. Given the ARC later become committed to involving students directly in their projects it seems evident that Anson would have developed this in his early years with the AA.

Anson wrote to Edward Bottoms in 2008 after the publication of Bottoms’ article. Anson began the letter with the words ‘NOT FOR PUBLICATION’, and in it he wrote:

‘When I joined the AA in 1971 it was generally acknowledged as ‘the best school of architecture in the world’ and, in my opinion it deserved the title. When I was ejected from the AA in 1980 it had become, to my mind, the **worst** school in the world.’<sup>385</sup>

Whilst this is perhaps a perfectly innocent comment, it appears with hindsight, quite arrogant. For Anson to claim that the AA was ‘the best school of architecture in the world’ only when he worked there is remarkably narcissistic. Under Boyarsky the pedagogy of the

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<sup>383</sup> Karpf, Op cit., pp.730+731

<sup>384</sup> Sunwoo, Op cit.

<sup>385</sup> Letter to Edward Bottoms from Brian Anson, 18<sup>th</sup> February 2008.

AA had changed dramatically, as is set out Irene Sunwoo in 'From the "Well-Laid Table" to the "Marketplace:" The Architectural Association Unit System'. As Sunwoo says in the article: 'The unit system that Boyarsky launched at the AA in 1973 was in fact the descendent of a teaching model born out of emergent modernist polemics at the school during the late 1930s.'<sup>386</sup> This unit system became the basis for Anson's work at the AA, with Anson offering a unit the following year, 1974/5. As Bottoms explained this coincided, in I am sure no coincidence, with the foundation of the ARC:

'In early 1974 a group of radical architectural students operating under the guise of the 'Architects' Revolutionary Council' announced their presence to the world, staging a dramatic press conference and publishing an inflammatory manifesto. Calling for the destruction of the RIBA and the establishment of 'an international movement towards community architecture', the ARC emerged from the AA's Intermediate Unit 1, tutored by the charismatic Brian Anson.'<sup>387</sup>

Intermediate Unit 1 was run out of the basement of number 11 Percy Street, just west of Tottenham Court Road, (Fitzrovia, London W1) from the AA in Bedford Square. Anson recalled in his interview with Crowley how it was called '...the Free Percy Street Atelier, and where we did all these things, we still worked with communities.'<sup>388</sup> And he claims with reference to Intermediate Unit 1 that '...over the ten years of the [nineteen] seventies, I created a very special unit of teaching at the AA.'<sup>389</sup>

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<sup>386</sup> Sunwoo, Op cit., p.25

<sup>387</sup> Bottoms, Op cit., p.14.

<sup>388</sup> Crowley with Anson, Op cit., 00:23:59–00:24:13.

<sup>389</sup> Ibid, 00:22:13





Figure 25. "If crime doesn't pay where do architects get all their money?" ARC poster. c.1974

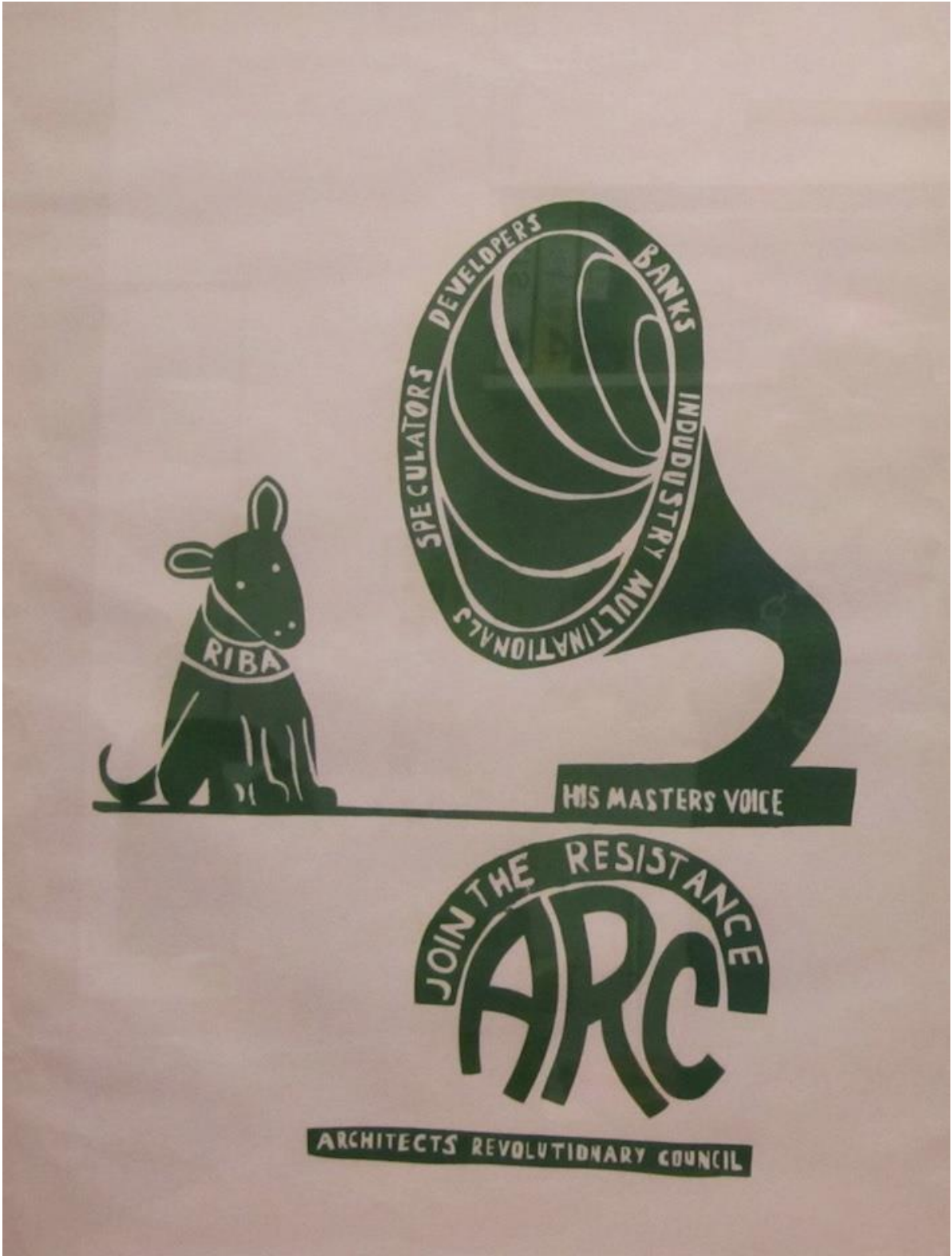


Figure 26. RIBA dog and “His Masters Voice” (HMV) poster.

The first official AA record of Anson's presence appeared in the AA's in-house publication *The Ghost Dance Times*, Intermediate Unit 1 appears on Friday 18<sup>th</sup> October 1974. By the 1976-77 AA *Prospectus* Anson's unit has been renumbered to Intermediate Unit 5. In 1977-78 Anson, and by this time George Mills' unit, is Diploma Unit 8. No unit taught by Anson, or any other ARC member or affiliate, appears in the 1979-80 *Prospectus*. This ties in with Anson's date of his apparent "ejection" from the AA in 1980.

Additionally, in an article entitled "Land Song" published on Friday 6<sup>th</sup> December 1974, in *The Ghost Dance Times*, by Stephanie Wuensche (presumably an AA student at the time) summarises a talk Anson gave, titled "Let's Sing The Land Song". The poster (see figure 15) shows this was on Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> November 1974. Wuensche says 'The talk itself was basically a swift history lesson on the landownership problem.'<sup>390</sup> Wuensche recounts that Anson believes '...land should be as free as air,...'<sup>391</sup> She claims Anson set out that the imminent death of commercial architecture went hand in hand with the "death of late capitalism" (a belief held in some parts of the political Left in the early-nineteen seventies<sup>392</sup>) Wuensche continues, 'Unfortunately Anson gave no suggestions about a 'new architecture' or even an embryo of design ideas.'<sup>393</sup> Design ideas were not at all what Anson or the ARC was about, as we will see later in this thesis.

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<sup>390</sup> Wuensche, Stephanie. 'Land Song', *Ghost Dance Times*, Friday 6<sup>th</sup> December 1974, 1-3. p.1

<sup>391</sup> Ibid, p.1

<sup>392</sup> It was the 1970s when '... the 'post-war settlement' of social-democratic capitalism began to disintegrate, ... punctuated by successive, ever more severe crises of the capitalist economy ... This was the period of both intensifying crisis and deep transformation when 'late capitalism', ... gave way to neoliberalism.'" Streeck, Wolfgang. *How Will Capitalism End? Essays on a Failing System*. (London: Verso, 2017)

<sup>393</sup> Wuensche, Op cit., p.3

The foundation of the ARC at the AA in 1974 was very much of its time, the dark glasses, the posters, the publicity stunt of the press conference, the talks (such as the one above) and the taught units run by Anson for near a decade at the AA tell us much about the nature of the time and the AA under Boyarsky. The exact detail of what the ARC stood for, other than the destruction of the RIBA, would come later in the writings of its key members Peter Moloney, George Mills and Brian Anson in a manifesto and myriad of other writings which I will address in this chapter and the next.

### A Manifesto

The earliest version of the manifesto I have found was in a collection of papers owned by George Mills, this undated version of the manifesto is none the less marked as “draft”. This along with the image reproduced from the 1974/5 AA prospectus, appears to be the same text, giving us a rough date of the Summer of 1974. We also see the publication of some elements of the Manifesto in the 28<sup>th</sup> May 1975 issue of the *Architect's Journal*, where the *AJ* writes rather snootily. ‘In a long, prolix and rather ungrammatical explanatory note, the ARC explains that ‘the new system of architecture will need to be based on a mass movement’ but the revolutionary council does not regard itself as the embryo of the movement. ARC is, as it were, the midwife...’<sup>394</sup>

The manifesto did make several key claims for the future of the ARC and by extension the architectural profession itself. Key amongst these were the calls for members of professions both qualified and students to ‘...join the new international movement and through solidarity help to bring about the architectural revolution.’<sup>395</sup>

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<sup>394</sup> Architects' Journal "Record." *Architects' Journal* (Archive: 1929-2005) v.161, n.22 (28/05/1975) 1120. [www.proquest.com/trade-journals/record/docview/1431327101/se-2?accountid=12507](http://www.proquest.com/trade-journals/record/docview/1431327101/se-2?accountid=12507) [Accessed 5<sup>th</sup> July 2013]

<sup>395</sup> Mills & Moloney, Op cit., p.9.



## **Padraig Pearse**

***My instinct is with  
the landless man  
against the lord  
of lords and with  
the breadless man  
against the master  
of millions***

P.H. Pearse

**LET'S SING THE LAND SONG**

**with BRIAN ANSON, ARC.**

**NOV. 20 LECTURE HALL, 6-30**

Figure 27. Poster of the "Land Song" lecture given by Brian Anson, 1976.



Image redacted for  
copyright reasons.

Figure 28. PEOPLE LIBERTY ARCHITECTURE? AA information Board from Prospectus 1977-78, by which time the unit had been renumbered Intermediate Unit 8. The number at the bottom of the image is as the board was photograph from the previous year.



Image redacted for  
copyright reasons.

Figure 29. ARC Manifesto, as reproduced in AA Prospectus 1974-75.

The ARC's aim was to destroy the pedestal upon which the RIBA sat, supported by the capitalist mode of production and the moneyed classes. The first paragraph of the manifesto deals with this most explicitly:

Image redacted for  
copyright reasons.

Figure 30. ARC Manifesto draft c.1974



'ARC calls on all those architects and others involved in the built environment who believe that we should cease working only for a rich powerful minority or the bureaucratic dictatorship of Central and Local Governments and offer our skills and services to the local communities who have little chance to work directly with architects and architecture.'<sup>396</sup>

It is notable that the 'bureaucratic dictatorship of Central and Local Governments' is mentioned here a phrase that today sounds dated; however, at the time of writing 1974/5 the involvement of the State in architecture, specifically in housing architecture, was considerable. This is despite the fact that, by this point, central and local government architectural projects had moved away from slum clearance and new building housing and towards redevelopment and regeneration.<sup>397</sup> It is interesting to note that Peter Malpass and Alan Murie state that '...the White Paper of 1968, "Old Houses into New Homes", which really marked the end of the period of high levels of construction and the beginning of a shift towards rehabilitation and improvement of existing dwellings.'<sup>398</sup> This is further illustrated by the 1969 and 1974 Housing Acts which, respectively, introduced General Improvement Areas (GIAs, as in Liverpool discussed earlier) and Housing Action Areas (HAAs) both of which were aimed at improvement of existing housing stock, not slum clearance and new build. Central government were herein encouraging rehabilitation and renewal, rather than demolition and new build.

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<sup>396</sup> Mills & Moloney, Op cit., p.9.

<sup>397</sup> '...the last high-output period lasted only from 1964 to 1968, covering the years when the Wilson Government aimed for half a million houses per year by 1970.' additionally '...public sector completions fell away sharply after 1968, reaching a low of 88,000 in 1973'. In, Malpass, Peter, and Murie, Alan. *Housing Policy and Practice*. 5th Edition (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1999), p.57

<sup>398</sup> Ibid.

We can see here that the ARC rage as much against the (often leftist) Greater London Council and other local authorities, who continued to clear and rebuild, as they did against the emerging global capitalism of big corporations.

The ARC manifesto would appear to have been aimed at first and foremost the students and peers at the AA in 1974. The manifesto was designed to rally support for the ARC and as it says early on that the 'ARC calls on all those architects and others involved in the built environment.'<sup>399</sup> Therefore, it seems evident that the broad definition of architecture which I am using in this thesis (i.e. expanded to include all those "professionals" who work with the built environment) is the one which the ARC are also employing. Thus, we might read this manifesto as being aimed at students and academics at the AA, along with architects, the RIBA, planners, local and central government officials, building inspectors, surveyors, architectural technicians, draftsmen (in the parlance of the time), landscape and interior designers.

This document therefore forms the political and, to a degree, the moral basis of the ARC and all the later work they would carry out. The manifesto can be seen made manifest in various case studies which will be looked at in Chapters 6-11, as well as in the personal ethos of Brian Anson, George Mills and Peter Moloney whilst each interpreted this in their own way and adapted it to suit their own circumstances and lives outside of, or after the ARC, these three formed the hard core, or Politburo, of the ARC.

The ARC welcomed all comers if they were committed to '...a new international movement and through solidarity combine to bring about the architectural revolution.'<sup>400</sup> The element of internationalism however did not go further than the unnamed and somewhat mythical Yugoslav architect who helped found the ARC in 1972, 73, or 74 (depending on which

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<sup>399</sup> Mills & Moloney, Op cit., p.9.

<sup>400</sup> *ibid*

source we are relying upon), and the occasional recruitment of non-UK students to Anson's AA units. The ARC would remain, in common with so many radical leftist political pressure groups which emerged in nineteen seventies Britain,<sup>401</sup> an organisation whose influence did not spread beyond Britain and Ireland.

### Identity

The ARC's primary aim was always remained the destruction of the architecture establishment and the social class of The Architect as embodied by the RIBA. As Anson, Mills and Moloney saw the RIBA and the establishment as the basis of the problem of Architecture. Their determination to undermine this at every turn, whether in their work as the ARC at Covent Garden, Ealing, Bridgtown, Colne Valley and Divis; or in their work after it. In Anson's case the establishment of what later became European Architectural Students Assembly (EASA) and his period as the chairman of the Schools of Architecture Council (SAC) in 1979/80. Moloney's work at Hackney Council, or Mills' architectural career.

The ARC's self-identity was something of an active debate in many if not all of the group's internal communications which I have seen. In an undated note (but found with documents from 1976) titled "Brian's Reply: A response to Rob's untitled and undated paper" we find Anson waxing lyrical on the definition:

'ARC ... is the one radical architects' group - and maybe even one of the few general radical groups - in the country which is closest to 'The People'. Christ! We talk about nothing else. When we speak of types' [sic] we speak of

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<sup>401</sup> Tranmer, Jeremy. "A Force to be Reckoned with? The Radical Left in the 1970s.", *Revue Française de Civilisation Britannique* [Online], XXII- Hors série | 30/12/2017, journals.openedition.org/rfcb/1728 [Accessed 13<sup>th</sup> January 2022]

personalities based on certain fundamental, and unquantifiable, principles, (greedy, selfish, treacherous, heroic etc) not based on economic criteria. And people generally think like us in ARC; only 'systems' think in the other way. The paradox is that systems rule life and until we find Utopia they always will.<sup>402</sup>

Anson is engaging in misleading rhetoric here, the idea of 'The People' is largely fallacious, a straw man used by ideologues of many persuasions to speak for themselves as if for the majority. Abraham Lincoln's invocation of '...a government of the people, by the people, for the people,...'<sup>403</sup> during the Gettysburg Address is one of, if not "the" origin of this phrase, which has been used and misused a myriad of times since 1863.

As the line 'And people generally think like us...' demonstrates this idea or ideal of 'The People' is used to justify the ideas and beliefs of the speaker as being for the 'common good'. This terminology is an example, of which there are many in the writings of the ARC in general, of a 'knowing best' attitude. They are radical, the only radicals; they are closest to 'The People', they are therefore correct.

This reinforces other examples of the rather high handed and patrician attitudes prevalent here such as those demonstrated at Covent Garden, particularly with reference to the conclusions drawn by Anson at the end of *I'll Fight You For It* (1981). Somewhat ironically it is exactly this attitude that ARC so rail against in the RIBA and the architecture profession more generally. The 'Repressible, Insensitive, Brutal, Arrogant' poster (see figure 19) produced for the 1974 press conference for use by the ARC in its campaigns, rather eloquently highlights this apparent hypocrisy.

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<sup>402</sup> Letter, Brian Anson. "Brian's Reply: A response to Rob's untitled and undated paper", no date.

<sup>403</sup> Lincoln, Abraham. (1863) *The Gettysburg Address*. (Vero Beach, FL: Rourke Educational Media) [rnc.library.cornell.edu/gettysburg/good\\_cause/transcript.htm](http://rnc.library.cornell.edu/gettysburg/good_cause/transcript.htm) [Accessed 18<sup>th</sup> May 2009]

Anson goes on to say later in the undated reply:

'...we are Utopians. There's nothing strange or new about that. The only problem is that it's a most uncomfortable existence. Just think if Rob had a nice socialist analysis on which to base his writings; wouldn't it have been a much easier task? But wouldn't it have been a much less disturbing paper?'<sup>404</sup>

Anson's comment here regarding a 'nice socialist analysis' is a comment worthy of some attention. The political position of the ARC cannot be argued to be anything other than Leftist certainly. Their statements are clearly anti-capitalist, with appeals to 'The People' and allusions to the RIBA being fascists<sup>405</sup>, but the above suggests Anson does not see the ARC as a socialist group, or at least not a socialist group that has a 'nice socialist analysis' they can rely on.

As argued earlier in this thesis that the position of the ARC is perhaps more akin to that of an anarcho-syndicalist group than that of revolutionary Marxism. This comment could indicate Anson is at least of the opinion that they do not strictly conform to any 'nice socialist analysis' available at that time. As Anson would say in his letter to the Bridgtown Residents Action Group (BRAG) (see Chapter 9) from December 1977 he describes the ARC as being slandered by Cannock Chase Council after they called the ARC Trotskyists,<sup>406</sup> and in interview with Crowley when he says 'So I'm a socialist, obviously, you know 'cause in my background. ... I just grew into like... but I'm not a dogmatist.'<sup>407</sup>

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<sup>404</sup> Letter from Brian Anson. [n.d.] "Brian's Reply: A response to Rob's untitled and undated paper"

<sup>405</sup> 'IF CRIME DOESN'T PAY... WHERE TO ARCHITECTS GET ALL THEIR MONEY' poster, using the symbol of the RIBA in place of a swastika in a Nazi eagle emblem and the "Repressive, Insensitive, Brutal, Arrogant. RIBA" depicting a jackbooted stormtrooper with the RIBA coat or arms for a face, c.1974.

<sup>406</sup> Brian Anson, Letter regarding the Bridgtown Residents' Action Group from Brian Anson, (BA. Surbiton. Dec: 1977.) ARC archive, courtesy of Peter Moloney.

<sup>407</sup> Crowley with Anson, Op cit., 00:51:35.

This is one of, if not the, clearest indication given by Anson of his politics not otherwise contaminated by propaganda. The ARC absolutely knew how to present themselves and thus, their public statements, protests, lectures, and press conferences, cannot be relied upon to provide us with the real thinking of the group. But this candid interview years later shows us Anson in a more reflective state of mind. Can we therefore infer anything specific about Anson's positioning here? We can conclude that perhaps the ARC and Anson were reluctant to describe themselves as anarchists in this period, more comfortable with the more mainstream accusation of being Marxists (if bristling as being called Trotskyists!), Anarchism at the time was most associated with the anarchist groups which had emerged from Spain after the collapse of the Spanish Republic in 1939, and of course the likes of The Angry Brigade.

As I set out at length in Chapter 3 the series of bomb blasts committed by self-confessed anarchist terrorist group The Angry Brigade were perpetrated throughout the early seventies. From 1969-1972 The Angry Brigade carried out at least 26 bombings, likely more, largely in London.<sup>408</sup> These attacks and the synonymy of "anarchist" with "terrorist" in the early nineteen seventies may have given even Anson and the ARC pause. Perhaps it was safer to be considered Marxists and thereby linked to the trade unionists and strikers seen as rabble rousing left wing zealots, than out right criminals and potential (though not actual) killers. It was certainly safer and more legitimate for the ARC to concentrate its attacks in a Class War fashion aimed at the bosses of Architecture, Government and Capitalism than the bombing campaign of The Angries, especially given the IRAs mainland campaign had begun in this same period (see Chapter 3 pp.88-96).

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<sup>408</sup> Vague, Op cit.

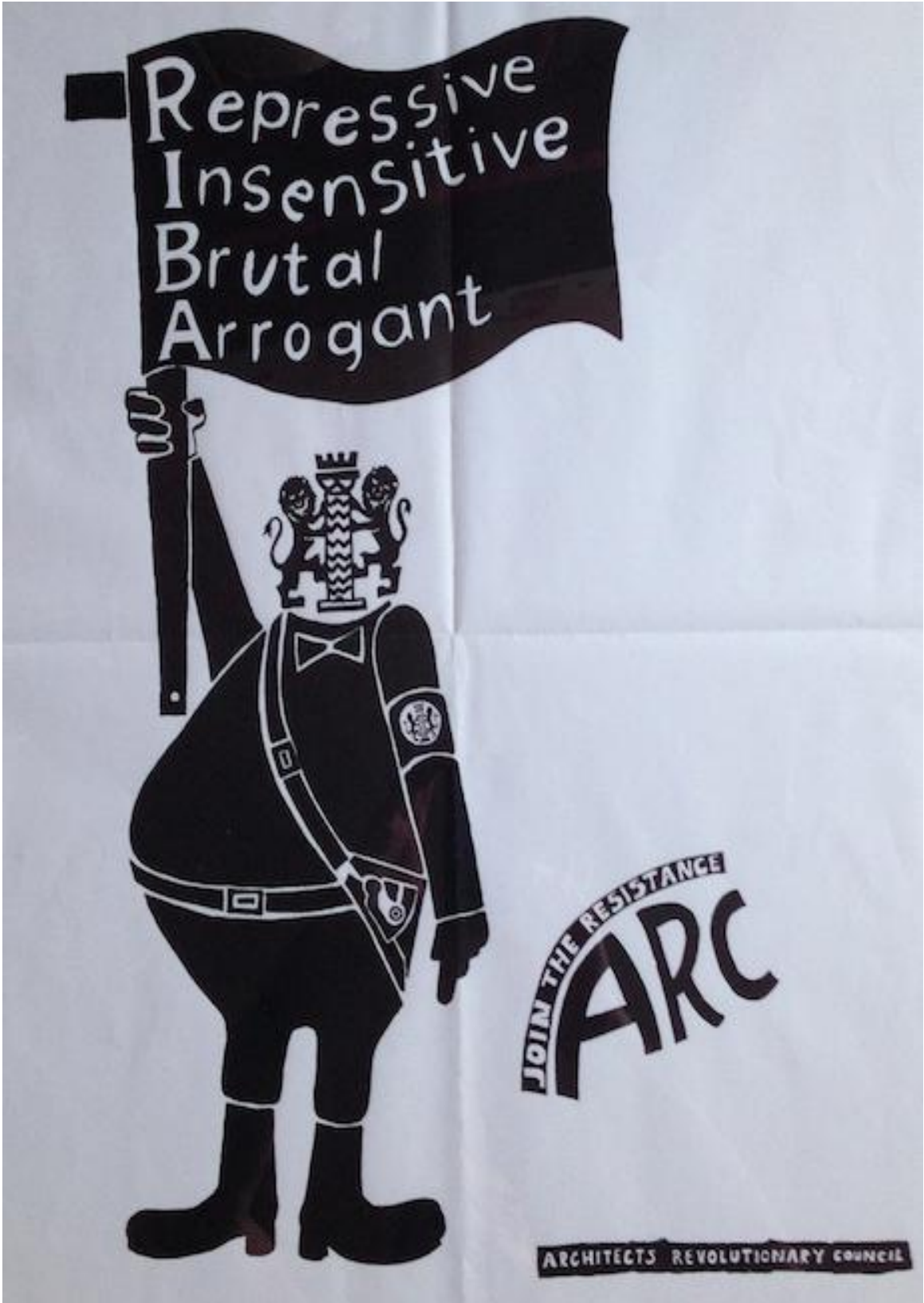


Figure 31. "Repressive, Insensitive, Brutal, Arrogant. RIBA" ARC poster. c.1974

The three core members, Anson, Mills, & Moloney, can all be described as radicals, revolutionaries, Leftists, and Socialists of one stripe or another. In Anson's case growing up in Bootle appears to have shaped his politics at an early age and quite significantly. That coupled with marrying 'a Mayo woman' whose family had '...a very vivid history ... of rebellion.'<sup>409</sup>

For Moloney his politics were Revolutionary in a truer sense of the word, being an Irishman from Donegal who lived in Derry at a young age, he came from a staunchly Republican and Catholic background. With Mills he describes his politics and their relationship to Anson and Moloney's politics as follows:

'I suppose for me, I mean Brian had become a completely political animal whereas I, first and foremost, was an architect who'd got leftish leanings. That was the fundamental difference between us, and I'd always wanted to practice architecture. Pete, working in Hackney, he was kind of political animal in housing but it was the political side of housing kind of thing, and that suited Pete's nature very well.'<sup>410</sup>

Whilst Anson may not have been clear on the ARCs collective 'socialist analysis' it seems a socialist analysis of some sort was central to the ARC and its key members in the mid-nineteen seventies.

Whilst George Mills was the most liberal of the 3 and least prone to revolutionary sentiment, it is evident from his writings (notably "Come on lads—get your balls back!", see pp.46-8) that he was then certainly a socialist, though most definitely a democratic socialist, as opposed to Anson and Moloney's more revolutionary socialist principles and behaviours.

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<sup>409</sup> Crowley & Anson, Op cit., 00:03:55

<sup>410</sup> George Mills, in conversation with the author, Withington, Manchester, 16<sup>th</sup> July 2014.



Conversely Moloney's childhood as a Catholic in the north of Ireland, and his rite of passage during the Irish Civil Rights movement places Moloney, in action and intent firmly in the revolutionary camp, more wedded to Irish Republicanism perhaps than Marxist revolution.



Figure 32. Peter Moloney as young man on roof top in Derry, c.1967

### Storming the RIBA Conference, Hull, July 1976.

By the middle of 1976 the ARC had clearly established itself both in the consciousness of the higher echelons of the architectural profession with its ongoing baiting of the RIBA, protesting speeches, and articles in the architectural press attacking the establishment. The 1974 press conference and speeches made by Anson and others in support of their aims at the AA and other architectural venues were clear attempts to raise their profile as the revolutionaries of the architectural profession. This was largely successful in drawing the

attention they wanted, from the disenfranchised member of the profession as well as students, but it appears they served as little more than a minor annoyance to the RIBA juggernaut until 1976.

The most public of the early acts of the ARC was the disruption of the RIBA Hull Conference, 14<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> July 1976, as recorded in the British “newspaper of record”, *The Times*<sup>411</sup>, and recounted by George Mills in an interview with me in 2012:

‘...we decided we would go to the RIBA conference in Hull. So, we forged tickets to get in there. With the intention of heckling and disrupting the president's opening speech. There were about six of us. We just went in individual parts of the hall amongst these kind [*sic*] of 800-900 hundred practicing architects. And we drew straws, and I got the first straw, so it was me that had to leap up at an appropriate time, followed then by the other five. And it was David Rock who was president at the time [*sic*, it was in fact Eric Lyons]<sup>412</sup> and he was going about the environment and budgerigars living in the wild, and that, and then watch what the differences were living in a cage!? And I thought “I can't stand this!” so I stood up and said “This is a bloody sham!”, ... I can't remember the exact words, it were the heat of the moment. The next thing is I see Brian with a black beret and a pair of black sunglasses leap up on the other side of the bloody hall. And he... I didn't know he was going to dress like that... but at that time it was very provocative. It was very much for the Republican [IRA] kind of

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<sup>411</sup> Times, The 'Disruption at architects' conference', *The Times Newspaper*, 16th July 1976, (1976), 1 (p. 7) [link-gale-com.mmu.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/CS118193904/GDCS](http://link-gale-com.mmu.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/CS118193904/GDCS) [Accessed 18<sup>th</sup> May 2021].

<sup>412</sup> *The Times*, article reads: “*The annual conference of the Royal Institute of British Architects at Hull was interrupted yesterday by members of the Architecture [*sic*] Revolutionary Council. Mr Eric Lyons had begun his presidential address when interruptions came from two men in the conference room at Middleton Hall, Hull University. They accused the conference of being a “ridiculous jamboree” and a “sham” and accused architects of failing with planning in places such as Liverpool and Glasgow, and of ignoring needs.*” 'Disruption at architects' conference', *The Times Newspaper*, 16<sup>th</sup> July 1976.

stance. So, I got up and shouted and there was a steward heading towards me, but when Brian stood up with his beret and black glasses they thought "oh, this guy!" and they headed towards him. And we were evicted ...thrown out.' <sup>413</sup>

This act, whilst not intended to lead to the downfall of the RIBA, was an early statement of intent from the ARC. Anson however rather overstates the impact and the nature of *The Times* short article in a letter to George Mills dated Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> July 1976 and "from "sunny Surbiton" (the Saturday in question was in fact 17<sup>th</sup> July): 'Did you realise we made 'The Times'? Rob rang me and it's not a bad little article and puts Lyons and the RIBA in a very bad light.'<sup>414</sup> The mere 137 words of The Times article did not appear to put Lyons or the RIBA in a "bad light" or particularly dwell on the RIBA at all. Save for the very last line, which we might charitably read as a criticism of architecture where *The Times* author says: 'In his address, Mr Lyons said he hoped the spending spree over the past 25 years on the wrong kind of planning was over.'<sup>415</sup>

We have seen in this chapter that the emergence of the ARC in 1974 occurred within an architectural, social, and political context that made its emergence at the time in a way rather unremarkable. As Karpf set out in her 1977 article 'The Pressure Groups' ARC was one of many, but it was different in many important ways. Other groups were selective pressure groups, focussed on a particular group of workers or area of work whether that be Salaried Architects (represented by SAG), Consultant Architects (represented by ACA), or Architects in Industry and Commerce (represented by AIC). The ARC was the only group who set out to disestablish the architectural profession, the others all set out to improve their

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<sup>413</sup> George Mills in conversation with the author, Withington, Manchester, 25<sup>th</sup> May 2012.

<sup>414</sup> Letter from Brain Anson to George Mills, Saturday, 15<sup>th</sup> July 1976, "from sunny Surbiton"

<sup>415</sup> Times, The. 'Disruption at architects' conference', p.7

little corner of it. The ARC was bent on true revolutionary change, not tinkering, or trying to achieve change from the inside, they stood outside the tent flinging metaphorical bricks, grenades, and Molotov cocktails into it. The foundation of the ARC was also messy and undisciplined, after the slick press conference it took some time for its manifesto to be published. The crashing of the Hull Conference and Anson's rabble rousing at the AA certainly raised their profile, but it was sometime before a coherent narrative or set of positions emerged from the genesis of this group. The first 'work' the ARC did outside of the AA was to become involved in a residents' campaign in Ealing to block the insensitive redevelopment of their town centre (see Chapter 8) and this began in 1974/5. Probably the most significant contributor to the ideology and intentions of the ARC was Brian Anson, he was a prolific writer, speaker, and campaigner. He produced tens of thousands of published words along with many letters, scripts, and policy documents as Director of Policy for the ARC. These form the basis for our understanding of the ARC, and Anson, and the best insight I have to their aims and objectives. These will be the subject of the next chapter of this thesis.

# CHAPTER FIVE

## ANSON'S WRITINGS

The process of accumulating the primary material for this chapter has been largely a combination of archival research and interviews. The source of much of these primary documents are unorganised collections of documents held by George Mills and Peter Moloney. These personal collections consist of letters, transcripts of speeches, most by Brian Anson, and copies of some of the ARCs in-house newspapers, like *Red House* and the *Colne Valley News*, produced by members of the ARC during their active years in the nineteen seventies. These collections were held Moloney at his home in Greenwich, London; and Mills at his home in Withington, Manchester; at the time I had access to them (2012-2017).

This chapter will look at the writings of Brian Anson, which I have been able to obtain from Mills and Moloney and aim to establish the social and political themes evident in them. I will also determine the relevance of these to the organisation and development of the ARC, and indeed Anson's own political evolution over the period in question. Beginning with a speech from Anson in 1973 through to the latest work a pair of extensive articles published in the *Architects' Journal* in 1982, "Colonialism in Architecture".

## The Architect as Revolutionary

The 1973 speech *The Architect as Revolutionary*, which this section deals with, is the transcript of a speech written by Anson. This speech is 4 pages long and was written to be spoken not to be published, the subtitle of the speech 'Text of a speech given to the AA by Brian Anson on 23<sup>rd</sup> October, 1973' gives us some indication of the audience (an academic one) for whom the speech was written. There is nothing in the context of the text that suggests it is for a non-architectural audience, but this cannot be proven. There is also no other verifiable record in the AA archives that the speech was actually delivered, only that it was written. In the speech Anson sets out a detailed and at times vociferous political position that seems to inform the basis of the ARC's ideology. It is dated one year before the press conference announcing the founding of the ARC, at what Anson refers to as 'the height of the struggle in 1972-3' at Covent Garden.

The final page of the speech refers to the purpose of the ARC:

'...posters advertising this Talk, the word ARC. ARC stands for Architects Revolutionary Council. The aim of ARC is to provide a structure for discussing all the things I have mentioned and more besides. The organisation has so far two members'<sup>416</sup>

Stating that the aim of the ARC is to provide a structure for discussion appears to be how the ARC began, when it consists of Anson and one other, unnamed, member, but as we will see it is not how the group's manifesto described their aims or objectives.

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<sup>416</sup> p.9, Brian Anson, Speech: *The Architect as Revolutionary*. 1973.

The previously cited Mills and Moloney article 'The Architects' Revolutionary Council its aims and objectives', implies that the other member of the ARC mentioned by Anson in 1973 was an unnamed Slovenian architect:

'ARC came into being three years ago in Yugoslavia when a Slovenian architect and ARC's founder saw the need for an international movement to bring together those socially-inspired architects who had been working with communities throughout the world.'<sup>417</sup>

Indeed, on the final page of the speech Anson also says: 'We now have Yugoslavs here: listen to them as they describe their Partisans.'<sup>418</sup> Anson ends the speech with the line: 'In fact what small percentage in this hall would right now be prepared to commit themselves to the organisation' [sic].<sup>419</sup>, so it seems apparent this talk was designed to recruit members to the ARC from the AA's community.

The revolutionary credentials of the ARC was well and truly reinforced in such talks and public addresses, press releases, etc. but so much of this appears to be propaganda. The question of whether it truly reflected the politics of those involved is vexed. As I said in the previous chapters the 3 main players in the ARC had quite different political ideologies. Whilst all firmly on the left in the UK context at the time, some were more radical and revolutionary than others. Some, like Adam Purser, were outright communists.<sup>420</sup>

In June 1975 the architectural profession was being reported in its own in-house press, the *Royal Institute of British Architects' Journal (RIBAJ)*. The article "Rank and file dissent: the RIBA crisis 1971-72" discusses in detail the crisis affecting the RIBA. As discussed earlier in Chapter 2 of this thesis, the article sets out what the editor authoring this piece saw, in

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<sup>417</sup> Mills & Moloney, Op cit.

<sup>418</sup> Anson, Speech: The Architect as Revolutionary. p.9.

<sup>419</sup> ibid

<sup>420</sup> George Mills, in conversation with the author, Withington, Manchester, 16<sup>th</sup> July 2014

1975, as being the basis of the crisis of the profession. The author breaks down what they call ‘...The factors which caused the dissension of rank and file members in 1971...’<sup>421</sup> the first lines of the article reads:

‘Only about a quarter of all architects are now principals in private practice, but it is a widely held belief, among both architects and outside observers, that the Institute remains an organisation primarily meant for private practices and run by principals for principals.’<sup>422</sup>

The above is illustrative of the fact that by the mid-nineteen seventies many architects worked in “official” practices, meaning they were employed by local and central government largely building housing. Indeed, State house building in England had peaked in the late nineteen sixties with over 350,000 units being produced per year, with a subsequent drop off to 150,000 in the early nineteen seventies and another rise to around 220,000 by the mid nineteen seventies <sup>423</sup>. These peaks and troughs map neatly on to the nature of central government at these times. The two Harold Wilson Labour administrations from 1964-1966 and 1966-1970, the Edward Heath Conservative administration, 1970-1974 and Wilson’s final period as Prime Minister between 1974 and 1976.

The ongoing crises within Architecture notwithstanding Anson sees a bigger crisis of the role of the profession in society at large. He cites this as an explanation for ‘...the reasons why I am not allowed to practice architecture.’ <sup>424</sup> Primarily, and presumably, this is because Anson did not qualify for ARCUK (now Architects Registration Board) accreditation by not completing his Part 3 qualification and thus not being legally able to call himself an architect.

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<sup>421</sup> RIBA, “Rank and file dissent”, p.11

<sup>422</sup> *ibid*, p.10

<sup>423</sup> Fullfact (22/03/2018) “House building in England.” [fullfact.org/economy/house-building-england](http://fullfact.org/economy/house-building-england) [Accessed 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2019]

<sup>424</sup> Anson, Speech: The Architect as Revolutionary. p.1.



He appears to see this as a noble sacrifice on his part to undermine the architectural profession.

‘...in order to design buildings, I would have to become subservient to a socio-political system that is becoming increasingly corrupt and diseased because it is based on material power and growth in general.’<sup>425</sup>

The socio-political system that Anson identifies has not significantly changed direction since 1973. If anything, the collaboration of the Architectural professions with what we now refer to, since 1980<sup>426</sup>, as neo-liberalism has continued apace with notable architects being criticised for their implicit acceptance of oppressive regimes in order to engage in their art<sup>427</sup>. Therefore, there is perhaps some legitimacy in Anson’s claim to want to avoid becoming subservient to Architecture as for him this would have been too great a sacrifice of his principles. He goes on to say that:

‘Architecture is a luxury profession.

...in our cities today the bulldozer is operating to make rich men richer. Anyone who aids this process is an accessory to the crime.’<sup>428</sup>

‘...the architect must work within the materialist limits of private industry. And in so doing he emphasises the luxury nature of his profession.’<sup>429</sup>

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<sup>425</sup> Anson, Speech: The Architect as Revolutionary. p.1.

<sup>426</sup> Stephen Metcalf, (2017) ‘Neoliberalism: the idea that swallowed the world,’ *The Guardian*. [theguardian.com/news/2017/aug/18/neoliberalism-the-idea-that-changed-the-world](https://www.theguardian.com/news/2017/aug/18/neoliberalism-the-idea-that-changed-the-world) [Accessed 10<sup>th</sup> April 2019]

<sup>427</sup> Nick Clark, (30/06/2014) “Zaha Hadid’s prestigious award for building to glory of Azerbaijan dictator criticized”. *The Independent*. [independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/news/zaha-hadid-s-prestigious-award-for-building-to-glory-of-azerbaijan-dictator-criticised-9574291.html](https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/news/zaha-hadid-s-prestigious-award-for-building-to-glory-of-azerbaijan-dictator-criticised-9574291.html) [Accessed 10<sup>th</sup> April 2019]

<sup>428</sup> Anson, Speech: The Architect as Revolutionary. p.2.

<sup>429</sup> *ibid.* p.4

This total opposition to the architect as an accessory to the crime does fundamentally undermine Anson and the ARC's pursuit of building. Architecture/the RIBA's stranglehold, then as now, on the process of "doing architecture" meant that Anson and the ARC's refusal to engage with the profession excluded them from being able to 'building something'. This is somewhat contradicted by Moloney when he said in interview with me, in reference to the ARC's work at Bridgtown: '...the ultimate was to build something'<sup>430</sup>. This cognitive dissonance between Anson's refusal to "build something" as that meant surrendering to the mores of the establishment he was actively trying to undermine, and the desire of two of his closet comrades (Moloney and Mills) to engage in architecture created a division between Anson and Mills particularly. As Mills recalled: 'As a practice [MBLC] we did things like *Homes for Change*<sup>431</sup> in Hulme. Brian saw no value in it. I was a big fat architect now and all that kind of stuff.'<sup>432</sup> On further pursuing this point in interview Mills and I had the following exchange:

[Michael] - Brian was never able to make it happen in a way because he was obsessed with being so radical. Too radical, if you like, to make it happen?

[George] - That's a good way of putting it, because... I did a lot of urban stuff...

I mean, Brian never understood that the reason I did that kind of thing was because of him. But he couldn't understand why... he never thought things like

*Homes for Change*, master-planning, was a good thing to do.'<sup>433</sup>

These statements from key ARC member and friend of Brian Anson, George Mills, in response to my question seem to corroborate the premise of my question. Anson appears

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<sup>430</sup> Peter Moloney, in conversation with the author, Bloomsbury, London, 15<sup>th</sup> May 2013.

<sup>431</sup> Towers, Graham. *At home in the city: an introduction to urban housing design*. (Oxford: Architectural Press, 2005), pp.227-232.

<sup>432</sup> George Mills, in conversation with the author, Withington, Manchester, 16<sup>th</sup> July 2014.

<sup>433</sup> Ibid.

to share a sentiment with Bill Risebero in this regard. Given Risebero worked as an architect and planner in local government in London from 1973-1988 and taught at the University of East London in the same period, becoming Professor in 1988,<sup>434</sup> means that Risebero and Anson moved in similar circles in London in the same period. Both argued that the system needs to be transformed before any new world could manifest. As Risebero said of modernism, writing in 1992:

'Under capitalism - eastern or western - modernism is incapable of living up to its promise. A movement which comes to express only alienation, or actively oppose the society in which it exists, or to express social alternatives, cannot fully develop until that society is superseded. Any form of modernism that exists under capitalism is inevitably flawed: constrained by the logic of the capitalist mode of production and compromised by bourgeois ideology.'<sup>435</sup>

This concept of the "new world", in Risebero's case modernism, being '...compromised by bourgeois ideology.'<sup>436</sup> seems to correlate to Anson's semi hostility to the work of Mills as '...a big fat architect.'<sup>437</sup> and as he also said in the 1973 speech:

'Has it [the RIBA] ever, for example, considered that architecture should be free or at least accessible to all the people? Why is it so far behind the medical professions? The reason is simple: if it did the profession as it stands would wholly [sic] and absolutely cease to exist.'<sup>438</sup>

This extrapolation may just be a rhetorical device use by Anson in his speech. But the argument that the profession should be destroyed is fundamental principle of the ARCs

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<sup>434</sup> Writers Directory. "Bill Risebero", Encyclopaedia, 2005. encyclopedia.com/arts/culture-magazines/risebero-bill [Accessed 9<sup>th</sup> October 2021]

<sup>435</sup> Risebero, *Fantastic Form*, p.7

<sup>436</sup> Ibid.

<sup>437</sup> George Mills, in conversation with the author, Withington, Manchester, 16<sup>th</sup> July 2014.

<sup>438</sup> Anson, 'Speech: The Architect as Revolutionary'. p.4.

agenda. This in and of itself could be enough to explain Anson's sardonic attitude to Mills work as an architect in nineteenth century Manchester. However, Anson's call for something akin to a 'National Architecture Service', that the profession would cease to exist in its current form should this happen, as Anson suggests, but the will to do so does not and cannot lie solely within the profession. A sea change in the priorities of British society would have to take place for architecture to be considered on the same level as health or indeed education. Such a change would require a significant portion of the populace to see architecture and the built environment more broadly as something worthy of support from taxation. Anson goes on that the Architect:

'... is certainly not characterised by the strength of his commitment to society...  
By the very nature of our society the architect in private practice is directly related to the rich and powerful minority that decide on our environment. He is in the business game, despite his futile attempts to be arty.'<sup>439</sup>

Anson is here arguing that the inevitable consequence of a privatised architecture sector, rather than a 'National Architecture Service', is that Architects and Architecture are in hock to big business and state agencies responsible for large budgets capable of enabling architecture. This is an inherent contradiction in any argument being made in support of the democratisation of architecture, a key question is "who is going to pay for it?" One such answer is Anson's, as set out above, taxation.

Another answer might be to dispense with architects and Architecture altogether. This would achieve the elimination of the social class of "the architect", desired by the ARC, but would do nothing to place control of the built environment back in the hands of the populace. But Anson has no truck with this argument, saying:

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<sup>439</sup> Anson, 'Speech: The Architect as Revolutionary', p.5.

'It is not true to excuse lack of action and commitment by saying that the cities will get built despite the architects – or by saying we have no power.'<sup>440</sup>

Whilst this is true, that this is no excuse for lack of action on the part of the professions, it is nonetheless a major stumbling block, despite Anson's protestations to the contrary. The building of cities in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century has clearly demonstrated Anson to be mistaken in this claim. The building of vast developments, indeed whole districts of our cities, can now take place without Architects, or with their minimal involvement. The advancement of technology along with the standardisation and mechanisation of construction processes means that engineers are arguably more significant in the building of buildings today. But the basis of Anson's call to the profession is not to answer these practical questions of implementation but as he himself puts it to appeal to the people, the professional, the man (as he insists on gendering the architect throughout his writing):

'An architect is a man as well as an architect. He can if he wishes also be a revolutionary.'<sup>441</sup>

The political argument and the political decision to '...be a revolutionary.'<sup>442</sup> is paramount in Anson's thesis, as in common with so much revolutionary socialist thinking. But Anson contradicts this statement in the same page of the speech saying:

'So there is the architect, in my opinion, not as an individual but as a corporate body. None of us exist as individuals. That is a clever, selfish liberal lie perpetuated by intellectuals with one eye on personal advancement and another on the market.'<sup>443</sup>

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<sup>440</sup> Anson, 'Speech: The Architect as Revolutionary'. p.6.

<sup>441</sup> *ibid*

<sup>442</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>443</sup> *ibid*

The architect is not therefore ‘...a man as well as an architect.’<sup>444</sup> “he” is a corporate body as we are none of us individuals. As this speech draws to an end, we seem to find Anson tied up in his own rhetoric. The architect is “a man” and a possible “revolutionary”, but “he” is also a corporate entity. Anson appears to be confusing two related but distinct states. The architect as human being, a person working within a framework only partly of their own making. The other the professions of Architecture, the capital ‘A’ Architect, the professional, the social class raised above that of the occupant or subject of their professional expertise. These two entities whilst sharing considerable overlap are not one in the same.

There is a necessary distinction between the ARC eliminating the Architect and retaining the architect. The architect may cease to be an identifiable individual and evolve into a being as set of skills shared by various individuals working within a cooperative whole. His kind of subtlety or complexity is not something with which Anson seems willing to tangle saying: ‘...I will not be side tracked by suspicious counter-arguments of complexity.’<sup>445</sup>

But he is prepared to set out, at considerable length (which will not be repeated here) what the ‘4 points for a revolutionary architect’<sup>446</sup> are. In these 4-bullet points Anson does not actually explain what a revolutionary architect would do, only what they would *not* do. The four points can be paraphrased as; the architect will renounce architecture and thus become committed to working to change the system, thus becoming a revolutionary. How this revolution might be fought or how a person, having abrogated from Architecture, can hope to achieve change from outside of it with no ability or willingness to practice architecture is unclear. Indeed, the principled individual which Anson describes might well

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<sup>444</sup> Anson, ‘Speech: The Architect as Revolutionary’, p.6

<sup>445</sup> Ibid, p.8.

<sup>446</sup> Ibid, p.8+9.

be him. An architectural professional who abandoned his profession to fight for the people of Covent Garden. In doing so he was able to remain ideologically pure, and committed, as he exhorts others to be, but found himself on the peripheries of the professions, powerless to either bring them down or change them in any significant way. This 1973 speech in many ways, not just temporally, prefigures the *raison d'être* of the ARC, and the formation of its manifesto a year later. At this point in 1973 ‘...[ARC] so far has two members.’<sup>447</sup> the 1975 press conference would see the ARC launch itself on the architectural profession and begin its period as the “...the enfant terrible of the radical architecture groups...”<sup>448</sup>

### “Architecture as Colonialism Part 1”

‘And it is no use saying that we do not have wars in our society, on our land. That is evading the true facts. The resident moved out of his house (sometimes forcibly) in the inner city area is just as much a victim of war as is the human victim of a war-torn state.’<sup>449</sup>

Anson’s war on architecture never abated, despite the rapidly shifting political landscape in Britain. By the time Anson’s two-part article “Architecture as Colonialism” was published in the *Architects’ Journal* on the 30<sup>th</sup> June and 7<sup>th</sup> July 1982, Margaret Thatcher had been in power for 3 years, the Falklands War had reached its bloody conclusion in June, and that month her Tory government was the most popular since World War II with an approval rating of 51% (and would remain so until 1997).<sup>450</sup> Despite this, Anson soldiered on. The ARC had

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<sup>447</sup> Anson, ‘Speech: The Architect as Revolutionary’, p.9.

<sup>448</sup> Karpf, Op cit., p.730

<sup>449</sup> Anson, Brian. ‘Architecture as Colonialism: Part 1. Anger, tragedy and celebration’, *The Architects’ Journal*, v.175, n.26, (30/06/1982) 29–44.

<sup>450</sup> Skinner, Gideon. (08/04/2013) ‘Margaret Thatcher (1925-2013)’, *Ipsos MORI*. ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/margaret-thatcher-1925-2013 [Accessed 12<sup>th</sup> May 2019]

largely ceased to function as a group of architects and architecture students engaged with society or the profession, and the various key protagonists had gone their separate ways. Anson had quit the AA in 1980, and published *I'll Fight You For It* in 1981, and in 1983 Anson would become involved with the Town & Country Planning Association (TCPA) work that would lead him to the final ARC project, at The Divis Flats in Belfast (see Chapter 11).

This section of the Chapter will analyse the two 1982 articles 'Architecture as Colonialism: Part 1. Anger, tragedy and celebration' and 'Architecture as Colonialism: 3 routes for the profession which way will you go?' In these articles, which coincide with the by-and-large dissolution of the ARC, Anson sets out the fundamental flaws, as he sees them, in the architectural professions, the imperialism of mass mid 20<sup>th</sup> Century redevelopments. In the second article Anson sets out his view on how Architecture must respond to these challenges to survive and create value in society. This serves as a key example of the thinking of Anson in the immediately post-active period of the ARC. Anson's revolutionary fervour was undimmed in this period, whilst he was no longer advocating for the wholesale destruction of the profession or the establishment of Architecture, he does state that the profession must reform dramatically, or it will die.

Of course, we know 40 years later that Architecture has not significantly reformed and it continues to exist. The priorities analysed below are admirable and with many of which this author concurs. But these were not essential, nor necessary for its survival. Architecture was though restructured by very different ideologies, those of free market capitalism and post-modernity beginning with Margaret Thatcher's first government (1979-1984). Change in architecture and indeed society in general was seen as necessary by 1979, that much was evident. But the change that did occur was antithetical to the ARCs ideals, as Mills said:



“...but it [*the spirit of revolution of the nineteen-seventies*] manifested itself, in architecture for some bizarre reason, it migrated into postmodernism. It went though, because on the back of all the Community Action stuff is about preservation about stopping development. It wasn't about new radical development, ... so that manifest itself as postmodernism. I never quite understood that. I don't know, I mean. You can't blame Thatcher for everything, but I think it was a kind of the reason she got elected was that there was a waning of that idea. Of social radical cultural alternatives?”<sup>451</sup>

Despite the world changing radically around him, there is little notable change in the direction of Anson's rhetoric from 1973 to 1982. His ideas are expressed in a somewhat more “profession friendly” manner in the 1982 articles that I'll analyse in detail below, but the profession is still an unending source of consternation for him. However, there is detectable shift in his focus away from the destruction of the RIBA and the social class of the Architect, and towards a more engaged and engaging critique of what we would now call participatory architecture and spatial agency.<sup>452</sup> Anson's devotion to not building things, as Architecture had not been reformed so no building could reflect his highest ideals, places him in some interesting anarchist company including that of Ward, Comfort, De Carlo, et al. (see Chapter 3) As Colin Ward set out cited in Chapter 3, Giancarlo De Carlo was an advocate, or perhaps even an originator of “an architecture of participation”. As was acknowledged even by the RIBA president Frank Duffy in 1993 (when he came to London to receive the gold medal) Duffy saying that De Carlo's work was “a testimony to community: he does not build monuments, he builds communities”.<sup>453</sup>

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<sup>451</sup> George Mills in conversation with the author, Withington, Manchester, 21<sup>st</sup> May 2012.

<sup>452</sup> Awan, Till, & Schneider, Op cit.

<sup>453</sup> Ward, *Talking to Architects*, p.8

There seems to be an echo in Anson's thinking when he says:

'If we are to stand any chance at all of creating an architecture generally acceptable to society we must first acknowledge our ignorance of the social and political culture of many, indeed the majority, of those who inhabit the "whole built environment".'<sup>454</sup>

Anson's critique of Architecture's disassociation from society at large is not a new element to his critique of Architecture, but there is a subtle shift here from "Architecture must be destroyed" to "Architecture must reform and engage with people outside of the experience of the profession". Indeed, Anson begins 'If we are to stand any chance...'<sup>455</sup> thereby including himself in the broadest definition of the professions of Architecture. Architecture, the Modernist thesis argues, has the potential to correct or advance a society. This is a point that Anson reinforces in support of his argument that Architecture must become more engaged with society if it is to reach its potential.

'Most architects would agree that architecture has long ceased to be the mere "building of buildings" – how many would honestly refuse a major city redevelopment commission on the grounds that it was "none of their business"?'<sup>456</sup>

Anson's point here is of course that precisely these social issues are indeed the "business" of architects and Architecture. A position he shares with the RIBA, as he goes on to say: 'The RIBA itself defends the concept that architecture is an all-embracing social, cultural and political discipline.'<sup>457</sup>

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<sup>454</sup> Anson, 'Architecture as Colonialism: Part 1', p.30

<sup>455</sup> *ibid*

<sup>456</sup> *ibid*

<sup>457</sup> *ibid*

But the issue for Anson in these articles is that the professions of Architecture have become so removed from society at large that they cannot hope to fulfil this mission without a significant change in direction.

'It is not difficult for most people in our society to imagine all architects as creatures smug in their professional comfort, with their degrees and "artistic" houses.'<sup>458</sup>

The social distinction that Architects and Architecture have built up around itself has created a barrier to it achieving its role for the betterment of society. The Architect is now so aloof from society at large that they cannot hope to understand the society for which they, in theory at least, provide. This element of Anson's argument has become somewhat more developed and perhaps less reactionary or revolutionary by 1982. Rather than calling for the wholesale destruction of Architecture he now appears to be arguing that reform is the way forward. The reasons for this shift in focus are unclear in Anson's writings. He makes no direct reference to any change in position but comparing the ARC manifesto<sup>459</sup> and these quotations shows marked shift in 8 years. The utterly transformed face of British politics, the nature of the audience Anson is writing for in the AJ or even Anson's (admittedly unlikely) mellowing with age, or perhaps even a resignation, are possible explanations. It would seem Anson was moderating his rhetorical hostility in the AJ article, not due to his own shift in position or his "mellowing with age" but shifts in the behaviour of Architects and Architecture by this point. His position has moved to that of the profession must reform dramatically or die.

By the early nineteen eighties various significant shifts had happened in the profession of Architecture, none of these are things one might imagine Anson approving of, however. The

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<sup>458</sup> Anson, 'Architecture as Colonialism: Part 1', p.30

<sup>459</sup> Mills, & Moloney, Op cit.

formation of London Docklands Development Corporation (LDDC) in the same year that Anson's articles appeared,<sup>460</sup> serves as an excellent example of the direction of Architecture both professionally and politically in nineteen eighties England. The employment of around half of working architects by local authorities had ended, in London alone in 1976 49% of architects worked for local authorities, by 2017 this was 0.13%.

As Sue Brownhill and Glenn O'Hara said in 2015:

[Michael Heseltine's] proposal was to create Urban Development Corporations (UDC) 'modelled on the New Town Development Corporations and ... given powers of planning, land assembly and disposal for private sector development and a range of other activities'. The London Docklands Development Corporation (LDDC) was therefore established in 1982 with a remit to regenerate Docklands by attracting the private sector to address perceived failures in housing and land markets in the area.<sup>461</sup>

Whilst the idea of the Liberal model of New Town Development Corporations might have met with limited approval from Anson, the broader Government-instigated project for the total erasure and redevelopment of the old docks for global financial services and the Capital's second international financial hub, sits in total opposition to anything Anson would have advocated.

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<sup>460</sup> Brownhill, Sue. & O'Hara., Glen. 'From planning to opportunism? Reexamining the creation of the London Docklands Development Corporation', *Planning Perspectives*, 22/01/2015, 30:4, 537-570.

<sup>461</sup> Ibid, p.545

## The Bootle Effect

Anson's experience of living on a typical Northern terraced street in Bootle, Lancashire, (now Merseyside) where he was born in 1935, is described in detail in the first part of "Architecture as Colonialism":

'To describe (and value) much of the spatial culture of such meagre and unsatisfactory environment is not to sentimentalise it—the dream of many in the community was a "nice" semi with a garden and all mod cons. But while they waited for that dream to be realised they had to exist as best they could.'<sup>462</sup>

The seeds of Anson's distaste for his own profession seem to have been sown in these early years, even though large areas of Bootle survived both the bombs of World War II and the wrecking ball. Indeed, the areas of Bootle depicted in the articles are of a small area to the west of Bootle New Strand railway station, giving an inaccurate impression of Bootle as a post-nineteen sixties slum clearance and concrete rebuild. Many areas of architecture practice and theory had, by the nineteen seventies, developed a loathing of this kind of rebuilding, the imposition of a modernist megastructure solution to an essentially social and domestic issues of housing the people. Oscar Newman's infamous critique of 'non-street housing'<sup>463</sup> had been published in 1972. As Dominic Severs said in 2010:

'In 1972, in the book *Defensible Space*, Oscar Newman offered a convincing analysis of the impact of physical design on the relationship between flat and street, and the route from one to the other. The particular focus of his work was

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<sup>462</sup> Anson. 'Architecture as Colonialism: Part 1', p.32.

<sup>463</sup> Severs, Dominic, 'Rookeries and no-go estates: St. Giles and Broadwater Farm, or middle-class fear of 'non-street' housing', *The Journal of Architecture*, v.15, n.4, (16/08/2010) 449-497.

crime, but conclusions were drawn on the effect of physical design on social structure and the formation of 'communities'.<sup>464</sup>

This classic critique of the Architecture profession's ignorance of the communities for which they build is reflected by Anson:

'When the authorities (with the aid of the architects) finally offered them the "dream" of better housing, they discovered it had nothing to do with their way of life. One of the clear reasons for this failure was the architects' profound ignorance of the people for whom they were designing.'<sup>465</sup>

This position was one which George Mills also shared in 1975 when he wrote in an unpublished text 'The Future for the ARC':

'My greatest influences are not Corbusier, Gropius, van de Rohe, Tange, or Kahn. Theirs, and the other 'great' architects [sic] abstract symbolism, have been responsible for the urban demise being suffered by most great cities. They achieved their greatest ... works and acclaim at the expense of civilised societies.'<sup>466</sup>

The new housing with which Anson's community in Bootle was provided, the nineteen sixties' maisonettes and tower block flats at New Strand, which were subsequently demolished in the nineteen nineties (see figure 28). These are evidently the environments Anson is referring to when he describes housing in Bootle that '...had nothing to do with their way of life.'<sup>467</sup> The demolition of the New Strand area of Bootle began in 1965 with the

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<sup>464</sup> Severs, 'Rookeries and no-go estates: St. Giles and Broadwater Farm, or middle-class fear of 'non-street' housing', p.465.

<sup>465</sup> Anson. 'Architecture as Colonialism: Part 1', p.32.

<sup>466</sup> Mills, George and The ARC, "The Future for the ARC". [n.d.]. Author's personal collection.

<sup>467</sup> Anson. 'Architecture as Colonialism: Part 1', p.32.

new shopping centre, tower block and maisonettes opening 2 years later.<sup>468</sup> Anson referred to his abandonment of architecture near the end of his life in an interview with Crowley at EASA in Letterfrack, Ireland, in August 2008<sup>469</sup>:

'I'm 74, I was an architect. I left architecture because I found that it didn't serve my people. I fell in love with architecture when I was a teenager in Bootle, Liverpool; where I'm from, and I thought it would help my people and then I slowly discovered that I was disappointed in very broad terms. That was only for the rich. It wasn't for the poor...'<sup>470</sup>

Anson's outright hostility to Architecture of the early-nineteen seventies, and the desire for reform of the early-nineteen eighties, seem to have been born out of quite a familiar early experience. Although the demolition and rebuild of parts of Bootle occurred when Anson was in his late-twenties or early-thirties, the undoubted impact it would have had on his community seems to have left a lasting impression on Anson. This being despite the fact that Anson had left Bootle by then working '...as an architect and planner in Liverpool and Dublin in the mid-nineteen sixties, then arrived at the Greater London Council in 1967 (Anson gives the date at 1966) as a deputy principal planner for the Covent Garden design team'<sup>471</sup>. Anson describes some of the local responses to the new housing in Bootle with reference to the 'Art in Action'<sup>472</sup> project in 1977 and 1978. 'Art in Action' was part of a

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<sup>468</sup> Price, Mike. '50 years since the birth of Bootle Strand Shopping Centre', *The Liverpool Echo*. 3 June 2015. [liverpoolecho.co.uk/whats-on/whats-on-news/gallery/50-years-birth-bootle-strand-9386842](http://liverpoolecho.co.uk/whats-on/whats-on-news/gallery/50-years-birth-bootle-strand-9386842) [Accessed 9<sup>th</sup> October 2021]

<sup>469</sup> Crowley, Duncan. 'Boldjourney - Home', 16/05/2013. [web.archive.org/web/20130516125502/boldjourney.wikispaces.com](http://web.archive.org/web/20130516125502/boldjourney.wikispaces.com) [Accessed 1<sup>st</sup> November 2021]

<sup>470</sup> Anson & Crowley, Op cit. 00:01:52–00:02:30.

<sup>471</sup> Rogers, 'Brian Anson obituary'

<sup>472</sup> The project is called 'Art in Action', Anson misnames it throughout the article as 'Art and Action'. Art in Action, 'Art in Action Bootle', *Facebook*, no date. [facebook.com/groups/130281883662401](https://www.facebook.com/groups/130281883662401) [Accessed 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018]

campaign to highlight the poor quality housing in Bootle<sup>473</sup>, this being despite the fact the rebuild of Bootle New Strand was barely a decade old by the time the 'Art in Action' project was established.

'Art and Action realised the political power of photography to describe and expose the deprivation of the environment in which they all *had* [my emphasis] to live. It was them (not any Chapter of the RIBA) who produced a booklet *Bootle: a pictorial study of a dockland community*.<sup>474</sup>

Bootle serves, as do so many other larger and more completely investigated projects of mid 20<sup>th</sup> Century housing architecture, as key evidence of Architecture's inability to understand the very people for whom it is building. In the mid 20<sup>th</sup> Century this building manifested as State or Local Government sponsored housing.<sup>475</sup> It is widely accepted that by the nineteen seventies the mass housing project was in trouble;<sup>476</sup> the utopianly conceived modernist mega-structures of that period were dissolving into worse slums than those they had replaced. These looming urban dystopias became a by-word for council housing and modern architecture in the eyes of the public, the media, and politicians. Whilst the State housing, largely modernist architectural project was a failure, when applied to the private sector (notably in England at Chamberlin, Powell and Bon's Barbican Estate, in The City of London) it has been, and continues to be, a great success.

As I have argued in previous work the housing process was then and remains today in desperate need of rescuing from a methodology that had overshadowed the occupant, the

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<sup>473</sup> Connell, Kieran. *Black Handsworth: race in 1980s Britain*. (Oakland, California, USA: University of California Press, 2019), p.58

<sup>474</sup> Anson. 'Architecture as Colonialism: Part 1', p.32.

<sup>475</sup> Coates, Michael. 'The City, Urban Planning and Architecture', in *The Palgrave Handbook of Anarchism*, ed. by M. Adams and C. Levy, 1<sup>st</sup> Edn. (London: PalgraveMacmillan, 2019).

<sup>476</sup> See the work of Anne Powers, Colin Ward, Elaine Harwood, Lionel Esher, N. John Habraken, Patrick Dunleavy, Alice Coleman and Oscar Newman.



very reason for its existence, and become the process itself, mass housing. The occupant had to be placed back at the heart of the housing process, modern mass housing had alienated the occupant not only from the process but from the resulting architecture as well, a reconnection and re-identification with the architecture of housing had to be achieved to allow the occupant once again feel like these dwellings were really theirs and they really belonged.

This is an argument that N. John Habraken had made before Anson (although only available in English from 1972), his way out of the unsustainable situation in which the housing process had found itself, is still radical today over 50 years after it was proposed in 1968. Whether Anson was aware of Habraken's work but the point he was writing 'Architecture and Colonialism' 10 years on, is unknown. Anson makes no reference to Habraken in his work, but I have found that Anson rarely cites others from within Architecture as influencing his thinking. He cannot however claim ignorance of Ward, Turner or cooperatives in general as a mode of tenure, especially given that John F.C. Turner and Robert Fichter's edited volume, *Freedom to Build: Dweller Control of the Housing Process* was published by Freedom Press in 1972, Ward's *When We Build Again: Let's Have Housing That Works* was published in 1985. Not to mention the Corn and Granby Street Cooperatives (addressed in detail in Chapter 1) took place in the same city as Bootle in the early nineteen seventies. These examples are just a few amongst many of the thinkers, theorists and writers and actors in non-Establishment, non-Architect driven architecture in England at the time. The fact Anson does not acknowledge any of them as influencing him and his thought is just not credible.

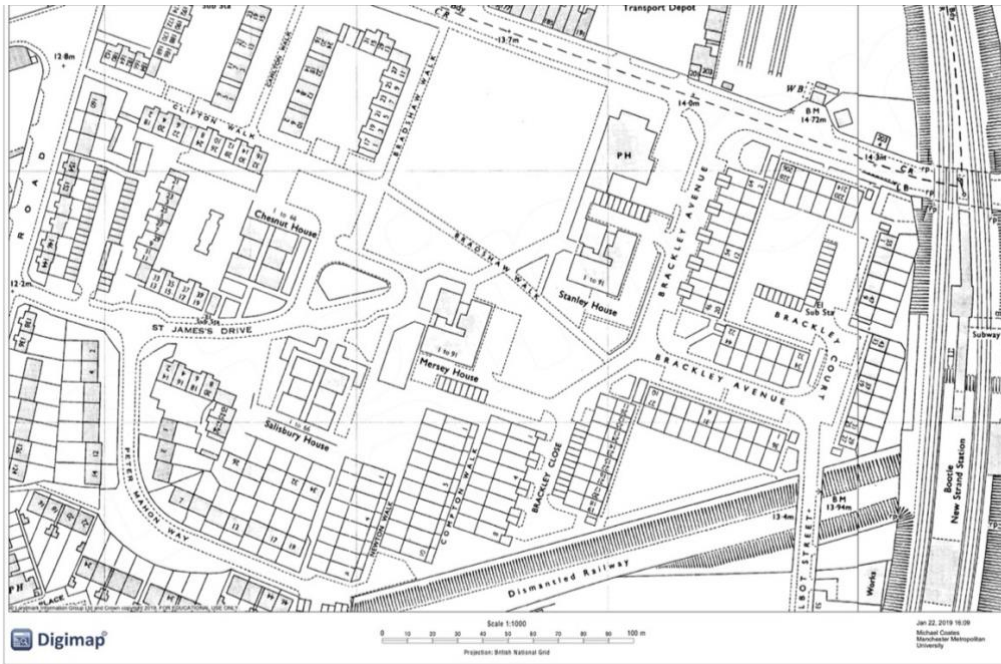


Figure 33. Bootle New Strand area in the 1970s.

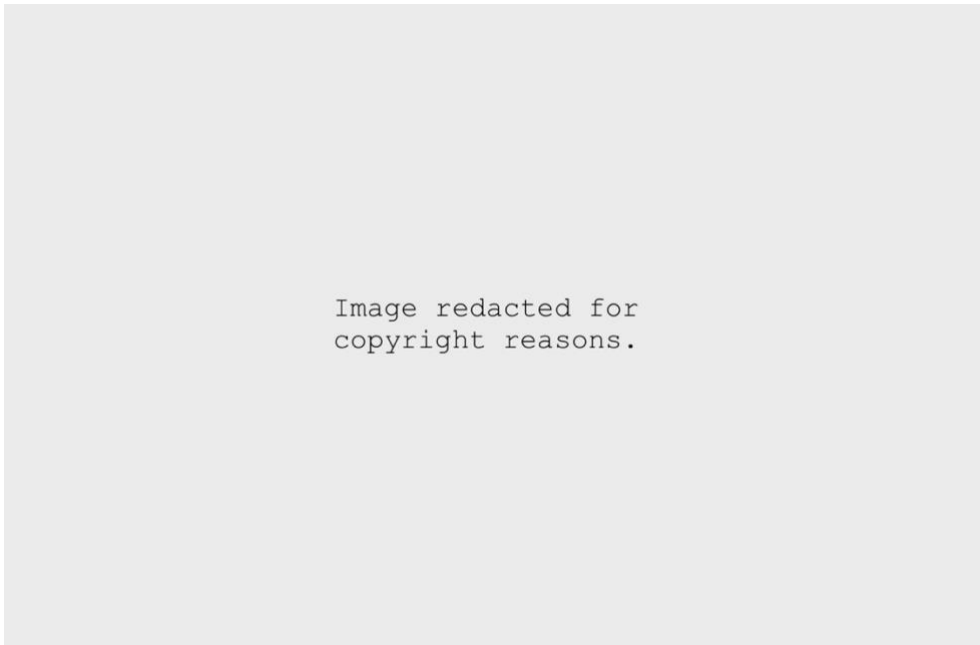


Figure 34. Building work on the New Strand June 1967.

Image redacted for  
copyright reasons.

Figure 35. Photo of Bootle in 1978 from the Art in Action project.

Image redacted for  
copyright reasons.

Figure 36. Photo of Bootle, with bridge over the now abandoned freight railway to the docks, in 1978.

## Eisenheim

From the perspective of Anson's thinking and position the question is really "can this be achieved without the revolution within the architectural professions?" Anson of course argues not but he also cites an example of radical workers cooperative in this article as an example of where the middle-classes (in which he includes architects) can infect and affect radical working-class projects. In a section entitled 'Eisenheim: A sense of celebration' he cites the town of Eisenheim, West Germany; this, he tells us is a

'...urban mining settlement in the city of Oberhausen in the Ruhr' and 'It was the first "Workers Initiative" (or community action) in Germany in the mid-1960s. Millionaire owners planned the entire demolition of the settlement in 1968 to expand their industrial zone. With the help of an architect, Professor Roland Gunter, who went to live with the miners, the community fought a long battle with the industrialists which only terminated in 1978 with a community victory.'<sup>477</sup>

One of the key factors which Anson sees in the victory at Eisenheim is that the community was a working-class mining community, except for Professor Roland Günter (1936–) who was a German art and architectural historian.<sup>478</sup> This industrial proletariat is perhaps the purest of the revolutionary classes in Marxism, although the more controversial term Luxemburgism<sup>479</sup> better exemplifies the developments at Eisenheim, and indeed Anson's own political outlook. At Eisenheim, there was, as he described it 'No middle-class take over.'<sup>480</sup> The Workers were those leading and succeeding in their battle against erasure by "big business" and corporate industrial power and greed.

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<sup>477</sup> Anson. 'Architecture as Colonialism: Part 1', p.41.

<sup>478</sup> Günter, Roland. 'Roland Günter'. *Roland Guenter Werke*, roland-guenter-werke.de [Accessed 3 June 2023]

<sup>479</sup> Grieger, Manfred, and Holger Politt. 'Luxemburgism'. *Rosalux.de*, March 2023. [rosalux.de/en/publication/id/50095/luxemburgism](https://rosalux.de/en/publication/id/50095/luxemburgism). [Accessed 2 June 2023].

<sup>480</sup> Anson. 'Architecture as Colonialism: Part 1', p.41.

'The federation [at Eisenheim] has attracted other groups such as ecologists, students and squatters. At first the workers were suspicious that these groups would bring in "abstract" concepts. But the workers' majority has overcome that, and the structure of the federation, prevents any takeover by the middle class, the links of which destroyed so many community initiatives in the United Kingdom – particular at Covent Garden.'<sup>481</sup>

Anson's rhetoric is consistently contradictory in 'Architecture and Colonialism', and between it and earlier work. In *I'll Fight You For It*, he bemoans the lack of engagement of the local (working-class) community. As addressed in Chapter 3 Anson is not alone in this belief (still held today by various Trotskyists)<sup>482</sup> that the English working classes are not ready for The Glorious Revolution of International Socialism. As Chamberlain said, E.P. Thompson '...who accused the English working class of quietism'<sup>483</sup> Anson was too guilty of being the radical and revolutionary who could not bring people with him. There was an argument, and is still now evident from his records, and those that speak about Anson post-mortem, that he was radical and revolutionary. But what we see here in these writings, and to a degree later in the case studies is a lot of talk. Anson was an excellent speaker, one can hear that in his writings, but his ability to spur people into action was it seems (from the evidence of Covent Garden, and at Ealing and Bridgtown (see Chapters 7 and 8)) limited. Anson did not meet people where they were, but shouted to them from across a gulf that they must rise up. It cannot be denied that Anson provided notably the Covent Garden campaign and later others with his expertise in the fields of architecture and urban design, this is a key

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<sup>481</sup> Anson. 'Architecture as Colonialism: Part 1', p.41.

<sup>482</sup> See the rhetoric of the Socialist Workers Party, i.e. 'And crucial to any successful revolution is a strong revolutionary party rooted in the working class. It has to be ready to organise people together when crisis escalates and steer the struggle.' Ringrose, Isabel. 'What Is the Route to Revolution?' *Socialist Worker*, 4 December 2022, [socialistworker.co.uk /features/what-is-the-route-to-revolution](http://socialistworker.co.uk/features/what-is-the-route-to-revolution) [Accessed 4 June 2023]

<sup>483</sup> Chamberlain, Op cit., p.183

achievement of the ARC and Anson personally, but the stirring of ordinary people to outright rebellion was at best limited.

In both *I'll Fight You For It* and in 'Architecture and Colonialism' Anson refers to "the workers" being "suspicious" of "abstract concepts" and haranguing "the middle classes" for "taking over" the Covent Garden campaign. In 'Architecture and Colonialism' again we see the ongoing bitterness that Anson holds (here almost a decade after the fact) towards the middle-classes who took over the Covent Garden campaign and the working-class Covent Gardeners who let them. Anson is only interested in the engagement of "the people" or The Workers in architecture, as per Marxist theory they are the only legitimate actors for him. The only ones not '...compromised by bourgeois ideology.'<sup>484</sup> This terminology is largely redundant in first world societies in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (if still existing on a global scale<sup>485</sup>) undoubtedly posing a problem in applying Anson's work today to a British context.

But the 'passive consumer mentality', as Habraken calls it, is perhaps more critical to Anson's thesis. Anson however does not acknowledge any link of his ideas to those of Habraken and thus gives this concept little attention. Nevertheless the 'passive consumer mentality' in so much of contemporary society (and indeed at Anson's own time) means that 'The People' lack the revolutionary zeal which Anson identifies as being so critical. He laments the lack of this at Covent Garden and similarly Peter Moloney referred to the 'revolutionaries' in Belfast 'not being ready'<sup>486</sup> and George Mills when speaking about Colne Valley said '...there wasn't any political motivation in the Valley itself.'<sup>487</sup> as we will see later.

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<sup>484</sup> Risebero, *Fantastic Form*, p.7.

<sup>485</sup> Seabrook, Jeremy, 'The New Class Struggle', *The Guardian*, 7<sup>th</sup> July 2006. [theguardian.com/commentisfree/2006/jul/07/themakingofthenewbritish](http://theguardian.com/commentisfree/2006/jul/07/themakingofthenewbritish) [Accessed 19<sup>th</sup> September 2021].

<sup>486</sup> 'But the revolutionaries weren't ready. The other revolutionaries [Sinn Fein/P-IRA] weren't ready. And they'd been too busy being part of a very different process.' Peter Moloney, in conversation with the author, Bloomsbury, London, 15<sup>th</sup> May 2013.

<sup>487</sup> George Mills, in conversation with the author, Withington, Manchester, 16<sup>th</sup> July 2014.

In the context of architecture, especially housing architecture, Colin Ward makes the point that the mass housing method as *the* method of providing housing over the last 150 or more years has left the occupant, and indeed the architect, planner, and politicians alike, unable to think beyond *mass housing* when they really need to think of only housing, or of housing as a verb.<sup>488</sup> As discussed in Chapter 3 the relationship between individuals prepared to engage in their built environment and the Architecture Establishment is the issue, this is something Anson recognises, and sought to bring down in the course of the activities of the ARC. This is a very present idea in the early nineteen seventies. Whilst it began with Habraken (in Dutch in 1966) as cited by Ward: 'In the rich world as Habraken puts it, "man no longer houses himself: he is housed"'.<sup>489</sup> Correctly identify that the Industrial Revolution changed the process of housing to something done to one, from verb to noun. Ward also cites Turner from the essay "We House, You are Housed, They are Homeless" in which we cites Turner as follows:

'In English, the word 'housing' can be used as a noun or as a verb. When used as a noun, housing describes a commodity or product. The verb 'to house' describes the process or activity of housing.'<sup>490</sup>

Thus the 'passive consumer mentality' and lack of 'readiness' of the working classes is a given to be overcome, not an impediment to be complained about.

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<sup>488</sup> Ward, *Tenants Take Over*, p.10

<sup>489</sup> Wilbert & White, Op cit.

<sup>490</sup> Ward, *Anarchy In Action*, p.6

## Soul of Man Under Socialism

'In 1892, in his *Soul of Man Under Socialism*, Oscar Wilde pointed out that the ultimate goal of socialism is "individualism" which will "give life its proper basis and its proper environment", the sort of individualism which will provide the means for all people to "develop their personalities" in harmony.'<sup>491</sup>

Anson here returns to the topic of the anarchist mode of organisation with the above citation of Oscar Wilde. The citing of *Soul of Man Under Socialism* gives us further evidence of the anarchist approach to architecture and society taken by Anson and later the ARC. Despite Anson's protestations not to belonging to any political credo or dogma, key tenets of anarchism and anarcho-syndicalist modes of organisation are evident in much of this writing, certainly at this later point in the nineteen eighties at the end of the ARC. The development of one's personality in harmony with others is a central plank of any conception of any anarchist society.

As set out in Chapter 1 the concept of anarchism modes of organising society emerges from *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution* in which Pëtr Kropotkin argues that mutual aid is a natural human instinct that has been present throughout history and has contributed to the development of human societies. He believed that mutual aid can be seen in various forms of cooperation among individuals and groups, ranging from the sharing of resources to the provision of support and assistance in times of need. We see this clearly in *Soul of Man Under Socialism* from Wilde and in Anson's own writings. Everything (as we will see later) in the work of the ARC in their various projects and campaigns was based on this conception. Whilst Mutual Aid can perhaps be argued to just socialist and mutualist, rather than just

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<sup>491</sup> Anson. 'Architecture as Colonialism: Part 1', p.41.



anarchist, this point is challenged by Read, Ward, Comfort and Bookchin (see Chapter 3). The argument therefore comes down to whether we see the work of ARC which was undoubtedly rooted in mutual aid as being therefore inherently anarchist. This is apparently not a leap that Anson makes or is prepared to make.

That Anson invokes Wilde here is interesting in that it indicates the strand of revolutionary socialism to which Anson subscribes, and consequently to which the majority of the activities, public pronouncements, and political rhetoric, to which leading members of the ARC subscribed (i.e. Peter Moloney, George Mills, Adam Purser, and Rob Thompson as the 'core group'<sup>492</sup>), to be markedly anarchist in its conception. In an echo of Habraken, Ward, or Turner (see Chapter 2) Anson goes on to cite Roland Günter's assessment of Architecture's fatal detachment from Society, when speaking about his involvement in the Eisenheim community:

'As Roland Gunter states:

"Architecture consists of social facts: if they are ignored then there can be no real research into architecture, for it exists within the heads, in the hands and in the feet of people. It is an abstraction which thinks that architecture consist only within itself".'<sup>493</sup>

This question that Architecture has lost its way as a profession is central to Anson's argument in these articles. The ARC posters from 1974 and the manifesto published under

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<sup>492</sup> 'Because the AA was in London, the distractions of working in the north of England, for most students, was still a bind because there were international students in the AA. There was a core group there when I was there with Brian and Pete, Adam Purser and three or four other students, who were politically very active.' George Mills, in conversation with the author, Withington, Manchester, 16<sup>th</sup> July 2014.

<sup>493</sup> Anson. 'Architecture as Colonialism: Part 1', p.44.

Mills and Moloney's names, calls on architects to abandon Architecture if not 'doing architecture'. Not simply because Anson and the ARC wish to engage in class war against the RIBA, but because of everything the RIBA represented then as now. Namely, an elite group of professionals, technocrats, controlling the built environment through long established mechanisms of professional obscurantism and protectionism. A system that is inevitably, as with all hierarchical structures in British society, built on the substrate of the British class system.

### *Architecture as Colonialism 07/07/1982*

In the third part (second article) in the series *Architecture as Colonialism* Anson seeks to link the working-class struggle of the industrial proletariat against Architecture with the struggles of colonised peoples in the former British Empire. This is one of Anson's least convincing arguments, full of seemingly half-understood quotations and misrepresented ideas, wilfully or otherwise.

Anson's desire to paint his struggle in architecture in the same colours as true revolutionary struggle against imperial oppression is at best in bad taste:

'Colonialism is not a relic of the past (empire building in foreign lands), it is a philosophy – very much alive – which sees territory as merely a profit, or power-making mechanism.'<sup>494</sup>

Whilst this statement is, I believe, true, the next part of Anson's argument does not hold water:

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<sup>494</sup> Anson. 'Architecture as Colonialism: 3 routes for the profession which way will you go?' p.68.

‘...In its basic objectives, colonialism is more successful in its own domain than in “foreign lands”. The British working-class has been, justifiably, described as “the last colony of the British Empire”.’<sup>495</sup>

This reference by Anson seems dubious or just misunderstood. David Dabydeen claimed in *On Not Being Milton*<sup>496</sup> that E.P. Thompson has described England as “the last colony of the British Empire”, this is not a direct reference to the working-class, as Anson is claiming it is. Though Dabydeen is writing about oppressed ethnic minorities in Britain, which arguably could be extended to the working-class more generally, this would be putting somewhat more weight on the premise than it can bear. This point was further made by the Rt. Hon. Anthony Wedgwood Benn MP (a.k.a. Tony Benn) in 1991 in parliament, in this case in reference to a debate on Scottish independence.<sup>497</sup> Therefore, we are again somewhat lacking credence for Anson’s claim that this description applies to the working-class.

Anson does here also return to his theme of Architecture’s detachment from Society, below referred to as ‘the people’s social culture’. He correctly identifies this alienation as a key cause for the creation of the “new slums”<sup>498</sup> that emerged from the genuine desire of Modernist architects to build a new world post-World War 2. ‘The professions [sic.] general ignorance of the people’s social culture has produced what are now aptly termed “the new slums”.’<sup>499</sup>

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<sup>495</sup> Anson. ‘Architecture as Colonialism: 3 routes for the profession which way will you go?’ p.68.

<sup>496</sup> Dabydeen, David. “On Not Being Milton: N\_\_\_\_\_ Talk in England Today”. In Ricks, Christopher; and Michaels, Leonard (eds.) *The State of Language*. (San Francisco: University of California Press, 1990)

<sup>497</sup> Hansard HC Deb. vol.191, col.564, 17<sup>th</sup> May 2011. [publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm199091/cmhansrd/1991-05-17/Debate-3.html](http://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm199091/cmhansrd/1991-05-17/Debate-3.html) [Accessed 14<sup>th</sup> May 2018].

<sup>498</sup> Thompson, Matthew. ‘Dwelling on design: the influence of Logos and Eros, nouns and verbs, on public housing renewal, and cooperative alternatives.’ *University College London*, 2019. [discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10135722/1/Dwelling%20on%20Design.pdf](http://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10135722/1/Dwelling%20on%20Design.pdf) [Accessed 13 May 2020]

<sup>499</sup> Anson. ‘Architecture as Colonialism: 3 routes for the profession which way will you go?’, p.68.

In this article, in contrast to many earlier writings, Anson proposes a group of three potential routes which he sees as those available to Architecture. These are summarised as; 1) do nothing and die, 2) participation is at best a half measure, and 3) architects need educating by the masses.

The first option as set out by Anson:

'Route 1:

Society will lose out because, despite its social failing and ineptitude, the profession has a wealth of creativity to offer *all the people* in this country. Architecture will lose because it will bring upon itself the naked hostility of a growing community of people who see that they have as much right to a civilised habitat as they have to some form of dignified work'<sup>500</sup>

The suicide pact set out above has come to pass in some ways. One might argue that the post-modern era just beginning in the early nineteen eighties; and the advent of developer led inner city "regeneration" at the turn of the millennium (e.g. Manchester, Birmingham, Cardiff, and Anson's home city of Liverpool) have led to soulless and "architect creativity free" rebuilding of our cities. The naked hostility directed against Architecture that Anson refers to has now turned to apathy at the sight of yet more glass and steel developer builds. This anger was arguably more powerful when Anson was writing, and into the nineteen nineties, than today. When questioned on the architectural profession a resident of Brixton or Liverpool (Anson does not specify which) but the word "bread" suggests the latter: 'The bastards who design this shit in which we are forced to live make a lot of bread from it – when the time comes we'll burn them too!'<sup>501</sup> This seems a clear reference to the April 1981

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<sup>500</sup> Anson. 'Architecture as Colonialism: 3 routes for the profession which way will you go?', p.70

<sup>501</sup> Ibid, p.71.

riots in Brixton, and the July 1981 riots in Toxteth, and the arson which occurred in both places, along with 30 other towns and cities across the Britain in July 1981, uprising having begun in St Paul's, Bristol; in April 1980.<sup>502</sup>

The second route which Anson describes critiques the lip service "consultation" that are now such a hallmark of public bodies, HR departments, planning departments, and the "AA educated" type architecture student:

'Route 2: The project [p.69] made the point that, despite the fact that "participation", "local initiatives", etc. are now fully accepted processes in our establishment philosophy, this does not mean that *total* control will ever be countenanced by *the system* [my emphasis].'<sup>503</sup>

This is a significant point that a truly anarchist form of architecture cannot hope to exist whilst Architects and Architecture are those determining who should have what levels of control or influence and at what stage. Elsewhere I have argued: 'Ultimately however if the field of Architecture is to become one in which anarchist modes of *doing* and *organising* can develop it is up to *the profession to surrender its power and control* over the process. Continuing the process of building buildings (architecture) does not require the profession (Architecture) to exist.'<sup>504</sup> Anson does not believe this to be possible, and now 40 years the professions of Architecture are still very much alive and working in similar ways and susceptible to same critiques Anson was levelling at them in 1982.

The route that Anson advocates is left until last:

'Route 3: ...the profession must drop its arrogant belief that it can "teach" the communities of these areas about the environment; such an approach is

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<sup>502</sup> Gilroy, Paul. 'The "Riots."' *Race & Class*, v.23, no. 2-3 (1<sup>st</sup> October 1981): 223-32.

<sup>503</sup> Anson, 'Architecture as Colonialism: 3 routes for the profession which way will you go?', p.70.

<sup>504</sup> Coates, 'The City, Urban Planning and Architecture', in *The Palgrave Handbook of Anarchism*.

impertinent in the extreme, given the record of architectural disasters. If their declared intentions in the press are accurate, the RIBAs Architecture Workshops are a faulty concept from the start, in that they propose to “educate” the people in environmental matters. It is we, the architects, who need the education.’<sup>505</sup>

Even today, in the first quarter of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, schools of architecture, students, academics architects, planners, and local authorities continue to conduct “participation” in this way. Of course, such ideas are not unique to Anson, not new to Architecture. Over 20 years before Anson wrote his article Ralph Erskine and Vernon Gracie were engaging more meaningfully with the intended occupants of their giant redevelopment scheme at Byker, Newcastle-upon-Tyne<sup>506</sup>, setting up shop in an old funeral parlour in the middle of Byker. As David Dunster said in *‘Progressive Architecture’* (1979):

‘From the converted funeral parlour, Erskine’s dedicated team has designed and supervised construction of the scheme. The office has been instrumental... in demonstrating to this working-class community that the project belongs to them and is their responsibility. The office [was, during the build,] open during normal working hours to all callers.’<sup>507</sup>

During the Byker project Erskine and Gracie did not surrender any control over the process nor over the design or creativity of the buildings being constructed, as Anson argues is necessary to democratise Architecture. They did however provide residents a degree of access to architects not seen before in public housing. They sought to engender a sense of belonging and community in a different way, which in Byker’s case lasted a generation. As

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<sup>505</sup> Anson. ‘Architecture as Colonialism: 3 routes for the profession which way will you go?’, p.70.

<sup>506</sup> Erskine, Ralph, *Byker Redevelopment, Byker area of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, England. 1969-82*, ed. by Yukio Futagawa, trans. by Mats Egelius (Tokyo, Japan: A.D.A. EDITA Tokyo Co., 1980).

<sup>507</sup> Dunster, David. ‘Walled Town: Byker’, *Progressive Architecture*, v.60, n.8, (1979) 68-73, p.70

Colin Amery pointed out in 1974 this participation is a kind of quasi-participation, not full participation like that described by Habraken:

‘There is a real dilemma inherent in participatory designing. The residents have absolutely no control over any redevelopment and they lack the skills to actually design and build their own houses. What is happening in Byker is a middle way.’

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Amery’s attitude is one very evident in *Architecture* at the time, and indeed still now in 2022. He is right in his observation that residents ‘...have absolutely no control over any redevelopment’, as this housing was bought and paid for by Newcastle City Council. The fact that little had changed when Anson was writing in 1982 is evident in Anson’s frustration. His failure to acknowledge some in *Architecture* had been working in this engaged way as early as the nineteen sixties is also curious as this seems to mesh with earlier claims that architects (as opposed to *Architects*), have something to offer society and should do so freely. This is certainly the sentiment expressed in the ARC manifesto by Mills and Moloney.

Anson says towards the end of the article:

‘Creativity, in the world of architecture and environmental design, is not an abstraction: it must be related to social reality.

The *total* experience of the physical environment resides, by definition, within society. Every man, woman and child possesses elements (possibly only minute ones) of the “knowledge” that we architects need to do our jobs properly. It is a concept far beyond the (now so patronising) ideas of participation, consultation, town trails and the like;...’<sup>509</sup>

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<sup>508</sup> Amery, Colin. ‘Housing, Byker, Newcastle-upon-Tyne’, *Architectural Review*, December, v.156, (1974) 346-362, p.361

<sup>509</sup> Anson. ‘Architecture as Colonialism: 3 routes for the profession which way will you go?’, p.71

The idea that the people of Byker (or indeed any inner city mass housing project of the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century) had anything to contribute to the process was not considered by Newcastle City Council, and the chance they did was embraced, at least to a degree by Erskine and Gracie. The fact however is that social housing is a social project for a social good and it was necessary then as now that the society that will make such projects home is involved at every step of the process. This could be an exciting and long overdue development in the very substance of Architecture. As Anson says:

'The recognition of our ignorance is not a depressing idea; on the contrary it is a cause for celebration.

'The celebration of co-operation being suggested is in contradistinction to the absurd theory that architecture, in order to gain social acceptability, must "give the people what they want", a notion as ridiculous as that of Anthony Caro at the recent Art and Architecture symposium that "people do not know what they want; when they get it they like what they get".'<sup>510</sup>

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<sup>510</sup> Anson. 'Architecture as Colonialism: 3 routes for the profession which way will you go?', p.71



## Letters

Brian Anson was a writer of letters. As he makes this clear in a letter in 1996 to the journal *City* in which he says: 'The practice of 'letters' is my way of writing. It used to be an art form but it's been neglected as the 'stitch-up' of technology has proceeded.'<sup>511</sup> In the second issue of *City*, Anson's letter was published in full. It is, as he himself says at the end of the letter, a 'mad rant' in which he excoriates the journal and its contributors as knowing nothing about the city. He also provides us with some insight as to the reason for his relocation to France, the exact address is in fact provided in his curriculum vitae which is reproduced in full on page 188 of the journal (see figure 36):

Straight off the bat Anson attacks the hypocrisy of the experts published in *City*, saying:

'But this whole thing about 'experts' (academics, intellectuals and such). Pirsig, in his second book *Lila*, [Robert M. Pirsig, [1991] *Lila: An Inquiry into Morals*) points out that psychiatrists can only practise if they definitely prove they are sane; ergo they know nothing (first hand) about madness. It's the way I feel about experts on cities - especially when they talk about the 'problems' of cities. The problems of cities are not roads, rivers or fine buildings. They are poverty, emptiness, loneliness - and selfishness manifest! In the end, the problems of cities are violence! Sarajevo, Belfast'<sup>512</sup>

Anson here in his typically bombastic written style claims that "experts" on cities know nothing of 'poverty, emptiness, loneliness - and selfishness' and that these are the real problems of cities, this claim seems somewhat detached from reality. That Anson is claiming

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<sup>511</sup> Anson, Brian. 'Message from an outsider', *City*, v.1, 1996, n.3-4, 187-191, p.190,

<sup>512</sup> Anson, 'Message from an outsider', p.191.

this in 1996, a few months after his old friend and comrade George Mills (as part of Mills Beaumont Leavey Channon) had completed the Homes for Change project, and the mass regeneration, in Hulme, Manchester<sup>513</sup>; does seem vaguely ludicrous.

Interestingly Anson also refers to why he moved to France in this letter saying: 'I was four years as Director of The Hoxton Trust, before it broke my health (hence France).'<sup>514</sup> The Hoxton Trust which Anson references is a charity established in 1983 to address the decay of the physical environment of Hoxton and Shoreditch<sup>515</sup>, it seems that Anson was one of the Trusts first directors. It seems this may have been one of Anson's last jobs in England, before decamping to France in 1991.<sup>516</sup> Anson's CV shows (see figure 37) his tenure at The Hoxton Trust was between 1986 and 1991, which coincides with the end of the last ARC project, in Belfast in 1986. Anson, with suitable élan ends his letter:

'I guess I'm an OUTSIDER! But then so are millions of others - the ones who have to endure the cities. The homeless, the vagrants, the single mothers and the harassed and abused.'<sup>517</sup>

This letter to *City* is one of a panoply of writings, many of which have been lost, that Anson wrote to journal, politicians, contemporaries and his "old comrades" of the ARC. Over the course of the nineteen seventies, whilst the ARC was still very active, Anson also wrote numerous letters, mainly to George Mills in the ARC "northern outpost" in Yorkshire; many

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<sup>513</sup> MBLA. "Homes for Change Hulme, Manchester." 10<sup>th</sup> March 1996, [web.archive.org/web/20220524154025/mbla.net/projects/homes-for-change/index.html](http://web.archive.org/web/20220524154025/mbla.net/projects/homes-for-change/index.html) [Accessed 4 June 2023]

<sup>514</sup> Anson. 'Message from an outsider', p.190.

<sup>515</sup> Hoxton Trust. 'Trust History', *The Hoxton Trust*, 2021. [hoxtontrust.org/trust-history](http://hoxtontrust.org/trust-history) [Accessed 21<sup>st</sup> October 2021]

<sup>516</sup> Crowley, Duncan. (2008) Brian Anson - Activist/Architect/Artist, 25/06/2008, *European Architecture Student Assembly*. [easa.antville.org/stories/1809967](http://easa.antville.org/stories/1809967). [Accessed 21<sup>st</sup> October 2021]

<sup>517</sup> Anson. 'Message from an outsider', p.191.

of which Mills has retained. They provide an interesting insight into Anson's thinking at critical time for the ARC and bear some analysis here.



Image redacted for  
copyright reasons.

Figure 37. Brian Anson's CV reproduced as part of a letter sent to the journal *City* in 1996, published as 'Message from an outsider'

Additionally, his CV mentions numerous projects to which the ARC or at least Anson lays claim to some involvement in whilst many of these are substantiated (Covent Garden, Ealing, Bridgtown, Eisenheim, Colne Valley, and Divis) a number are not, namely Liverpool, West Donegal, Wimbledon, Cork, Hoxton, and Cymdethas yr Iaith Gymraeg: Planning and Language also in Wales. The early project in Liverpool is mentioned as an aside by both Mills and Moloney in their conversations with me, but neither provided other information on this.

The only detailed reference to this comes from Bottom's 2008 article where he writes:

'ARC became seriously involved in a number of important community issues between 1974 and 1977, mobilising on behalf of the Covent Garden Residents Association, the Ealing Alliance ... and the Pope Street Association of Bootle.'

Whilst Pope Street certainly exists and is only a mile from the New Strand area of Bootle where Anson was born, there is no publicly available record of any campaign or residents association at Pope Street.

Anson does refer to going to Donegal to work during his time at the Greater London Council working on the Covent Garden project. In his interview with Crowley in 2008, saying: 'I was asked to go to Donegal... to do a plan for the Donegal Gaeltacht so invited by the Irish Government ..., and it changed my life.'<sup>518</sup> It seems Anson credits the time he spent in Donegal with radicalising him, or at least making him realise the damage the Covent Garden redevelopment scheme would do to the people of Covent Garden, as he says moments later to Crowley:

'I came back to London and again innocently I tried to tell my colleagues who would profess that they were staunch socialists. You know, "we're doing it

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<sup>518</sup> Anson with Crowley, Op cit., 00:03:50–00:04:05.

wrong. We're gonna destroy the people in this area". The working class community particularly.<sup>519</sup>

In 1976 George Mills set up the Colne Valley Project from his base at New Hagg farm, near Brockholes, in the neighbouring Holme Valley<sup>520</sup> (see Chapter 10). As such Mills was remote from the ARCs locus of operations in the basement of 11 Percy Street, London<sup>521</sup>; markedly so for the mid-nineteen seventies, and thus Anson would write to him and include notes of ARC meetings held at Percy Street.

A final brief letter of Anson's worth of attention here for the light it sheds on Anson's work at the AA, is one to George Mills in which he signs off using *nom de plume*, Seamus Mulhern, dated 6<sup>th</sup> September 1976. In this we gain some insight into Anson relationship with the AA and Boyarsky at the start of what would be the start of Anson's fifth year at Bedford Square. The letter states that Anson was to be running two groups that year, that this would be exhausting and that Boyarsky had asked him to propose a budget for 1976/77 that would mean Mills being offered a day a week, up from his a day a fortnight the year before. Interestingly Anson says towards to the end of the letter that 'The politics at the AA are getting heavy; even Alvin says he has fallen out of love with the place. I've thought about constantly since, and I still come down on his side.'<sup>522</sup> What politics exactly Anson does not explain, either way this seems pronouncement seems to have been rather premature given Boyarsky would remain Chairman of the AA until his death in 1990.<sup>523</sup>

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<sup>519</sup> Anson with Crowley, Op cit., 00:04:10–00:04:30

<sup>520</sup> Historic England, New Hagg Farm (2021) [historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1134840](https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1134840), [Accessed 13<sup>th</sup> May 2021]

<sup>521</sup> Bottoms, 'If Crime Doesn't Pay: The Architects' Revolutionary Council', p.18

<sup>522</sup> Letter from Brian Anson [*nom de plume*, Seamus Mulhern] to George Mills, 6<sup>th</sup> September 1976

<sup>523</sup> Sunwoo, Op cit., p.34

## The Future for the ARC

Another document, again undated and written collectively, but largely by George Mills, called 'The Future for the ARC' was given to me by Mills in 2014 from his own collection. This document sets out a future for the ARC it also provides a useful timeline of events beginning with the statement:

'Overleaf is a primary action course, that we see as the foundation to the new architecture movement coming to fruition. We ask all architects, technicians, draftsmen and students within the profession to search their consciences and commence working for and towards the new order.'<sup>524</sup>

On the following pages of this letter appears the below timeline (see figures 33+34). Although this document is undated, we must conclude from the use of past tense in the above timeline that it was written no earlier than 1<sup>st</sup> November 1975.

On page 2 of the document, under the heading "Architectural Suicide", Mills says that the enemy in for the form of the architectural establishment that the ARC is fighting are not only, in the words of their poster "repressive, insensitive, brutal and arrogant" but also: '...in its present form it is also archaic, totally archaic. The practitioners and bosses of architecture are virtually unaware that they are so inadequate and ill-educated in terms of the directions that our society is trying to progress.'<sup>525</sup>

Mills goes on to describe the 'architectural establishment' as '...the power structure, based on the economic infrastructure, propped up and reinforced by the media and supported by

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<sup>524</sup> Mills, The ARC, "The Future for the ARC", p.3

<sup>525</sup> Ibid, p.2

the educational courses. [sic] This term, 'architectural establishment' is analogous with my own definition (see Chapter 2) of Architecture, as opposed to architecture. The 'architectural establishment', or Architecture, is the issue, the roadblock to progress, and in Mills and the ARCs view as elucidated in this document they are not only a roadblock but unaware that they are in the way.

MARCH 75	It was decided that the next phase of our work must be implemented as soon as we were back. The degree of commitment and solidarity amongst the group could not have been stronger.
APRIL 75	The group met on a few occasions and a real strategy for a real onslaught on the architectural profession evolved. It was decided that we must first make more people aware of our existence and purpose. The major object of this was to attempt to create more ARC cells around the country prior to attempting to instigate a mass movement. The main reason for this was to spread support for, and participation in a national convention of radically minded architects in October. This convention is seen as the spearhead of the mass movement. The part the Architects Revolutionary Council cells will play in this is primarily as the convenors. In the most recent literature published by ARC, this strategy and the reasons for the need for a new architectural order are outlined. Because of the intensity of ARC's activity over the past few months, a more detailed account of different aspects of our campaign during this period is given below.
MAY 9 75	New Architecture Movement pamphlet and 'Oklahoma' poster published. These two publications were intended to show ARC's views on architecture and the need to come together and begin forming a new architectural order. This set of material was firstly distributed to schools of architecture.
MAY 10 75	Letters and ARC posters and pamphlets sent out to the Rt. Hons. Anthony Crosland, Tony Benn, Eric Heffer and Jo Grimmond, MP's.
MAY 16 75	The ARC Manifesto and an outline of architecture as we see it plus the detailed reasoning behind our movement are published, along with the

Figure 38. Part 1 of the timeline from The Future for the ARC.



RIBA/Fascism Poster. This was distributed to all national newspapers and radio/television networks, weekly social magazines, underground press, community magazines, architectural publications, MP's previously contacted and all schools of architecture. It was also sent to about 20 people who had personally contacted us for information on ARC.

- MAY 28 75 The ARC poster and part of our publication appear in the Architects Journal.
- MAY 29 75 London group meeting expresses disappointment at the lack of response to our literature from the schools of architecture. We decided to send out a strong appeal to the schools to prick them out of their apathy.
- MAY 31 75 Critical article on the ARC appears in Building Design magazine. A resume of our aims and ideals appears in Time Out magazine.
- JUNE 2 75 'Criminal Architecture' pamphlet completed and printed. The primary action for advocates of ARC appears on the back of the pamphlet.
- JUNE 4 75 ARC is called into to prepare a draft plan to combat the town centre redevelopment plan for Ealing. A draft strategy for the proposals was agreed with the local amenity groups. George McRobie of Intermediate Technology is closely involved with us on the work.
- JUNE 6 75 'Criminal Architecture' poster ready.
- JUNE 9 75 Mass distribution of 'criminal architecture' literature.
- JUNE 10 75 42 individual letters recieved in response to our publicity to date. Most expressing support and a need for information on setting up an ARC cell.
- JUNE 16 75 Three ARC members meet Mr. Jo Grimmond to discuss the overall socio/political effect of our group.
- OCT 31 75 Convention of Radical Architects at Morecambe.
- CONTRIBUTIONS The following personal contributions have been made to the ARC movement.
- POSTERS AND PAMPHLETS 'Oklahoma' poster, design and printing.  
'Criminal architecture' pamphlet, author.  
'Criminal architecture' poster, designer.

Figure 39. Part 2 of the timeline from The Future for the ARC



RED HOUSE

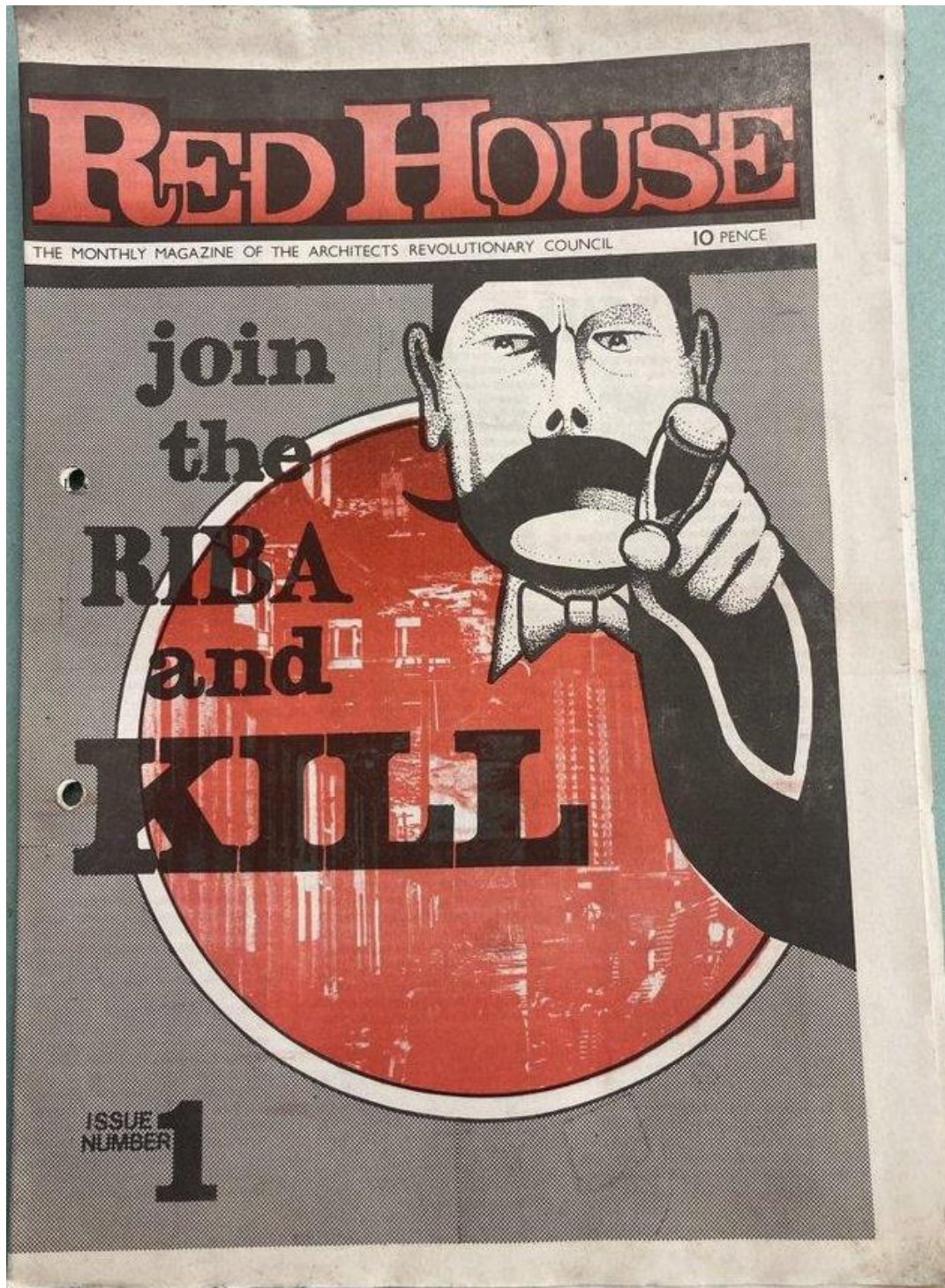


Figure 40. Colour image of the cover of the first issue of RED HOUSE via The May Day Rooms.

'Louis [Hellman] is editor of REDHOUSE. We will combine on the work of production but Lou must 'shape' the paper, ... He will produce an outline plan for the next six issues.'<sup>526</sup>

Published in mid-1976<sup>527</sup>, *RED HOUSE* was planned as a monthly in-house magazine for the ARC, however it only ever amounted to one issue, as Peter Moloney said in interview in 2013<sup>528</sup>. The single issue of *RED HOUSE* featured a number of articles, reviews and an editorial. Whilst it does not contain a copy of any manifesto of the ARC it does serve as something of a manifesto for the ARC in and of itself.

The very first article in *RED HOUSE* is an Editorial the headline of which is 'JOIN THE RIBA AND KILL (see figure 35). The article starts with allusions to the Spanish Civil War and the subversion of the "struggle for freedom". Before the editor (which we must assume is Anson, despite his claim above this Hellman was editor) gets on to architecture:

'Architecture is no exception. The community movements struggling against oppressive architecture schemes were, in a very real sense, waging a freedom fight to defend their homes, their land, their culture. On freedom fighter does by a bullet, another succumbs to weariness, to hopelessness in the unending struggle against a power system which holds all the cards; the bureaucrats, the politicians the planners and THE ARCHITECTS.'<sup>529</sup> [original emphasis]

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<sup>526</sup> 'Meeting notes' A letter from Brian Anson to George Mill, 6<sup>th</sup> September 1976

<sup>527</sup> This date can only be estimated from clues as no date is included on the issue. The latest date referred to the past tense is the death of Sammy Driscoll, of Covent Garden, on 29<sup>th</sup> April 1976, a further reference to August 1976 being in the future, indicates Red House must have been published between these two dates. Further reference to a meeting on 29<sup>th</sup> July 1976 in which Red House is referred to as though published, narrows the date to between 29<sup>th</sup> April & 29<sup>th</sup> July 1976.

<sup>528</sup> Peter Moloney, in conversation with the author, Bloomsbury, London, 15<sup>th</sup> May 2013.

<sup>529</sup> RED HOUSE, issue 1, 1976, p1. Author's personal collection



# EDITORIAL.

## Join the RIBA and Kill

There are many ways in which to kill and there is more than one way to die.

"...We were as men who through a fen of filthy darkness grope... something was dead in each of us and what was dead was hope...."

wrote Oscar Wilde in his 'Ballad of Reading Gaol'.

The spirit can be killed as can faith; it is possible to kill trust and destroy dreams. All those who conspire to subvert the struggle for freedom are potential killers for, should they succeed, they destroy more than the body; they wipe out the vision of a better future. To the sensitive nature physical death is not always the worst prospect as the Spanish Republicans proclaimed through their slogan, 'It is better to die on your feet than to live on your knees'. The struggle for freedom is universal and to be found in all walks of life.

Architecture is no exception. The community movements struggling against oppressive architecture schemes were, in a very real sense, waging a freedom fight to defend their homes, their land, their culture. One freedom fighter dies by a bullet, another succumbs to weariness, to hopelessness in the unending struggle against a power system which holds all the cards; the bureaucrats, the politicians, the planners and THE ARCHITECTS.

Even as we write this journal we mourn the death of Sam Driscoll, a young man of 65 who, for seven years, struggled valiantly in his home community of Covent Garden against oppressive architectural schemes. Some might say it was the developers' greed, the machinations of politicians and bureaucrats against which Sam Driscoll struggled and which, in the end, broke him, but how can our own profession be absolved?

We indict the RIBA for complicity in his death.

The RIBA is the official voice of architecture in Britain; governments seek its advice, the media pays special attention to its views on environmental matters, it controls education in the profession. Yet all the time it is in league with those who

brutalise our environment and mar the lives of that 80% of our society which has no economic control over its physical environment. During the speculation boom, the RIBA, when it could have offered support to the many millions of people who were powerless, instead threw the weight of its authority behind the environmental rapists. Many of its top members who control the profession made fortunes out of the brutalising of our country. Now in a recession they scuttle like rats from a sinking ship to the money-wells of the OPEC countries.

For such reasons many architects, and particularly the students, have come to despise the RIBA and some of us have grown to even hate it, as we hate all traitors to a noble cause. For architecture could be a cause for great good in our society. In an urbanised country such as ours it is nothing less than the physical backcloth against which we live out our lives.

Though society is far from ideal, were we doctors we would at least be thankful that good health was no longer denied people because they were poor. Were we labourers we would be glad that no longer did we have to wait each day at the gates of the dock, the factory and the mill for a decent days work. The right to health, the right to work, these were moral and noble causes; and so the architectural issue is a moral one. The right of people to a decent environment and to feel secure in their home, no matter what their station in life.

Some might plead that the profession has no control over such issues, that it must work within the socio-economic system of the time; that is to abide by the rules of big-business, monopoly capital and state bureaucracy.

But did the small group of doctors who initiated the Health Service have control, or the workers who struggled for unionisation? They acted because the way in which they were forced to practise their craft was based on a fundamental injustice. There has always been more than enough environmental injustice in this country to give the RIBA ample scope to show which side it is on; the privileged and powerful minority which controls the construction of our environment, or the communities and individuals so

Perhaps most contemptible of all the RIBA has killed the idealism of architectural youth by its stranglehold on education. The students are herded like so many cattle into an ever-narrowing architectural conveyor belt of the future modelled on the values of management and big business.

We believe that there is indeed a crisis in architecture but one far deeper than that about which McEwen writes. It is a spiritual, a moral crisis and the answer cannot be found within the usual narrow confines of right versus left. Nor has the RIBA any wish to tackle that crisis as its very position depends on preserving the status quo. Only by avoiding the real social problems surrounding architecture can the RIBA retain its monopoly; retain its fee scale which puts our profession out of the reach of most people and keep its stranglehold on education and thus the future of architecture. Thousands of our colleagues in the profession 'live on their knees' doing work which they despise; work that kills. The second-class citizens of architecture, the technicians, do the same destructive work, and the students are manipulated by the dictators of Portland Place.

In 'Wasteland. The building of the American Dream', architect Stephen Kurtz says:

"As long as the primary form of getting what one needs is begging, cajoling, or persuading, for so long is the childish status preserved... Only the revolutionary transcends and escapes the tragic dilemma. In a terrifying (even to himself) and ultimate defiance of authority, he gives up hope of some day receiving what he has always been denied and decides, either alone or with others, to provide for himself. In this way then revolutionaries are this world's only adults."

RED HOUSE is a call to all such revolutionary architects. Let us come together to create an architecture of life, and overthrow the *profession that kills*.

Of what do we have to be proud being architects?

When the RIBA joins with others in ripping the heart out of a neighbourhood against the wishes of its inhabitants it is a killer no matter what fancy words it may use to justify its actions. When, in league with bureaucrats, it brutalises people's lives through the design of certain types of local authority housing, it kills people's sensitivity. When it ignores the, still vast, twilight areas of our country because there is no money nor commissions in them, then it is a destroyer, by default, of the hopes of the inhabitants that they will ever have a decent environment. And when such areas are 'discovered' by the professional 'gentrifiers' the RIBA is a destroyer because it allows its members to plunder such areas and drive out the inhabitants.

Figure 41. Editorial from page 1 of Issue 1, RED HOUSE, 1976.

In the following paragraph the ARC declares ‘We indict the RIBA for complicity in his death’<sup>530</sup>, referring to the recent death of Sammy Driscoll of the struggle for Covent Garden.

The ARC it would seem are being quite literal when they accuse the RIBA and Architects of killing. And later refers to developers and local politicians as ‘environmental rapists.’<sup>531</sup> There are clearly no holds barred when it comes to a propaganda device such as RED HOUSE in the hands of the ARC. They also will brook no excuses from architects writing:

‘Some might plead that the profession has no control over such issues,... But did the small group of doctors who initiated the Health Service have control, or the workers who struggled for unionisation?’<sup>532</sup> The lack of any functioning trade union in the world of architecture, even still today in 2022, is a shaming fact. But the ARC more see themselves as a kin to those first NHS doctors, the potential founders of a ‘National Architecture Service’.

Towards the end of the editorial the ARC writes: ‘*RED HOUSE* is a call to all such revolutionary architects. Let us come together to create an architecture of life, and overthrow *the profession that kills*.’<sup>533</sup> [original emphasis].

This fits very clearly with the ARCs rhetoric calling for the destruction of the RIBA. The main thrust of this editorial is that the RIBA and Architects are in hock to big business, and at the time in the nineteen seventies, the overbearing bureaucracies of government, both local and national. Again, as is shown in their posters from the 1974 AA press conference (see figure 1)

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<sup>530</sup> RED HOUSE, issue 1, p.1

<sup>531</sup> ibid

<sup>532</sup> ibid

<sup>533</sup> ibid

The final paragraph of the editorial begins with the lines: ‘When the RIBA joins with others in ripping the heart out of a neighbourhood against the wishes of its inhabitants it is a killer no matter what fancy words it may use to justify its actions’.

The tone of this article and the allusions to destroyed communities seems to clearly be related to Anson’s own, and comparatively recent at the time, harrowing experience at Covent Garden where the combination of big business, and the massive bureaucracies of the London Boroughs are the Greater London Council, conspired (as Anson sees it) to erase a working class community from the heart of London. This they achieved even if the physical fabric of the area was ultimately preserved.

On page six there is an explanation of the choice of name, which has been taken Philip Webb and William Morris’s Red House, Bexleyheath (1860)<sup>534</sup>, under the heading “Why Red House?” the ARC say:

‘we’re sorry to disappoint categorisers, labellers and dismissers [sic], but ‘Red House’ has nothing to do with the Kremlin. We are *not* Syndicalists, Marxists, Maoists nor indeed Capitalists but, if we must talk in ‘ists’. Then artists, revolutionists, humanists and anti-dogmatists.

We follow the traditions of English radicalism – The Levellers, the Diggers, and 18<sup>th</sup> Century revolutionaries as well as Ruskin and Morris.<sup>535</sup>

Despite their very clear allusions, and rhetoric linking them equally to Marxist-socialism and Syndicalism and clear appearances to the contrary in their public pronouncements, the ARC

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<sup>534</sup> Sambrook, Justine. ‘Red House, Bexleyheath, 1860’, 06/01/2015, *RIBAJ*, ribaj.com/culture/philip-webb-red-house-bexleyheath-1860 [Accessed 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2021]

<sup>535</sup> RED HOUSE, issue 1.

seems here to be claiming no apolitical allegiance. As to whether this is mere propaganda or political positioning we are left to guess. The former is perhaps likely as a subcategory of the materials retained by Mills are notes from meetings held by the ARC one such meeting is recorded as in an ARC/NAM joint meeting on Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> July 1976 notes for which were recorded by Anson, in minutes dated 30<sup>th</sup> July 1976, he says:

'ARC began by outlining the three point programme;

- The build-up of REDHOUSE as a propaganda weapon.
- Development of the large Colne Valley community project.
- A Summer School for 1977 probably preceded by a large congress early in the year.

'NAM can use *REDHOUSE* for it's [sic] own propaganda purposes and may consider a major spread.

NAM would logically play a major role in the ARC Summer School of 1977.'<sup>536</sup>

RED HOUSE is seemingly designed to emulate in a suitably anarchistic manner the monthly journals that are so engrained in the architectural profession. These glossy mags which primarily exist today to perpetuate the profession and elite status of the architect, are suitably representative of such a profession. Whereas *RED HOUSE* is described, in an article on page 2 "ARCheology: A brief history of the Architects' Revolutionary Council", as: 'the radical broadsheet of our group.'<sup>537</sup> And goes on state: 'The ARC has no illusions, the RIBA and the architects who financially and spiritually support it are our enemy'<sup>538</sup>

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<sup>536</sup> 'Meeting notes' A letter from Brian Anson to George Mill, 6<sup>th</sup> September 1976

<sup>537</sup> ARCheology: A brief history of the Architects' Revolutionary Council'. *RED HOUSE*, issue 1, p.2, 1976. Author's personal collection

<sup>538</sup> *ibid*

Much of the rest of this lone issue of *RED HOUSE* is devoted to the Ealing Town Centre project, and I will address this much more detail in the next Chapter. But page 5 of the issue contains a brief obituary for Sammy Driscoll who died in April 1976, described as the 'King of Covent Garden', Driscoll was key community organiser, alongside John Toomey,<sup>539</sup> and features heavily in Anson's book on the struggle.<sup>540</sup> The summer school is an interesting point here as this is the beginnings of what later becomes the winter schools, and ultimately EASA, as Anson discussed with Crowley in 2008.<sup>541</sup>

Anson did not, at least yet in 1976, have the desire to build a new world of architecture. Despite as he said much later he would be a hypocrite if one criticised something without a vision for what it should be.<sup>542</sup> The ARC had their manifesto in which they argued for architects abandoning the RIBA and working directly for the people, but for nothing. Whilst this is perhaps a noble aspiration it is not viable long term, as people cannot eat the principles, or pay their rent or their bills with ideals. Anson seemed to have a clear idea of what was wrong, and what we needed to stop doing but not a clear vision of how the new world might manifest. Anson has said that he did not believe in just criticising but in proposing new alternatives, but at this stage at least of the ARCs work this criticism and outright hatred was the first and foremost consideration. *RED HOUSE* embodies that. Whether the 'radical broadsheet' would have evolved over time to something more solutions oriented we will never know.

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<sup>539</sup> Kent, Bruce. 'John Toomey Obituary', *The Guardian*, 08/11/2010, [theguardian.com/2010/nov/08/john-toomey-obituary](http://theguardian.com/2010/nov/08/john-toomey-obituary) [Accessed 18th November 2012]

<sup>540</sup> Anson, *I'll Fight You For It*.

<sup>541</sup> Anson with Crowley, Op cit.

<sup>542</sup> 00:22:45–00:23:01 Anson talk at EASA, 19<sup>th</sup> August 2008

Anson's argument made the case that architecture should be raised up as a vital public good is inherently flawed. Architecture would not be reconstituted by the State, and thus supported by taxation in the same way as the NHS. As it is not considered by the powers that be, or indeed by most of the population to be in any way comparable to the medical professions.

Just as Amery is wrong when he claims '...they lack the skills to actually design and build their own houses.'<sup>543</sup> The community in Byker especially so. The vast majority of those who lived in Byker were shipbuilders working in the vast Tyneside dockyards below the hill on which Byker perches. Given the materials and the time I have no doubt a group of hundreds of ship builders could have turned their hand to house building with little difficulty. But Architecture and the State was in no place for such ideas in 1962.

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<sup>543</sup> Amery, 'Housing, Byker, Newcastle-upon-Tyne', p.361



# CHAPTER SIX

## THE ANARCHY OF ARC POLITICS

In the course of the last 3 chapters, we have progressed from a reading and re-reading of anarchist thought and action as relevant to nineteen seventies Britain, to the writings and sometime rantings of the key actor in the ARC, Brian Anson. Here I want to pause and take stock of the broad overview of the different manifestations of anarchism, but importantly how these impacted upon built environment in nineteen seventies Britain. There are of course myriad other examples of anarchist thought and action throughout the world, from Russia (Bakunin and Kropotkin) to Spain (the CNT-FAI) and Germany (the Red Army Faction and Baader Meinhof) (see Chapter 3).

Today groups such as the anarcho-syndicalist Zabalaza Anarchist Communist Front (ZACF) in South Africa,<sup>544</sup> the Black Rose Anarchist Federation in North America,<sup>545</sup> and Anarchist Federation (AFed) in Britain, are inheritors of the ideas discussed in Chapter 3. AFed are particularly relevant here as they seek to build a society based on mutual aid and voluntary cooperation,<sup>546</sup> the key tenets of anarchism on which I see as being so obviously present in the communities ARC worked with. They are therefore something of the inheritors of the anarchist traditions so prevalent in the nineteen seventies in London where Anson and ARC were at work.

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<sup>544</sup> ZACF. 'What Is the ZACF?' *Zabalaza*, 4 October 2010, [zabalaza.net/organise/what-is-the-zacf](http://zabalaza.net/organise/what-is-the-zacf) [Accessed 14 June 2023]

<sup>545</sup> Black Rose. 'Black Rose Anarchist Federation'. *Black Rose/Rosa Negra Anarchist Federation*, 19 December 2014, [blackrosefed.org](http://blackrosefed.org) [Accessed 14 June 2023]

<sup>546</sup> AFed. 'Anarchist Federation'. *AFed*, no date. [afed.org.uk](http://afed.org.uk) [Accessed 14 June 2023]

At this point in the thesis, having set out how the ARC came into being in Chapter 4, and analysed in depth the various writings of Brian Anson over the 25 year period it is necessary to reflect critically on the various and sometimes contradictory positions that the ARC adopted.

We can conclude here that Anson was the radical brains behind the ARC. He was the ARC before the ARC existed, his rebellion against the GLC, and subsequent sacking, was the beginning of his radical journey. As Anson said: 'The consortium should have fired me there and then because, banal though my own words appear to me now, they contained within them the full spirit of my revolt four years later.'<sup>547</sup> The work he did at Covent Garden was ARC in all but name, and was rooted in a desire, a rather Trotskyist desire, to use this one campaign, moment of revolt to build it into something bigger. As he says in *I'll Fight You For It* the Covent Garden Community Associations (CGCA) aim was to in: '...the longer term, work for law reforms to bring land use and the activities of land-owning interests under fully effective public control.'<sup>548</sup> It is not clear from the context if this was the considered view of the CGCA, or if this campaign for the Trotskyist nationalisation of land and property might be just Anson, and perhaps other radical supporters of the CGCA.<sup>549</sup> These ideas and ideals do not mesh with those of the CGCA, Anson was too radical from the off, too willing to indulge in romantic ideals of the "The Permanent Revolution" of Socialism argued for by Trotsky in 1928.<sup>550</sup> There seems here to be a thread of outright Trotskyist thought in this

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<sup>547</sup> Anson, *I'll Fight You For It*, pp.21+22

<sup>548</sup> Ibid, p.183

<sup>549</sup> 'Trotsky shows a preference for the formula "nationalized property established by the revolution".' see: North, David. 'The Metaphysics of Nationalized Property'. *World Socialist Web Site*, 2028. [wsws.org/en/special/library/heritage/14.html](https://www.wsws.org/en/special/library/heritage/14.html) [Accessed 14 June 2023]

<sup>550</sup> Frey, Kate. 'An Introduction to Trotsky's Theory of Permanent Revolution'. *Left Voice*, 23 September 2020. [leftvoice.org/an-introduction-to-trotsky-s-theory-of-permanent-revolution](https://www.leftvoice.org/an-introduction-to-trotsky-s-theory-of-permanent-revolution) [Accessed 14 June 2023]

early period of Anson's rhetoric there is a clear rejection of the bureaucracy of local and national government in much of Anson's early writings as seen in Chapters 3-5. I cite this as one of the key differences between Marxism and Trotskyism is their view on the role of the State. Whilst Marxism advocates for the establishment of a dictatorship of the proletariat, (supposedly a transitional state that would eventually lead to the establishment of a classless society). Trotskyism, on the other hand, emphasises the need for workers' democracy and the rejection of a bureaucratic state.<sup>551</sup>

Another difference between Marxism and Trotskyism, and between Anson and Marxism, is the approach to revolution. Marxists generally believe in the importance of a revolution that is led by the working class and is based on the principles of class struggle. Trotskyists, on the other hand, emphasise the need for a permanent revolution that is international in scope and is aimed at overthrowing capitalism and establishing a workers' state.<sup>552</sup>

This where I see Anson, and his revolution, in architecture is part of broader revolution, an ongoing "Permanent Revolution" to overthrow the Architectural establishment in the form (in Britain) of the RIBA. These ideas can be seen directly manifested in the founding of the ARC in 1974, after Anson's "failure": 'Covent Garden was also my personal failure. ... Oppressed for so long in the centre of London, they [the working class community] have lost the will to fight for their land and culture.'<sup>553</sup>

However much of personal failure Anson felt Covent Garden was it nevertheless forged Anson's revolutionary zeal, a zeal he took with him to the AA when he was recruited there in 1971. By 1974 (as recounted in Chapter 4) he was delivering lectures that included claims

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<sup>551</sup> Blackledge, Paul. "Leon Trotsky's Contribution to the Marxist Theory of History." *Studies in East European Thought*, vol. 58, no. 1, 2006, pp. 1–31. JSTOR, [jstor.org/stable/20099925](https://www.jstor.org/stable/20099925). [Accessed 14 June 2023]

<sup>552</sup> Ibid.

<sup>553</sup> Anson, *I'll Fight You For It*, p.264

that ‘...land should be as free as air,’<sup>554</sup> and the founding of the ARC followed shortly afterwards.

The launch of the ARC at that infamous press conference and the publication of an ‘...inflammatory manifesto. Calling for the destruction of the RIBA and the establishment of ‘an international movement towards community architecture’,...’<sup>555</sup> again gives us a clear direction for Anson’s politics. Community Architecture is best defined by Ward in “Community Architecture: What a Time It Took for the Penny to Drop!” (see Chapter 2), and this is when we start to see some of the first tangible signs of a generally anarchist, or at least anarcho-syndicalist, modes of organisation in architecture. Even if the argument can be that community architecture is not strictly anarchist in execution, as it acknowledges the role of government and other institutions in shaping the built environment and seeks to work within existing structures to create positive change.<sup>556</sup> It also recognizes the importance of collaboration and consensus-building, which are not necessarily central tenets of some forms of anarchism. I think that the community architecture movement was, certainly at the time Anson was working and Ward was writing, perhaps a close to anarchist architecture that Architecture had got. But Anson was still a controlling hand, a Marxist if benevolent Big Brother watching over the students of the Free Percy Street Atelier as they continued in Anson’s words to ‘...still work with communities.’<sup>557</sup>

Thus, there are significant overlaps and synergies between Anson, Marxism, Trotskyism and Anarchism, I do not think we can describe Anson or the ARC as either solidly Marxist, Stalinist, Leninist, Socialist or Anarchist. If anything, Anson personally is closer to Trotskyist

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<sup>554</sup> Wuensche, Op cit., p.1

<sup>555</sup> Bottoms, Op cit. pp.14-19.

<sup>556</sup> Hanson, Julienne. and Hillier, Bill. *The Architecture of Community: Some New Proposals on the Social Consequences of Architectural and Planning Decisions*. *Architecture & Behaviour*, vol. 3, n. 3, p. 251 -273 (1987)

<sup>557</sup> Crowley with Anson, Op cit., 00:23:59–00:24:13.

ideas and ideals than to anarchism, and whilst there are differences between these two ideologies there are also a few key similarities between. One is their emphasis on the importance of a working-class revolution. Both ideologies view the working classes as the agent of social change and seek to empower workers to take control of their own lives and society as a whole. Another is their rejection of bureaucratic and authoritarian forms of socialism, as both emphasise the importance of grassroots democracy and workers' self-management, and oppose the idea of a centralized state that is controlled by a small elite (Marxism, Leninism, Stalinism) of course critical of the role of capitalism in perpetuating social inequality and exploitation and seek to establish a society that is based on social and economic equality, where the means of production are owned and controlled by the working class.<sup>558</sup>

Anson wrote in a letter to an unnamed member of the ARC in 1977 the following, this is one of the most direct and personal statements on his politics that Anson made, and warrants replicating here in full:

"My heart tells me not to worry because I don't want anything built; the struggle is eternal, and it is the struggle which is important. Yet I know I'm an extremist in this and the reality is that the ARC will eventually have to face this problem. All I can say is that Pete [Moloney] was close to the truth when he said we must be 'Situationalists' [sic]. We must approach all problems via the struggle.

AND THE DEFINITION OF THAT STRUGGLE IS WITHIN OURSELVES. IT IS OUR STRUGGLE AND IN THE PARTICULAR WORLD OF ARCHITECTURE AND PLANNING IT IS ARC'S STRUGGLE. THE FIRST BASIS OF THAT

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<sup>558</sup> Price, Wayne. 'An Anarchist Response to a Trotskyist Attack'. *The Anarchist Library*, 2011. [theanarchistlibrary.org/library/wayne-price-an-anarchist-response-to-a-trotskyist-attack](http://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/wayne-price-an-anarchist-response-to-a-trotskyist-attack). [Accessed 14 June 2023]

STRUGGLE IS TO KEEP THE BROTHERHOOD OF THE ARC."<sup>559</sup> [*original emphasis*]

As one might have suspected by now, Anson (at least) was not interested in architecture or even planning, he was interested in the fight. Once the old order was destroyed (RIBA, "representative" democracy, the profession, etc.) then the new could emerge in architecture as in other areas, but what this was seemingly did not concern him. The struggle was the prize, but only for Anson.

Whilst Anson was absolutely the driving force and mind behind the ARC and their work, at least between 1971 and 1978, but the two other significant contributors, Peter Moloney and George Mills, both of whom I was fortunate enough to with speak in the research for this thesis, had differing if related positions which I will address here in short.

Peter Moloney, having been born in the Republic of Ireland his family moved across the Anglo-Irish border to Derry when Moloney was an infant, and then to London in 1959.<sup>560</sup> Moloney lived and studied in Irish Republican circles in Derry and later in London, and took part in the Civil Rights Movement in Ireland from 1967 onwards. Defining Moloney's political ideology is not a straightforward task, in his youth he was certainly a revolutionary socialist and in later life (when working for the London Borough of Hackney) he was certainly a democratic socialist, he was always a lifelong Irish Republican. Whilst some factions of Irish Republicanism incorporated Marxist ideas into their political ideology, such as the Official IRA and Sinn Féin, which have both advocated for socialist policies and have had links to

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<sup>559</sup> Letter to unnamed member of the ARC (poss. Mills) c. Summer 1977. Note: This is after the end of the ARCs involvement at Bridgtown.

<sup>560</sup> CAIN. "Collector: The Northern Ireland Political Ephemera Collection of Peter Moloney", [cain.ulster.ac.uk](http://cain.ulster.ac.uk), *The Conflict Archive on the Internet [CAIN] Archive, Ulster University*, 02/08/2021, [cain.ulster.ac.uk/moloney/collector.htm](http://cain.ulster.ac.uk/moloney/collector.htm) [Accessed 14<sup>th</sup> October 2021].

Marxist groups in the past.<sup>561</sup> However, the Marxist-Leninist Irish Republican Socialist Party (IRSP) and their paramilitary wing Irish National Liberation Army (INLA)<sup>562</sup> (as we will see in Chapter 11) were active in the Divis Flats during Moloney and Anson's work there, was a Marxist political party closely associated with the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA), a paramilitary organization that was formed as the armed wing of the IRSP. Moloney had a significant network of associates in the Divis Flats in this period, and in fact still today. It is therefore logical to conclude that Moloney's politics whilst certainly being a socialist had some sympathies towards a more Marxist tendency.

But Moloney went on to be a housing officer at Hackney and worked for many years subverting the work of certain architects to the benefit of the local communities he was responsible for housing in this most deprived (in the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century) Boroughs of London.<sup>563</sup> For Moloney both what the ARC did at Bridgtown was what he and Anson '...saw as what architecture should be, and architects should be doing it for free. There were little successes, but the ultimate was to build something.'<sup>564</sup> But if this was the ultimate aim little of the work of the ARC attempts this, as we will see next most of the ARCs efforts were focussed on preventing architecture: Divis was about pulling architecture down, Bridgtown and Ealing were both about preventing demolition and stopping new architecture being built, as was Covent Garden.

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<sup>561</sup> McGuinness, Max. 'How Sinn Féin Built One of the Most Effective Political Machines in Europe'. *The New European*, 31 May 2021, [theneweuropean.co.uk/brexit-news-europe-news-the-political-history-of-the-ira-7919560](https://theneweuropean.co.uk/brexit-news-europe-news-the-political-history-of-the-ira-7919560) [Accessed 14 June 2023]

<sup>562</sup> Irish Republican Socialist Party. 'IRSP – Formed in 1974 by Republicans', *IRSP*, no date. [irsp.ie/](https://irsp.ie/). [Accessed 14 June 2023]

<sup>563</sup> Peter Moloney, in conversation with the author, Greenwich, London, 27<sup>th</sup> June 2013.

<sup>564</sup> *Ibid.*

George Mills was arguably the least radical or revolutionary of the three, and the one most determined to be an architect. He did successfully graduate from the AA (unlike Moloney) forming Mills Beaumont Leavey (later MBLC, then MBLA) in Manchester going on to work on several important rehousing and regeneration projects in Manchester, most significantly the Hulme Masterplan and Homes For Change. Mills was a self-described 'bit of Lefty' but never really saw himself as a revolutionary.<sup>565</sup>

Mills' most forthright political statements are arguably in his article for ARC "Come on lads—get your balls back!" written in the mid-nineteen seventies this article is focussed on the unfair conditions of the working class "unqualified" (i.e. not ARB registered Architects) staff in architectural firms which Mills cites as making up over 50% of the staff at the time.<sup>566</sup> As cited earlier in Chapter 2, Mills says the following, recognising the class struggle element of working in architecture at the time, and arguably still today in Britain in the first quarter of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

'The ARC is only too well aware that the architectural establishment has a vested interest in maintaining this class structure in architectural practice and education. In all honesty, in architectures present demise, the details and intricacies that are the sphere of the assistants and technicians, are the ONLY qualitative [sic] parts, the saving graces, of most buildings.'<sup>567</sup>

As we will see in Chapter 10, Mills clearest attempt to manifest the ideas of the ARC was at Colne Valley and there, Mills again found himself in a very Liberal environment, working in an area that lacked the working class solidarity the ARC had found in Bridgtown and Covent

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<sup>565</sup> George Mills, in conversation with the author, Withington, Manchester, 16<sup>th</sup> July 2014.

<sup>566</sup> Mills and The ARC, "Come on lads—get your balls back!"

<sup>567</sup> *ibid*



Garden (at least to a degree). Mills desire to build inevitably led to compromises, he wanted to build, and Anson did not, not truly. As Mills recounted:

'That was always my frustration with him [Anson] if he'd have just stepped back once or twice and said: "Right. This is an avenue we can now pursue, which is not quite as radical as the one I'd like to pursue, but it could be more fruitful; could be more *product* out of this in terms of..." whatever. But he never did.'<sup>568</sup>

It was this willingness to compromise, to engage in the struggle in a different more effecting and effective way (as Moloney had) that led to later conflict with Anson. As was cited in Chapter 5 this conflict was frustration for Mills as Anson could not see the influence he had had on Mills as a student that had led to the work MBLC did in the nineteen nineties:

'Brian saw no value in it. I was a big fat architect now and all that kind of stuff. ... Brian never understood that the reason I did that kind of thing was because of him. But he couldn't understand why... he never thought things like *Homes for Change*, master-planning, was a good thing to do.'<sup>569</sup>

We begin to see here, and as I will set out in more explicit detail in the following case study chapters, the three differing though interlinked political positions of these 3 main protagonists of the ARC. The Libertarian Socialist, the Irish Revolutionary, and the lefty architect. Perhaps all vital and important distinctions necessary for ARC to be who they were and to enable what they enabled. No, the ARC never did "build something", and perhaps that was never a thing they intended, (it certainly was not something Anson intended) but they enabled others, enabled them to save the buildings and places they loved, to stop insensitive and inhuman development, or to destroy the same where it had

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<sup>568</sup> George Mills, in conversation with the author, Withington, Manchester, 16<sup>th</sup> July 2014.

<sup>569</sup> Ibid.

already been built. As we will see in the following chapters in Bridgtown, in Ealing, and at Divis Flats.

All of the personal and political positions of the members of the AR, and the changing direction and emphasis of the ARCs project will be evident in the following case study chapters, and will be more directly synthesis in Chapter 12 which follows the 4 case studies.

The last word here goes to Mills who summed up the politics and positions of these 3 friends by the time of the Divis Flat project in the early-nineteen eighties:

'Brian had become a completely political animal whereas I, first and foremost, was an architect who'd got leftish leanings. That was the fundamental difference between us, I'd always wanted to practice architecture. Pete, working in Hackney, he was kind of political animal in housing, ... and that suited Pete's nature very well.'<sup>570</sup>

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<sup>570</sup> George Mills, in conversation with the author, Withington, Manchester, 16<sup>th</sup> July 2014.

# CHAPTER SEVEN

## THE ARC ACT

Whilst the ARCs subversiveness was noted by Anne Karpf in 1977<sup>571</sup> what is less well known is the work the members of the ARC did with various community groups. Some of the ARC's work was documented at the time in news articles and comment pieces in the architectural and mainstream press. The projects with which they became involved were invariably via invitation of the local groups concerned. Their work at Ealing, 1974-6, Bridgtown, Staffordshire, 1977-80; Colne Valley, Yorkshire, 1977-79; and the Divis Street flats, Belfast, 1980-86, are all worthy of further attention as in such projects the relationship between the architect or skilled architectural worker and the residents and/or occupants was part of the transgressive work of the ARC and, as such, provides me with a rich seam of study.

These examples of the ARC 'taking action' explored in Chapters 6–11 serve as four quite different examples, the common factor between all four is the involvement of the ARC, but each project is very different and dominated by a different ARC personality.

Ealing was the ARCs first project post the 1974 AA Press Conference, drawn to their attention by Louis Hellman of the AJ, a resident of Ealing. This project served as a test bed for many of the ARCs first tactics and initial ideas about the ways in which they could engage with local communities to bring about the architectural revolution.

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<sup>571</sup> Karpf, Op cit., p.730

Bridgtown is an example of local community fighting against local authority plans to demolish their village and turn the land over for industrial uses. The ARC became involved after another member, Rob Thompson<sup>572</sup>, read a Sunday newspaper article about this struggle in May 1977. This project, whilst initiated by Thompson, was largely dominated by Anson and is subject to a limited degree of examination by Karpf in the *Architects' Journal* in October 1977.<sup>573</sup> Here the ARC were dealing with a group of largely quite politically conservative residents who had already begun a campaign to protect their community.

The Colne Valley project, West Yorkshire; is a different kind of animal altogether. This project was initiated and kept alive for two years by George Mills, coming out of Mills '...leaving the AA and wondering what I was going to do.'<sup>574</sup> Here Mills attempted to establish a community campaign to repurpose the largely abandoned industrial architecture of the Colne Valley in the form a massive wool and worsted mills of northern England's great textile industry which had faded to next to nothing by the mid-nineteen seventies. Based in Slaithwaite, a principal town in the valley, it provides an example of a project run almost singlehandedly by Mills and the only concerted attempt by an ARC project to 'building something' which as Peter Moloney said regarding Bridgtown '...the ultimate was to build something'<sup>575</sup>.

Finally, the ARCs work at the Divis Street flats, Belfast; is a significantly different project, coming later in the ARCs history, at the point where key members, including George Mills and Peter Moloney, had moved on to careers of their own. In Belfast an Irish Catholic

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<sup>572</sup> Rob Thompson appears to be a relatively heavily involved member of the ARC in the late 1970s. Peter Moloney referred in interview 'Rob Thompson latterly came into ARC'. Thompson wrote the undated paper to which Anson replies in "Brian's Reply: A response to Rob's untitled and undated paper", and the author of the Bridgtown Primer 1 written for Diploma Unit 8 at the AA in 1978.

<sup>573</sup> Karpf, Op cit.

<sup>574</sup> George Mills, in conversation with the author, Withington, Manchester, 16<sup>th</sup> July 2014

<sup>575</sup> Peter Moloney, in conversation with the author, Bloomsbury, London, 15<sup>th</sup> May 2013.

Republican community had been corralled into poorly constructed and maintained social housing scheme for political ends by the Protestant Unionist Government at Stormont, in the form of the Northern Ireland Housing Trust. The Stormont Government was suspended in 1972 following the increase in Irish Republican attacks on Britain and all responsibilities thereafter were transferred to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. The people of Divis were not campaigning to protect their built environment but to have it destroyed. Only a decade after construction the people of Divis wanted their concrete slab and tower block estate to be demolished and for them to be housed in better quality and more traditional homes. Here the ARC came to be involved via Brian Anson's work with Dr Mike Beazley and the Mobile Planning Aid Unit of the Town and Country Planning Association. Led by Anson and Moloney the ARC was working with a community that was already staunchly opposed to the "powers that be", the Unionist and British occupying authority, with the estate being notorious amongst the security forces of the British state as a stronghold of Republican activity, both in the form of P-IRA and the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA).<sup>576</sup>

These projects, these communities, in Ealing, Bridgtown, Colne Valley, and Divis are this 'very good work', which Anson claimed the ARC did in his interview with Crowley in 2008, are the subject of this and subsequent chapters.<sup>577</sup>

These four are not the only projects carried out by the ARC however, both Peter Moloney and George Mills made reference in interview to a project in South Wales, and Richard Rodgers mentions '...in the Afan valley in south Wales, looking at such issues as healthcare and community hospitals, leisure provision, employment and housing.'<sup>578</sup> in Anson's obituary

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<sup>576</sup> Bohnacker, Siobhán. 'Life in Divis Flats', *The New Yorker*, 9 March 2015. [newyorker.com/culture/photo-booth/life-in-divis-flats](http://newyorker.com/culture/photo-booth/life-in-divis-flats) [Accessed 20<sup>th</sup> January 2022]

<sup>577</sup> Anson with Crowley, Op cit. 00:14:47–00:15:02.

<sup>578</sup> Rogers 'Brian Anson obituary'.

but there appears to be no documentary evidence of this project. Peter Moloney recalled that he was involved in this project, placing it in Maesteg or Bridgend in the neighbouring Llynfi Valley, saying:

'I ended up spending a year down in... and George spent some time down there too, in South Wales. We renovated an old house to make it into a community resource and then did community projects that try and create... microhospitals, cottage hospitals, employment opportunities, that sort of thing.'<sup>579</sup>

Part of my decision making process for the four selected case studies is the prominence that Anson himself gave to two projects in particular when speaking in 2008. In the summer of that year Brian Anson attended the 14<sup>th</sup> Euro Architectural Students Assembly (EASA) at Letterfrack, Co. Donegal, Ireland; to speak to the students there assembled. Anson was invited by a group of students who were attending the Assembly which took place between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> August 2008, and we can determine from the file names associated with the recordings that Anson's talk to the Assembly took place on 19<sup>th</sup> August 2008. During this visit Anson gave an hour long, sometimes rambling, lecture (or 'told a story' as he described it) about his work at Divis and Bridgtown. In this talk he made very little reference to the ARC (not mentioning any other member, for example key actors, such as Mills or Moloney) but very much emphasises his own involvement. From the talk, for which we have no contextualising information beyond a small amount of text published on the website of radio4all.com<sup>580</sup>, Anson is focussed on tactics, and this appears to be the topic of talk, with him using largely Divis, and to lesser degree Bridgtown, to illustrate these points.

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<sup>579</sup> Peter Moloney, in conversation with the author, Greenwich, London, 27<sup>th</sup> June 2013

<sup>580</sup> radio4all.net, (16/09/2009) 'Program Information: Stories of architecture and social struggle with Brian Anson', *radio4all.net*, [radio4all.net/index.php/program/37463](http://radio4all.net/index.php/program/37463) [Accessed 21<sup>st</sup> October 2021]

I will therefore begin with the first major campaign after Covent Garden, that of Ealing Town Centre in 1974, the same year as the ARC was founded. Moving chronologically through the campaigns and projects to Bridgtown in the late-nineteen seventies, on to Colne Valley as a key example of the ARC, or at least George Mills, trying to 'build something', which was happening at the same time as Bridgtown. Finally, coming to the largest of the four Divis, a project with significant ramifications for the north of Ireland, British politics, and indeed Brian Anson.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### EALING TOWN CENTRE, LONDON

#### BOROUGH OF EALING, 1974-6

Almost immediately after the founding of the ARC at the AA in 1974 they came to the attention of well known *Architects' Journal* cartoonist and satirist of the profession, Louis Hellman. This was serendipitous as it was just at a point where Hellman and his home suburb of Ealing needed a radical approach to save its town centre from crass development by corporate interests. Hellman was to become tangentially related to ARC throughout its existence being installed as Editor of the ill-fated RED HOUSE (see Chapter 4) and producing many cartoons for ARCs propaganda efforts. He wrote extensively about the Ealing campaign in an *Architects Journal* article "Ealing Powers – Residents and Revolutionaries Respond" in April 1985<sup>581</sup>.

The campaign, which was to protect Ealing Town Centre from insensitive redevelopment planned by the London Borough of Ealing in collaboration with property developer and corporate leviathan of the time Grosvenor EMI. Hellman was the key mover. Hellman and his family had lived in Ealing since 1967<sup>582</sup>, and whilst Ealing is an interesting project, it lacks many of the hallmarks of ARC politics or ways of working. This is perhaps due to Hellman's somewhat tangential relationship with the ARC, Ealing thus serves merely as an "also ran" in the canon of the ARC but it is worth outlining the project as described by Hellman in 1985.

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<sup>581</sup> Hellman, Louis. (1985) 'EALING POWERS: RESIDENTS AND REVOLUTIONARIES RESPOND', *Architects' Journal* (Archive: 1929-2005), 10/04/1985, 181(15), pp. 35-50, 53.

<sup>582</sup> Ibid. p.36



The ARC receives a paltry 7 or so column inches in a 17 page article, Hellman opens by saying:

'ARC's primary aims coincided for the moment with the alliance's [Ealing's 'Alliance of Residents Associations'], to defeat the council-developer plan, but its methods, motives and objectives were fundamentally different. ARC, which had grown out of '70s community action, was committed not just to combating authoritarian planning but to assisting community resistance and solidarity as part of a wider political battle in which planning was a tool. Merely changing the architectural *style* of the scheme was of no interest to ARC.'<sup>583</sup>

From this we can conclude that Ealing's 'Alliance of Residents Associations' was most concerned with the aesthetic of the scheme, and the ARC being the ARC was concerned with fomenting revolution in Ealing just as it was elsewhere. Hellman does not give us a date for the ARCs involvement in Ealing, but it was certainly short lived. The Ealing campaign began in 1974 with proposal by Grosvenor EMI of a megastructure redevelopment of Ealing (see figure 29) by Ealing Borough Council.

By 1976 a public enquiry was underway, and it would seem from Hellman's retelling that the ARCs involvement fell between these two dates. Concluding his mention of the ARCs involvement somewhat bitterly saying:

'The inevitable split between ARC and the alliance came, and ARC left. Needless to say it had received no mention or public recognition for the work and effort it put in, or for its influence on subsequent events.'<sup>584</sup>

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<sup>583</sup> Hellman, Op cit., p.38

<sup>584</sup> Ibid, p.39



Image redacted for  
copyright reasons.

Figure 42. Grosvenor-EMI proposal for the redevelopment of Ealing Town Centre, London, 1974.

There is rather more written about the Ealing project from the ARC perspective in the first and only edition of the ARC journal *RED HOUSE* (see figure 30). Given Anson stated that Hellman was the editor of *RED HOUSE* we may also assume that Hellman wrote these reports as well. In *RED HOUSE* the ARC opens the article with an introductory note writing:

'We in ARC have no desire to fool either ourselves or our readers with false claims of success. We are more interested in our failures at community level, for only by understanding these can we move closer to that revolutionary situation in which a true community architecture can arise'<sup>585</sup>

The opening statement gives us some sense of the ultimately fractious relationship that developed between the ARC and the Ealing Alliance of Residents Associations that Hellman alludes to in his *Architects' Journal* article. Their failures at the community level led to the ARC leaving the Ealing campaign relatively early on, as Hellman set out. Indeed later on this same page they say 'We agreed to spend only a specific amount of time, and to prepare

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<sup>585</sup> 'Community Architecture'. *RED HOUSE*, issue 1, p.3, 1976. Author's personal collection

alternatives for the vacant sites as 'ammunition' only (ultimately the plans must arise from the people)...<sup>586</sup> The inference appears to be that the ARC only ever intended to spend a short amount of time here, in direct contradiction to Hellman's claim as noted above.

The article continues recounting what was said by the ARC (probably in the person of Anson) at a public meeting with the people of Ealing, which strikes an appropriately revolutionary and hostile tone towards Architecture:

'If our colleagues in the architecture and planning professions had any morality, none of us need be in this room tonight. We feel a specific responsibility because these plans were done in our name, in the name of our art. That makes us angry and that is why we are architectural revolutionaries.'<sup>587</sup>



Figure 43. The Ealing campaign as documented on pp.4+5 of RED HOUSE, October 1976.

586 'Community Architecture'. p.3, 1976.

587 *ibid.*

The ARC are making clear that the architectural professions (including planners) are morally reprehensible. They blame them entirely for the situation in Ealing, and claim a sense of personal offence. They refer again to the 'art' of architecture here as demonstrated in the manifesto and myriad other ARC writings the skilled design processes involved in architecture are not what the ARC wishes to destroy, but Architecture, the establishment, and the incestuous relationship between big business, corporate interests, property developers, and Architecture as depicted in their posters.

Similarly, they take aim at the processes employed by the London Borough of Ealing for the clearance of the centre of Ealing. Large areas of a former working class residential area of people living in slum-like conditions had been vacated and cleared. They write:

'You might wonder how things have come to such a pass when community action became such a common-place event during the early seventies. We can only believe that this indigenous community was slaughtered overnight by compulsory purchase, evictions and promises of a better life in council tower blocks, whatever it was little fight appears to have taken place.'<sup>588</sup>

It is not clear to what precedents for 'community-action' the ARC are referring to here, but we might imagine the community action groups of places like Blackfriars, Southwark and Waterloo in the early-nineteen seventies being alluded to with this reference.<sup>589</sup> These groups were indeed a precedent that Ealing residents might have followed, however if the 'promises of a better life in council tower blocks' are accurate, this would be entirely in line with the themes and expectations of the era.

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<sup>588</sup> 'Community Architecture'. p.3, 1976.

<sup>589</sup> SE1 Stories (2021) 'View the Exhibition Online'. *SE1 Stories*. [se1stories.uk/blackfriars-se1/online-exhibition](http://se1stories.uk/blackfriars-se1/online-exhibition) [Accessed 4<sup>th</sup> February 2022]





Figure 44. Ealing Town Centre 1930s.



Figure 45. Ealing Town Centre, 2022.

By the early-nineteen seventies people had been being rehomed from inner city slums to cottage estates or council tower blocks for 50 years. One might conclude therefore that perhaps the previous residents of Ealing, pre-1974 had little motivation to stay in such an area (see figures 39+40). This sense of almost offence on the part of the ARC author (again one presumes Anson) that the local people did not fight to save the slums they had been living in for generations does imply a rather romantic view of the a la Young and Willmott with their overly rose-tinted ‘...sociable squash of people and houses’<sup>590</sup>

The Grosvenor EMI plans were undoubtedly a very locally unpopular move to radically urbanise a town centre in what was still in 1974 a thoroughly suburban town. Ealing, known as the ‘Queen of the Suburbs’ since 1902<sup>591</sup>, had only become part of Greater London in 1965. This almost total opposition to the local Council and Grosvenor EMI’s plans did provide the ARC with some fertile ground for their revolutionary demands. But the lack of a settled community in the centre of the town, and the more middle class nature of the surrounding residential areas, meant that the ARC felt there was a failure in their work at Ealing. Saying at the start of the conclusion to the article.

‘Our failures are connected with the mixed working-class and squatter community in the core area. We did our best to rally them at the first major meeting and they formed the majority on the Town Centre Action Group. But then they drifted away.’<sup>592</sup>

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<sup>590</sup> Young, Michael. & Willmott, Peter. *Family and Kinship in East London* (Penguin Books: London, 2007; orig. edn, 1957), p.122.

<sup>591</sup> Huq, Rupa. ‘Postcards from the Edge? Setting the Suburban Scene’. *The Political Quarterly*, 2019, 90: 6-14.

<sup>592</sup> ‘Community Architecture’. p.5, 1976.

However, ultimately Ealing was a success for the Ealing Alliance of Residents Associations resulting development (see figures 32-34) is significantly different from the Grosvenor EMI scheme on a largely aesthetic level, the domain which the ARC had little interest in. Anson however concludes that Ealing was a failure, at least for the ARC and their politics, saying at the end of the conclusion to the *RED HOUSE* article:

'We believe that the British people are really more oppressed (in the most invidious manner) than almost anyone. That is why planning bureaucracies and the architectural profession can beat them in the long run. Does this depress us? Certainly. Will we give up? Never. We will only fight harder to revolutionise the communities so that they fight for their own decent environment.'<sup>593</sup>

Both these statements bear comparison to Anson's views on his experience at Covent Garden, a campaign that had concluded immediately before the campaign at Ealing began. As I address in Chapter 4 Anson saw Covent Garden as failure as well, and for similar reasons. The campaign in both places to save the urban fabric was partly successful (more so at Covent Garden than Ealing), but the campaign to save the immediate working class community was less so, with both redevelopments and changes of use resulting in large portions of an working class community being resettled elsewhere.

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<sup>593</sup> 'Community Architecture'. p.5, 1976.





Figure 46. Ealing Broadway Shopping Centre, The Broadway, August 2021.



Figure 47. Ealing Broadway Shopping Centre, New Broadway, August 2021.



Figure 48. Ealing Broadway Shopping Centre, High Street, August 2021.



## CHAPTER NINE

### BRIDGTOWN, CANNOCK, STAFFORDSHIRE, 1976-80

Bridgtown is a former mining village near Cannock, Staffordshire; it first appeared as a significant settlement between 1850 and 1870 following the opening of the now disused Cannock Extension Canal (1863-1963).<sup>594</sup> Lying west of the former opencast mine of Mid Cannock Colliery (now a landfill site) and between the north-south railway line from Rugeley to Birmingham, and east-west A5 (the route of the ancient Roman Road of Watling Street), Bridgtown seemed, to Cannock Chase Council at least, to be ideally placed to be redeveloped as an industrial and commercial area. This was in keeping with accepted planning norms of the time, those of zoning urban areas and separating residential from commercial and industrial activities. The minor fact, as the Council saw it, that the residents of Bridgtown did not want to move and did not want their village demolished to make way for more industry, was seemingly the only obstacle to these plans.

It is worth pausing to note that whilst Cannock Chase was a Labour controlled council between 1973 and 1982, it had shifted from Labour holding 36 of the 37 seats on the Council (with the Tories holding 1) in the 1973 local elections, to Labour holding only 29, and the Conservatives having 18 in the 1976 elections, which were significantly affected by

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<sup>594</sup> [bridgtownhistory.co.uk](http://bridgtownhistory.co.uk), *A Brief History of Bridgtown*, 2010. [bridgtownhistory.co.uk](http://bridgtownhistory.co.uk) [Accessed 10<sup>th</sup> September 2018]

boundary changes.<sup>595</sup> It is difficult to say if the balance of seats better reflected the extant voting pattern and political allegiances of the people of Cannock Chase, or if sentiment in the area was shifting in a more small 'c' as well as large 'C', conservative direction. Bearing in mind the two General Elections of 1974 had taken place between these two local votes, with Harold Wilson's minority Labour Government taking power in the hung parliament of February, resulting in a second election in October of that same year, and Wilson winning a narrow 3 seat overall majority.<sup>596</sup> This again may have affected the tone of local politics, perhaps resulting in a local backlash against the narrow losses by former Prime Minister Edward Heath's Conservatives nationally.

Whatever the political mood of the country, or of just Cannock Chase, at the time that these events occurred at this point in the mid-nineteen seventies feeds into the wider argument made in this thesis that this period of social and economic uncertainties gave voice or just opportunity to more radical ideas and modes of campaigning, as represented by the ARC.

### The ARC arrives

Anson considered the ARC's involvement with residents of Bridgtown, in their successful campaign to defy Cannock Chase Council, to be more significant than its 'RIBA-baiting' activities. As quoted by Karpf, Anson is reported to have said: "In Bridgetown [*sic*], we've got closer to the people and it's logical that we spend more time at the grass roots".<sup>597</sup>

Anson recounted the following memory of the situation in Bridgtown when the ARC arrived

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<sup>595</sup> Rallings, Colin, and Thrasher, Michael. (n.d.) Cannock Chase District Council Election Results 1973-2012, *The Elections Centre Plymouth University*, [electionscentre.co.uk/wpcontent/uploads/2015/06/Cannock-Chase-1973-2012.pdf](http://electionscentre.co.uk/wpcontent/uploads/2015/06/Cannock-Chase-1973-2012.pdf) [Accessed 10<sup>th</sup> September 2018]

<sup>596</sup> Mark Dunton, Hung Parliament - February 1974, *Blog: History of Government*, 28/02/2014. [history.blog.gov.uk/2014/02/28/hung-parliament-february-1974](http://history.blog.gov.uk/2014/02/28/hung-parliament-february-1974) [Accessed 10<sup>th</sup> September 2018]

<sup>597</sup> Karpf, Op cit., p.731

in his talk at EASA 2008:

'Bridgtown in England ... it was a former mining village which turned into an industrial village. Again, a typical working class, village and community... it's located on a main road in Britain, it's not a motorway, autoroute, but it's one of Britain's main roads, the A3 [*sic*]<sup>598</sup> from the South to the North of England.'<sup>599</sup>

As the nineteen seventies Ordnance Survey map of the area (see figure 44) shows the opencast Mid Cannock Colliery works (top right) were still operational at this point, and Bridgtown was surrounded by industry of various kinds. These are euphemistically named by the Ordnance Survey as "Works" and "Factory" as well as the more specific, Iron Foundry, Brickworks, Valve Factory, and Sewage Works. There is, therefore, an evident logic to the Labour controlled Cannock Chase Council's proposals, were it not for the human element.

It is ironic that the modern Ordnance Survey map (see figure 45) shows that Bridgtown is now notably a largely residential area with much of its industry having declined and the sites cleared for new housing developments, leisure, and retail parks.

In the EASA lecture Anson went on to describe how Cannock Chase Council wanted to '...wipe this whole thing off the map, either to make it into an industrial estate'<sup>600</sup> and bizarrely he went on to claim that Bridgtown was '...possibly to be site for Euro Disney, which ended up ... outside Paris.'<sup>601</sup>

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<sup>598</sup> Bridgtown in fact lies on the A5, [along the line of the Roman Watling Street] from Hyde Park Corner, London; to Caergybi, Ynys Môn.

<sup>599</sup> 00:26:36–00:27:06, Anson, EASA 19<sup>th</sup> August 2008.

<sup>600</sup> 00:27:47, Anson, EASA 19<sup>th</sup> August 2008.

<sup>601</sup> 00:28:10, *ibid.* I have been entirely unable to establish one way or another if Cannock was ever considered as location for Disneyland Europe.



Figure 139. 1970s map of Bridgtown, Cannock, Staffordshire.

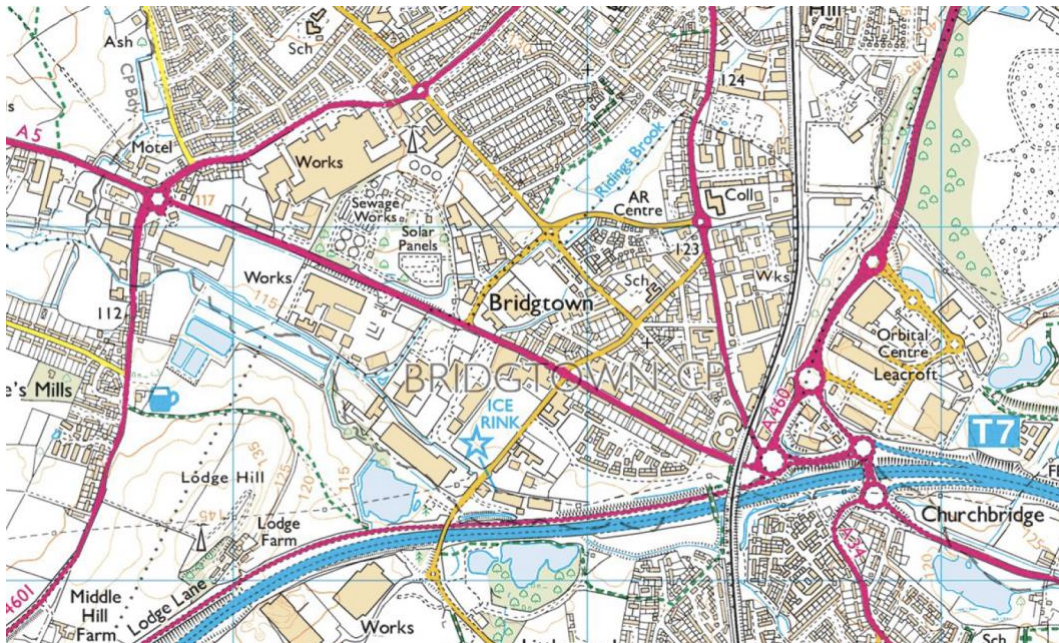


Figure 140. 2010s map of Bridgtown, Cannock, Staffordshire, the most obvious changes being the construction of the M5 Toll road and the building over of abandoned mine workings and industrial areas with retail and housing.

This campaign was not without its difficulties in terms of the ARC's relationship with BRAG, as a letter from Brian Anson to BRAG dated December 1977 reveals. The relationship began

well in May 1977 as the ARC was welcomed by BRAG. Anson recounted in 2008, how the people of Bridgtown ‘...called in our organisation, called the ARC, The Architects Revolutionary Council. So, we went off to the village and first of all we told them that “You’ve made a mistake. You don’t, you don’t theorise about your own extinction”.’<sup>602</sup> Anson does not, either in the 2008 lecture or other sources I have been able to obtain, explain how the ARC came to be involved: the rather vague they ‘called in our organisation’ is all we have. In any case it seems, as we will see later that this is not what happened, Rob Thompson became aware of the plight of Bridgtown after reading about it in the newspapers, and thus involved himself, and the ARC, in the story of Bridgtown. We need not wonder how a small village community in Staffordshire, in 1977, came to be aware of Anson and his band of architectural revolutionaries. This appears to be another example of a somewhat rose-tinted version of events as Anson remembered them with 40 years of hindsight.



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<sup>602</sup> 00:30:13–00:30:32, Anson, EASA 19<sup>th</sup> August 2008.



Figure 51. A cartoon produced by the ARC and used in Bridgtown depicting North Street being kicked down by a 1970s “yob” with Planners Rule OK on their t-shirt.



Figure 52. 2022 photograph of North Street, Bridgtown, Cannock, Staffordshire.



Figure 53. A cartoon produced by the ARC and used in Bridgtown depicting Union Street with the copy of the famous YOU ARE NOW ENTERING FREE DERRY gable end mural (see figure 39 below) rewritten as YOU ARE NOW ENTERING FREE BRIDGTOWN.



Figure 54. 2022 photograph of Union Street, Bridgtown, Cannock, Staffordshire

Image redacted for  
copyright reasons.

Figure 55. YOU ARE NOW ENTERING FREE DERRY mural, 2007.

In his interview with Duncan Crowley, after the talk given to the students, Anson went on to explain how when the ARC would ‘...start we in all our projects. We started newspapers [the one at Bridgtown] was called “The Wild Dog” [sic]<sup>603</sup>, all done by French students of

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<sup>603</sup> The paper was in fact called “The Wild Duck” as per the issues in my collection, see fig. 20

mine, and we've got the kids to deliver them.'<sup>604</sup> The students Anson refers to are the students from his Intermediate Unit 1 at the Architectural Association in 1977/78 (see Chapter 4).

From the Bridgtown Primer we know that the AA project began in Autumn Term 1977/78 and that Thompson had first become involved in May 1977. We have no information on what happened in those first 8-9 months. But we do know that by December 1977 relations had deteriorated to such a degree that Anson was moved to write a 3 page long, part manifesto, part treatise, letter to BRAG. Regarding a Bridgtown public meeting at which the ARC spoke, Anson wrote:

'We showed slides of our work in other areas of the country. We offered you a manifesto as a platform for your renewed struggle and this was unanimously accepted. We wrote you a song. Most important we tackled the problem of the stalemate into which you'd got yourselves, by suggesting that you break off all planning relationships with the Council, on the basis that no community can negotiate it's [*sic*] own extermination. This was fully accepted and was done;...'<sup>605</sup>

Anson here expresses his frustration with the apparent success of the divide and rule tactics of the powers that be. BRAG was better motivated to defend itself than the group Anson had worked with at Covent Garden. However, the motivating factor here was once again vested interests. The villagers of Bridgtown were seeking to defend their way of life as well as their village and were thus motivated to engage in a process of resistance that they may not previously have even considered.

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<sup>604</sup> 00:31:43–00:31:55, Anson, EASA 19<sup>th</sup> August 2008.

<sup>605</sup> Brian Anson, Letter regarding the Bridgtown Residents' Action Group from Brian Anson, *BA. Surbiton. Dec: 1977.*



Image redacted for  
copyright reasons.

Figure 56. A copy of Wild Duck

Later in the letter Anson appears to express concern about the deterioration of the relationship between the ARC and the BRAG Provisional Council, and is worthy of reproduction at length:

'Then by mid August something went wrong and we are not quite sure what.

Certainly we felt the committee meetings were getting very bureaucratic and the 'fire' seemed to have gone out of the struggle. [...]

widening daily. A public meeting was held and badly attended. Two things emerged from this meeting as far as we were concerned. First the appalling lack of knowledge that seemed to exist in the community and secondly that the assembled company appeared to renew it's [sic] basic faith in ARC. [...]

Unpleasantness was left in the air, gossip spread, and the rift seemed to be a further thing that arose from that meeting; the basic lack of understanding of who and what ARC was. The Cannock Chase Council had slandered ARC by calling us Trotskyists and the newspaper had refused to print our refutation and our threat to sue the Council on the advice of our lawyer. But worse the community of Bridgtown seemed to be full of gossip about us.

We felt hurt that the Provisional Council had not done it's [sic] utmost to counteract these rumours.\*<sup>606</sup>

Anson's reference to the ARC writing BRAG a 'song' and attempting to engage them in other acts of active resistance received lukewarm support from the residents. The ARC's attempts to reveal to the residents of Bridgtown the inevitable inequality of the planning process, biased then as now towards money and expertise, was unsuccessful. Whilst

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<sup>606</sup> Anson, Letter regarding the Bridgtown Residents' Action Group.

revolutionary songs were sung in Pula during the founding of the ARC<sup>607</sup>, and again at the AA in 1974 with the singing of the Land Song<sup>608</sup>, perhaps such overtly Leftist tactics did not sit well with the people of Bridgtown. We see here, as with other projects where the ARC engaged in the local community, they had initially called on their help but were not particularly interested in or motivated by, the revolutionary agenda of the ARC that came with their assistance. Whilst the ARC did claim, in their first issue of Red House: 'We are not Syndicalists, Marxists, Maoists nor indeed Capitalists but, if we must talk in 'ists'. Then artists, revolutionists, humanists and anti-dogmatists.' their revolutionary tactics were perhaps too subversive for many of those with whom they worked, or for whom they claimed to speak.

Here we once again see the clash between the ARCs radical socialist, Marxist and revolutionary anarchist principles and the vested interests of the people of Bridgtown (more on this in the next section of this chapter). Vested interests of the people of Bridgtown did not align with those of Anson and the ARC, they, like the people of Corn and Yates Streets in Liverpool, set themselves up as a form of syndicate, founded on the basis of vested interests and Mutual Aid. But self- or vested interests are one of the principal motivations for most people and will motivate them to act contrary to expected or accepted norms when necessary. It was necessary for the residents of Bridgtown to achieve their aims, and once those aims were achieved this syndicate would be disbanded, as we will see later this is not exactly what occurred in Bridgtown's case. I will argue that the people of Bridgtown (as at Corn and Yates Street) had a better grasp of key anarcho-syndicalist principles; that the impetus for such modes must come from within the concerned group, rather than the ARC. Anson's claims to not being Marxists (or any other type of -ist) just does not stand up to

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<sup>607</sup> Peter Moloney, in conversation with the author, Bloomsbury, London, 15<sup>th</sup> May 2013.

<sup>608</sup> Wuensche, Op cit.

scrutiny. It seems evident from what we have seen in Ealing and Bridgtown (and will see further in this example) that Anson and the ARC's practice, if not their motivating theory, were absolutely Marxists, and I would argue Trotskyists. They would have much in common today with the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and their appeal to the continual socialist revolution to bring down global capitalism. At Bridgtown, as at Covent Garden and Ealing before, Anson appears to have a similar degree of success to the SWP in convincing ordinary working people of the wisdom or necessity of such a grandiose project.

### Bridgtown's Recollections

Local historian David Williams in his series of stories about the history of Bridgtown the residents' campaign has recorded this resistance of the local community entirely without reference to the ARC. In the amateur volume *Bridgtown Recollections* (2016) Williams reports that '...in 1976 came the bombshell! There had been little further consultation with residents, but the local council apparently had a plan to demolish all the houses in Bridgtown over a 15 year period, run down the Primary School and keep some of the local shops to service the workforce of the new industries.'<sup>609</sup>

Williams goes on to report how the residents used the Queen's Silver Jubilee of February 1977 as an opportunity to throw '...a massive village party...' with floats depicting the demise of Bridgtown. Williams describes the image below: 'Clive was a strong supporter of Bridgtown Residents Action Group in the 1970s and, in this photograph (figure 57), he is seen preparing a BRAG float for the June 1977 Queen's Jubilee parade. The float depicted

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<sup>609</sup> Williams, David, and Devey, John. *Bridgtown Recollections*. (Cannock: Bridgtown and District Local History Society, 2016), p.70.

the sorry state of housing in the Bridgtown at the time.’<sup>610</sup> Williams appears to entirely skip over the period when the ARC was involved in Bridgtown.

The only ARC letters and documents that give us a period for their involvement at Bridgtown are a letter from Anson, which was sent to Moloney dated December 1977 discussed above, and the Bridgtown Primer 1 written for Diploma Unit 8 at the AA by Rob Thompson of ARC dated 5<sup>th</sup> January 1978. The latter refers to ‘...the last seven months...’ and Thompson also refers to a May 1977 ‘...article in a Sunday paper...’ which first alerted him to the existence of the threat to Bridgtown from the plans of Cannock Council.<sup>611</sup> No details of the name of the newspaper, the precise date, or the nature of the article are given beyond: ‘The story-line of the article was that this little village was going to be developed as an industrial estate...’<sup>612</sup>

In *Bridgtown Recollections* Williams writes ‘...after five or more years of fighting their cause better signs began to emerge and eventually in the early 1980s the council agreed to a status quo’.<sup>613</sup> Williams cites the formation of a Parish Council in 1988 as the turning point that put paid to the Council’s plans for redevelopment of the village with the formation of the Parish Council ‘...BRAG was wound up. It had served its purpose and marked its place in history’<sup>614</sup>. This amateur local historian sees nothing of relevance or importance in the contribution made by the band of “Trotskyist” architects from London, or chooses to leave out significant parts of the local campaign for his own reasons.

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<sup>610</sup> Williams & Devey, Op cit. p.60

<sup>611</sup> I have been unable to locate this Sunday Newspaper article in any publication from 1977 available in the UK, so I cannot corroborate this source. There is a Birmingham Post article from Thursday 17 February 1977, see figure 58.

<sup>612</sup> Thompson, Rob (1978) “Introduction”, *Bridgtown Primer 1*, The Architectural Association.

<sup>613</sup> Williams & Devey. Op cit., p.72.

<sup>614</sup> *ibid*


A large grey rectangular area covering the top half of the page, indicating that the image content has been redacted for copyright reasons.

Image redacted for  
copyright reasons.

Figure 57. "Clive" (surname not given) and Bridgtown Residents Action Group (BRAG) float being prepared for the 1977 Queen Elizabeth II Silver Jubilee parade


A large grey rectangular area covering the middle section of the page, indicating that the image content has been redacted for copyright reasons.

Image redacted for  
copyright reasons.

Figure 58. Jeanette Cartwright as pictured by the Birmingham Post, February 1977

Beyond the amateur volumes by Williams, the local history and Staffordshire County Council

archives related to Bridgtown in the 1970s contain little in the way of a record of the campaign, beyond the minutes of various planning committees. It seems the ARC do not even achieve the status of a footnote in the history of Bridgtown as far as the people of Staffordshire today are concerned.

The contrast between this local recollection and the descriptions of Anson from the time, and later in his “story” as told to EASA in 2008, paint an entirely different picture of the ARC’s involvement. Where precisely the truth lies, I have been unable to establish, but *the* truth is not my primary concern. The local community may now with hindsight see the ARCs involvement at Bridgtown as of marginal importance. Anson himself may fondly recall the eyes of middle aged ladies lighting up as they remembered being 10 years old during the campaign in 1977, and delivering the *Wild Duck* community newspaper, but this seems to not be a universally held view.<sup>615</sup> Therefore, it seems reasonable to conclude that it is perhaps somewhere between the strident revolutionary politics of Anson and his AA students the small ‘c’ conservative recollections of the people and local historian of Bridgtown lies the reality of the situation.

Interestingly the recollections of prominent member of BRAG, Janette Cartwright, a secretary of the Action Group reveals the ARC’s impact on BRAG from her perspective. It seems the ARC caused numerous issues for the local residents. In an informal memoir entitled “*Are You Aware That Your Home Is Under Threat 1976*” Cartwright recalls that the original secretary of the BRAG left because, as Cartwright describes it, ‘...he was being investigated by the police concerning the youths he had brought into the village, they belonged to an organisation called ARC.’<sup>616</sup> These “youth” are presumably the students

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<sup>615</sup> 00:39:36, Anson, EASA, 19<sup>th</sup> August 2008.

<sup>616</sup> Cartwright, Jeanette. (1976) Staffordshire Records Office, uncatalogued, D4925/Add, Cartwright memoir.

which Anson brought up to Bridgtown from the AA. Whilst Cartwright does not expand on what these students had done that had resulted in police attention, nevertheless it seems the activities of the AA students in 1976 were causing difficulties for BRAG. Similarly she recalls that plans for a protest at Parliament Square were abandoned as some residents were not happy with the idea of a march, describing how the plan was to '... march along outside [Parliament] carrying a coffin (empty of course) with the words on the side saying Bridgtown R.I.P. and carrying banners, the most militant members of our group with the help of ARC would do this to bring to national attention the fight for Bridgtown.'<sup>617</sup> It seems even a protest in London was beyond the pale for some in BRAG, perhaps focussed on the fact this was a local dispute and they did not want to draw wider public attention. It seems this conflicted with the aims of ARC whose tactics at Covent Garden and Ealing had been to expand the campaign and planned to do the same at Bridgtown. The intent seems to have been to build it into a bigger campaign to fight their battles with Architecture more generally. Ultimately the split between ARC and BRAG occurred, likely due to these disagreements over tactics. Cartwright's final mention of ARC reads as follows:

'The Action Group were carrying out the wishes of the community they no longer wanted ARC to be involved, Barry [Cartwright] was given the unenviable task of telling them, and they left the Village. We began to have successes.'<sup>618</sup>

It is quite a damning indictment that the final words in this section are 'we began to have successes', but only after ARC were asked to leave Bridgtown.

### The ARCs Recollections

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<sup>617</sup> *ibid*

<sup>618</sup> Cartwright, Jeanette. (1976) Staffordshire Records Office, uncatalogued, D4925/Add, Cartwright memoir.



Anson, when talking at EASA in 2008, referred to some of the more militant tactics used by the people of Bridgtown in the campaign, which do not appear at all in Williams amateur partial retelling. Anson recalled:

'And if the those of you who are Irish would know, it comes from the famous sign in in the Northern Ireland, YOU ARE NOW ENTERING FREE DERRY. You are now entering free Bridgtown and the, you know .the people had a system of sirens and tactics that if a house was going to be demolished one day, they just known people would occupy it.'<sup>619</sup>

Similarly, Moloney recalled in 2013 that when the ARC first arrived there was a degree of active resistance to the Councils plans, he says that there were:

'... quite a militant group of people, or willing to accept the level of militancy, on the western boundary of the village, on a gable, there was 'you are now entering Free Bridgtown' painted on it. And they were quite happy with it, and they understood where it was coming from.'<sup>620</sup>

Once again, we saw in the 'story' Anson told students at EASA a degree of bitterness, which he remembered 40 years later about how the people of Bridgtown behaved, alluding to the 'opportunists' in the community when he said:

'But in all community situations, communities were just people ... There were opportunistic little groups who thought "we'll use this energy that's being released to create our own little empires" so in Bridgtown there were a few people. "Oh yeah, we've got all this publicity now I can get on the Council. I can become mayor of the town", etc., etc. And so just a few rumours passed around

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<sup>619</sup> 00:35:24–00:35:53, Anson, EASA, 19<sup>th</sup> August 2008.

<sup>620</sup> Peter Moloney, in conversation with the author, Greenwich, London, 27<sup>th</sup> June 2013.

this group that are helping us are Trotskyists. You know, whatever. Marxists, which we weren't.<sup>621</sup>

Anson was correct in this assessment, one of the consequences of the Bridgtown campaign was that a Parish Council was set up in 1988 and several of the key people involved in BRAG became influential members of that council.<sup>622</sup> Whilst Anson might quibble over the political identity, or lack thereof, of the ARC, the people at Bridgtown were clearly less enamoured with the ARC than Anson suggests. The ARC's tactics were subversive in the extreme, a factor that seems to have turned some of the people of Bridgtown against them, perhaps the 'opportunistic' people Anson refers to above who had pretensions to higher social status as result. Moloney recounts one of the tactics used to try to extract information from Cannock Chase Council when they were reluctant or outright hostile to cooperating with the local residents. Moloney explained how the ARC set up a fake organisation '... called the Architecture National Linkup and we got a glossy brochure printed out. The Architecture National Linkup had registered offices in Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Saudi Arabia, Johannesburg, Nassau, Miami, Singapore, Istanbul... quite a few glitzy sort of places.'<sup>623</sup> This group was entirely fictional, but with their one glossy brochure sent with a letter to Cannock Chase Council, they managed to arrange a meeting. This meeting, which was attended by two AA students working on the project one French, one American, the planning officials of Cannock Chase were hoodwinked into sharing their plans with people, who they thought were architecture professionals, who looked and sounded the part. As Moloney recalled:

'All the shit came out. And we published it. The [ARC established] newspaper

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<sup>621</sup> 00:37:13–00:37:59, Anson, EASA, 19<sup>th</sup> August 2008.

<sup>622</sup> Williams & Devey. Op cit., p.72.

<sup>623</sup> Peter Moloney, in conversation with the author, Greenwich, London, 27<sup>th</sup> June 2013.

up in Bridgtown was called *The Wild Duck* after *Le Canard enchaîné*, the French satirical magazine. ... Anyway, we published the interview and Cannock Council Legal Department sent us a letter threatening to sue. ... And we passed on the letter to John Hendy [who had become the ARCs legal advisor] and he wrote back saying 'yes please, we need the publicity, you don't'. Needless to say, they never sued us.'<sup>624</sup>

One can see how an action like this, that bordered on fraud, could have alienated some of the less radical members of the Bridgtown's community. The campaign of BRAG was ultimately successful in that, with or without the assistance of the ARC, they were able to resist the local authorities' plans for the area. Through protests, public meetings, lobbying of local politicians, production of 'propaganda' including leaflets and cartoons (often drawn by Louis Hellman<sup>625</sup>) BRAG and the ARC were able to successfully reverse the decisions taken by the local authority. The exact nature of many of these processes and campaigns are lost, only partial recollections of the key protagonists remain.

The examples here give us a series of stories and paths from which we can draw together several strands illustrating the development of anarchist ideas and modes of working in Bridgtown. This story is inherently partial, we have the local history society, Anson, Moloney and the written account from 1977 in the Karpf *AJ* article seemingly contradicting each other in major and minor ways. The local historian does not recall the ARCs involvement in the Struggle for Bridgtown at all. The gable end mural which harkens to Derry, and the struggle

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<sup>624</sup> Peter Moloney, in conversation with the author, Greenwich, London, 27<sup>th</sup> June 2013.

<sup>625</sup> Hellman, Louis. 'Louis Hellman's stories', *Architects' Journal*, no date. [architectsjournal.co.uk/louis-hellman/317.contributor](http://architectsjournal.co.uk/louis-hellman/317.contributor) [Accessed 27<sup>th</sup> May 2017]

in the north or Ireland, the sirens, and occupations which Anson mentions, nor the children delivering in the ARC paper 'Wild Duck', (see figure 20) make any appearance in the local account. The local history boards and community memories erected around the village today similarly make no reference to this revolutionary and/or anarchist moment in Bridgtown's history. The struggle of the nineteen seventies gets a mention of barely one hundred words in the fifth of five boards (see figure 43). To look at these accounts one would be forgiven for imagining the struggle at Bridgtown was all conducted very calmly, through the "right and proper" channels of planning objections, and appeals, and local democracy. Only Cartwright's recollections mention the ARC, primarily to illustrate how their militancy was not very well received by at least some, if not most of BRAG.

The ARCs account includes these far more radical forms of resistance, the setting up of the fake architecture network to hoodwink the Council into handing over all their documents, the occupations, and Moloney's description are starkly at odds with Bridgtown's own story. Independently verifiable information is sadly significantly lacking in this story, beyond Karpf's contemporaneous article, much of the documentation for the Bridgtown Residents Action Group has gone missing from the Staffordshire Records Office.<sup>626</sup> We must therefore draw on partial and inevitably biased and half remembered accounts 30-40 years after the fact. Nevertheless, Bridgtown serves as the first major action of ARC, the second for Anson after Covent Garden and a testing site for several their tactics, ideas and ideals.

The community here that the ARC worked for and with, perhaps fall more fully into the category of 'unconsciously anarchist'. In Covent Garden, Ealing, and Bridgtown, they were motivated by vested interests, not pure political ideology, Marxist, anarchist, or any other

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<sup>626</sup> Email conversation with Staffordshire Records Office, RE: NRA 3515 Staffs RO misc D4925. 05/12-09/12/2021.

dogma, whatever ARCs protestations to the contrary. Their desire was to save their homes, and their wider community, from destruction. Their desire to self-organise, to engage in anarchist practices, was therefore motivated by a more “natural” desire to protect their homes. The wider work of the housing co-operative, the self-builder, the groups who seized control of their built environment for their greater good, can all be described as unconsciously anarchist acts. Some people such as Ward, Read, Bookchin and Comfort were more explicit in their anarchism (see Chapter 3) whilst also recognising the lack of anarchist motivation or ideology in the general populace.



Figure 59. Board No. 5: 'The Heritage Trail' The Leighton Memorial Garden, on the corner Union Street and North Street, Bridgtown.

## CHAPTER TEN

### COLNE VALLEY, YORKSHIRE, 1976-79

The Colne Valley is a part of West Yorkshire between the towns of Huddersfield and Oldham. Starting at Standedge on the border between West Yorkshire and Greater Manchester, the River Colne flows east towards Huddersfield through the valley towns of Marsden and Slaithwaite thereby defining the Colne Valley.

It was in 1976, at the age of 30, that George Mills set up the Colne Valley Project<sup>627</sup> from his base at New Hagg, near Honley (which is in fact in the neighbouring Holme Valley). Mills had studied at Huddersfield Polytechnic in the early 1970s (since 1992 known as University of Huddersfield) and in 1975 had, with his first wife, bought New Hagg ‘...a collective house – three mews cottages, a farm and a barn, two acres of land with two other families.’<sup>628</sup> Once Mills finished his studies at the AA in London, he moved back to New Hagg. As he said in an interview with me in 2014: ‘Colne Valley came out of me leaving the AA and wondering what I was going to do.’<sup>629</sup> Mills was, unlike Anson, determined to “do architecture”, something he was very successfully able to do, with the later setting up of Mills Beaumont Leavey Channon (MBLC, later MBLA) in Manchester in 1988. The establishment of Colne Valley project appears to have been created by Mills, and unlike other projects the ARC became involved in, it was initiated by him and Anson with the assistance of the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, as Mills explained:

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<sup>627</sup> Letter from Brian Anson [*nom de plume*, Seamus Mulhern] to George Mills, 6<sup>th</sup> September 1976

<sup>628</sup> George Mills, in conversation with the author, Withington, Manchester, 16<sup>th</sup> July 2014.

<sup>629</sup> *Ibid.*

‘...through a variety of connections through the Rowntrees Trust that Brian had... he suggested that we approach the Rowntrees Trust with a view to me setting up an office in the Colne Valley ostensibly to try and get some activity, some movement around a lot of the big redundant textile mills and textile-related buildings.’<sup>630</sup>

This project was then established in Colne Valley shortly after this in late 1976. Mills was setting out to try to develop a community architecture project in effect, an *en vogue* term in the mid-nineteen seventies<sup>631</sup>. His intention was to reuse these abandoned textiles mills for community purposes, whether through the repurposing of those buildings, or the deconstruction of the buildings and the reuse of the materials for other purposes. The danger of the ongoing economic downturn in the economy of the Colne Valley was leading to social decline, along with depopulation and the dereliction of the built environment. By the nineteen seventies deindustrialisation had arrived in Colne Valley, specifically the woollen and worsted mills of the valley, could not compete in the globalised market.<sup>632</sup> The ARC of course recognised the impacts that the inevitable failings of global capitalism were having on Colne Valley and for Mills as a Northerner, from Salford then in neighbour Lancashire, now Greater Manchester, and the Valley’s struggles were familiar to him and close to home.

The ARC project was reported on by Anne Karpf in the *Architects’ Journal* in October 1977, alongside other activity of both the ARC, and other groups *Architects’ Journal* reproduced the following images. It is not clear from the article if the mill shown (see figure 53), Stanley

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<sup>630</sup> George Mills, in conversation with the author, Withington, Manchester, 16<sup>th</sup> July 2014.

<sup>631</sup> Ward, “Community Architecture: What a Time It Took for the Penny to Drop!”

<sup>632</sup> Tomlinson, Jim. ‘De-industrialization not decline: a new meta-narrative for post-war British history’. *Twentieth-Century British History*, 27(1), 2016. pp.76-99.

Mills, in Milnsbridge (now a suburb of Huddersfield), is the mill in question. It does differ from the one depicted in the page of the Colne Valley News (image, left) however as this is a drawing it is unclear if this a real building or a composite image employing some artistic licence.



Figure 60. Images from the Colne Valley News, and of Stanley Mills, Milnsbridge, Huddersfield; as reproduced by Anne Karpf, and the AJ.

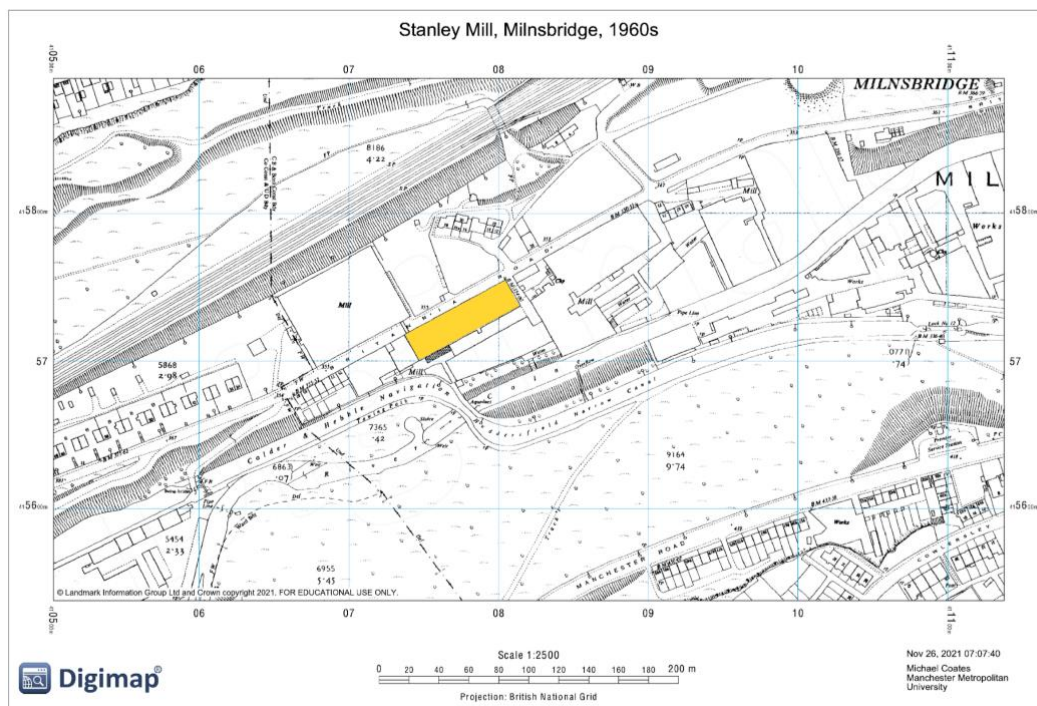


Figure 61. Map of Stanley Mill, Milnsbridge in 1960s



Regardless, many of the mills of the Colne Valley were constructed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century as textiles, principally woollen, mills. Stanley Mill was constructed in 1870 for John Lockwood & Sons and operated by them from 1878-1979.<sup>633</sup> The object of the project for Mills was to do architecture, saying:

‘It was very much a physical thing, rather than Bridgtown or Ealing, which was a political motivation from them or us. ... Rowntree’s gave us a grant for me to set up an office and to run that office, and I also had a salary from the AA as a part-time teacher, and I had six or seven students doing projects in the Colne Valley.’<sup>634</sup>

So, whilst running a live project for AA students Mills was able to begin a purposeful project of the ARC where the attempt was to engage with a community and to do architecture (in this case what we might now conceive of as interior architecture). The repurposing of abandoned industrial buildings in towns and cities in Northern England has now become common place, and indeed Stanley Mills, Milnsbridge, Huddersfield; shown in the photograph from the *Architects’ Journal* in 1977 is, as of 2019, being converted into apartments.<sup>635</sup>

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<sup>633</sup> Underground Histories. ‘A Catalogue of the Textile Mills and Factories of the Huddersfield Area c.1790-1914.’ *Underground Histories*, 2015. [undergroundhistories.wordpress.com/a-catalogue-of-the-textile-mills-and-factories-of-the-huddersfield-area-c-1790-1914/](http://undergroundhistories.wordpress.com/a-catalogue-of-the-textile-mills-and-factories-of-the-huddersfield-area-c-1790-1914/) [Accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2021]

<sup>634</sup> George Mills, in conversation with the author, Withington, Manchester, 16<sup>th</sup> July 2014.

<sup>635</sup> Earnshaw, Tony. ‘Former Lindsay’s Allsorts Mill to Undergo Big Renovation’, *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 2019. [www.examinerlive.co.uk/news/west-yorkshire-news/former-lindsays-allsorts-mill-undergo-16117206](http://www.examinerlive.co.uk/news/west-yorkshire-news/former-lindsays-allsorts-mill-undergo-16117206) [Accessed 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2021]

### Intermediate Unit 5, 1976/77

In the Architectural Association (AA) 1976/77 Projects Review booklet, a kind of options selection handbook for AA students, there is a unit listed as Intermediate Unit 5 run by Anson and Mills. As Sunwoo explains '...during Boyarsky's second and third years as AA chairman the unit system was distributed throughout an undergraduate course newly reconstituted into First Year, an Intermediate School (second and third years), and a Diploma School (fourth and fifth years).'<sup>636</sup> Thus we can conclude this unit was for second and/or third year students at the AA. The unit appears to be more manifesto than architectural education, a fact perhaps unsurprising given it was an ARC unit, in the Projects Review which Anson and Mills says that the unit (and presumably the students on it) '...functions as a kind of 'active service unit' of the ARC.'<sup>637</sup> Here Anson and Mills are using a term synonymous with the IRA, an 'active service unit' was an operational cell of the IRA consisting of 4-8 members.<sup>638</sup> This was an incredibly provocative act for the ARC given the IRA had been active with deadly effects in London throughout the early nineteen seventies (see Chapter 3) planting over 40 bombs.<sup>639</sup> Anson and Mills were firmly nailing their colours to the mast with this provocative phrasing, this perhaps explaining the mere handful of students the unit attracted. The description of the unit begins with the following lines:

'The Unit is trying to understand how the architect should work in society; no that's not right... whether the architect should exist at all... not quite right either. Hell! It's not concerned with architecture at all, or if it is the subject's right down on the list. What we do know and talk about a lot is that this 'thing' called

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<sup>636</sup> Sunwoo, Op cit., p.33.

<sup>637</sup> Intermediate Unit 5, Architectural Association School of Architecture Projects Review 1976-77

<sup>638</sup> Boyne, Sean, 'Inside the IRA - Organization and Command'. *Public Broadcast Service*, no date. [pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/ira/inside/org.html](https://pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/ira/inside/org.html) [Accessed 7 January 2022]

<sup>639</sup> Melaugh, Martin. 'CAIN: Chronology of the Conflict 1974', *University of Ulster*, no date. [cain.ulster.ac.uk/othelem/chron/ch74.htm](https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/othelem/chron/ch74.htm) [Accessed 7 January 2022]

architecture done by 'things' called architects, tends to carve people up a lot and create a lot of misery and frustration in society. If the Unit's not acting in a very militant manner over a project in which case the conversation's about fighting and struggle.'<sup>640</sup>

The Colne Valley project does not make an appearance in the Projects Review until the second page where a series of facts and statistics are listed about Colne Valley. One interesting factor of which is the statement that "'Industrail [sic] Development Land" options that have existed in the valley for the last 15 years have not been taken up.'<sup>641</sup> This lack of development, and the decline of the valley, also listed in the Projects Review, such as the fact that 'The M62, Trans-Pennine motorway, was opened in 1970 and has reduced the traffic flow through the valley by 95%. This has serious consequences.'<sup>642</sup> Was the environment into which Mills was arriving in 1976, a valley in decline with little activity and little apparent possibility of regeneration.

So, where did Mills start? We can see from one of the documents with which he provided me, he and the ARC began trying to define a "peoples architecture". In the image (figure 49) we see that Mills and the ARC start with premise in all caps that: 'THE LAND, INDUSTRY, BUILDINGS, AND COMMUNICATIONS ARE OWNED AND CONTROLLED BY THE COMMON PEOPLE.' This is to establish what the situation should be; therefore, the ARC is in effect advocating a natural relationship *a la* Habraken and Read as cited earlier in this thesis (see Chapter 3). Herbert Read's contention that 'before we can make things naturally, we must establish the natural order in society, which for my present purposes I

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<sup>640</sup> Intermediate Unit 5, Architectural Association School of Architecture Projects Review 1976-77

<sup>641</sup> Ibid

<sup>642</sup> ibid

assume is what we will mean by democracy.’<sup>643</sup>, rather clearly defines the situation Mills is describing above. Whilst they are not proposing to bring into being an anarcho-syndicalist utopia first, they are adopting what is arguably an anarchist starting point with their ‘utopia condition’.

The next question is then how did the ARC/Mills begin to try to create this ‘utopian condition’ in the valley? The ARC used various tactics, in different settings to try to bring the community together or to build on already present disquiet. As we have seen in Bridgtown and Ealing these were examples of local communities who were ready to fight. Colne Valley was not such a place, but some tactics were redeployed here, and arguably more successfully as we will see.

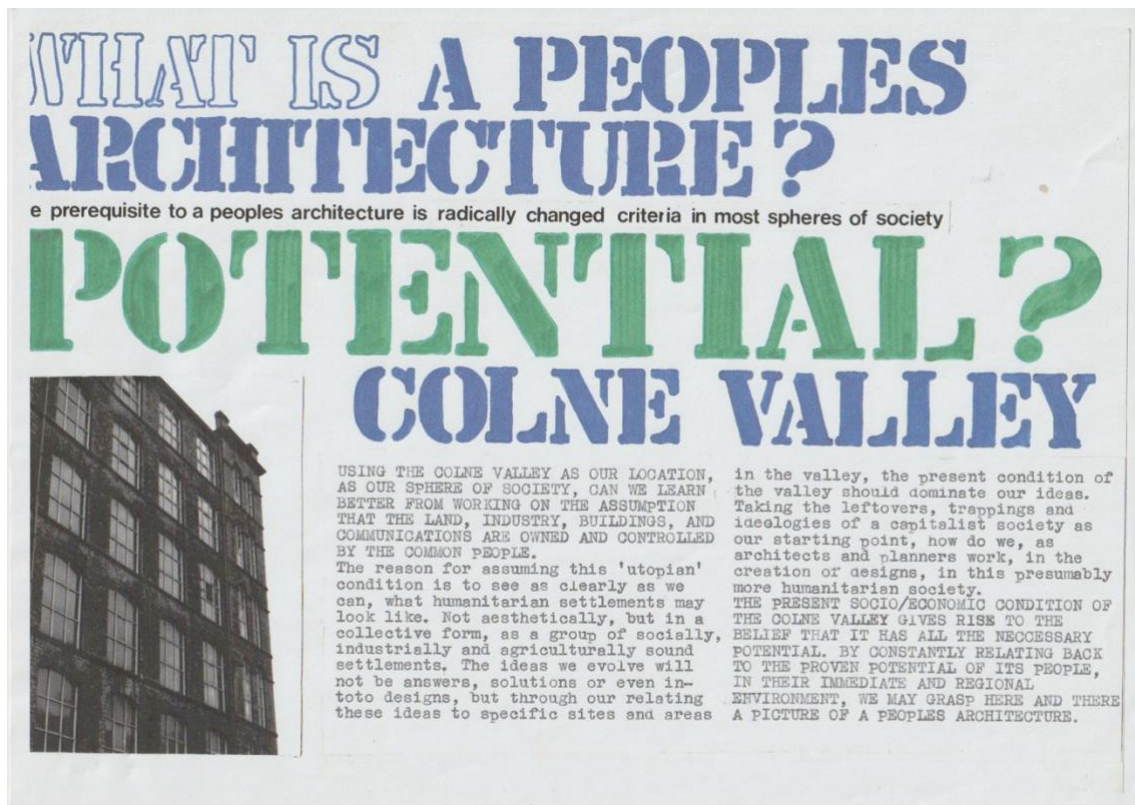


Figure 62. "What is a Peoples Architecture?" as created by George Mills as part of the ARCs Colne Valley Project.

<sup>643</sup> Read, Op cit., p.14

## The Colne Valley News

The ARC set up community newspapers for each of its projects with the aim of mobilising if necessary, or galvanising as needed, the community in support of their cause. In Cannock this was *The Wild Duck*, and in Colne Valley Mills established the *Colne Valley News*:

‘Because the Colne Valley News, the Colne Valley Guardian as it was, had closed about mid-’60s, early-’60s. And Rowntrees said it would be a good idea to actually use that as a way in to getting the conversation started, and I think they were right. So that was my main thrust in the end, was that I ran the Colne Valley News...’

The Colne Valley Guardian had, in fact, only just closed at the time that Mills moved to the area, it merged with Huddersfield Daily Examiner in 1976<sup>644</sup>. The first page of the first issue of the Colne Valley News in October 1976 supports this saying on its front page in all caps:

‘SINCE THE DEMISE OF THE COLNE VALLEY GUARDIAN EARLIER THIS YEAR, THE VALLEY AREA HAS NOT HAD ANYTHING LIKE THE PUBLISHED REPRESENTATION IT’S [sic] PROBLEMS WARRANT’<sup>645</sup>

The establishment of the *Colne Valley News* was as the primary vehicle for Mills to communicate with the people of Colne Valley. The ARC project there had, unlike Bridgtown, Covent Garden, or as we will see later, Divis, not been initiated by the local people and then the ARC came to be involved. It was a project as Mills says above that came out of him “wondering what to do”, of him formulating his contribution to the ARC in effect.

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<sup>644</sup> Cole, Matthew. *Richard Wainwright, the Liberals and Liberal Democrats: Unfinished Business*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011). p.64. [www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt155jb5t.15](http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt155jb5t.15) [Accessed 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2021]

<sup>645</sup> *The Colne Valley News*, issue 1, October 1978, p.1

There were at least 17 issues of the *Colne Valley News* beginning with issue 1 in October 1976. The last issue I have a copy of is March 1978, issue 17, this gives us an approximate date for the winding up of the project, and this fits with the time frame given by Mills of 16-18 months, from October 1976 to March 1978.

Issue 1 of the *Colne Valley News*, perhaps what we might expect from a first issue of a community Newspaper: it sets out its intent, its editorial position. It gives an address for Community Architecture of 1 Ned Lane in the Colne Valley town of Slaithwaite, (now a beauty salon) and sees Mills present the issues of the Colne Valley at the time.

The issues of the *Colne Valley News* bear some attention here. I am in possession of a scan of the first edition of the *Colne Valley News* as well as original copies of issues 10, 12, 13, 15, 16, & 17 spanning September, November & December 1977, and January to March 1978.

In starting with the figures and pages above we can see on page 2 of the first edition (figure 32) that Mills does not in fact make any reference to the ARC, and refers to the group by another name entirely, he writes:

‘Through it we hope that a lively, locally initiated debate will begin, which may inspire people to act regarding their own futures in the Colne Valley. This first issue has been put together by a group of planners and architects from the Community Architecture Team, who have worked as designers for local tenant and resident groups up and down the country.’<sup>646</sup>

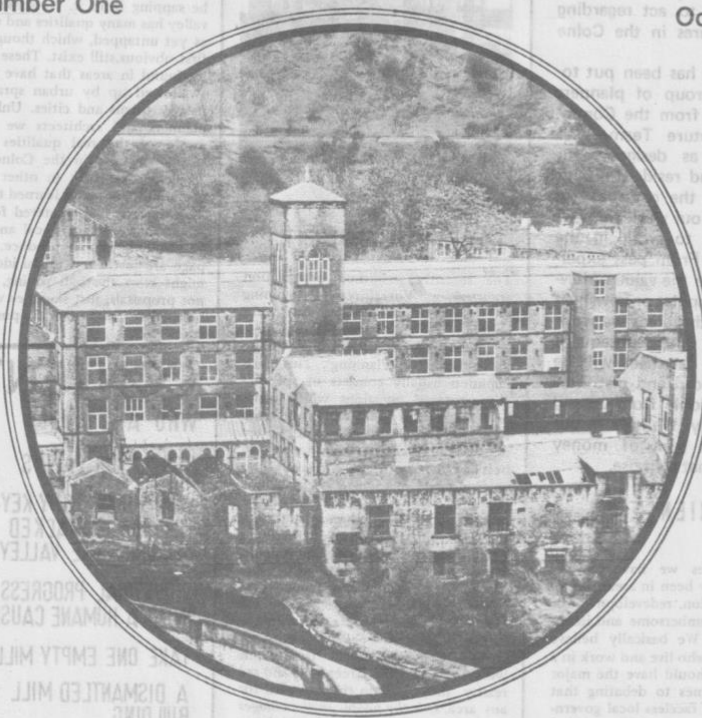
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<sup>646</sup> Mills, George (1976) “WHO AND WHY: An introduction to the *Colne Valley News* and the Community Architecture Team”. *The Colne Valley News*, issue 1, October 1976, p.2

# COLNE VALLEY NEWS

Issue Number One

October 1976



SINCE THE DEMISE OF THE COLNE VALLEY GUARDIAN EARLIER THIS YEAR, THE VALLEY AREA HAS NOT HAD ANYTHING LIKE THE PUBLISHED REPRESENTATION IT'S PROBLEMS WARRANT. THIS FIRST ISSUE IS INTENDED TO EXPRESS ONE PARTICULAR VIEW, IDEALLY THE NEXT ISSUE WILL CARRY A WIDE VARIETY OF LOCAL OPINION. WE ONLY HOPE THAT THE PAPER WILL ALWAYS SPEAK OUT STRONGLY ABOUT IMPORTANT LOCAL ISSUES. THE MAJOR THEME OF THIS ISSUE IS POTENTIAL, NOT GRUMBLES ABOUT THE PRESENT OR NOSTALGIA FOR THE PAST, BUT IDEAS & POSSIBILITIES IN THE FUTURE

Figure 63. p.1, The Colne Valley News, issue 1, October 1976.

# WHO AND WHY

An introduction to the Colne Valley News and the Community Architecture Team.

BY GEORGE MILLS

This newsheet is hopefully the first of many. Through it we hope that a lively, locally initiated debate will begin, which may inspire people to act regarding their own futures in the Colne Valley.

This first issue has been put together by a group of planners and architects from the Community Architecture Team, who have worked as designers for local tenant and resident groups up and down the country. On the strength of our work we were given a grant to work in the Colne Valley. From past experience we realize the value of having a good pamphlet or newsheet circulating in the areas we work in. Hopefully the subsequent issues of this newsheet will be written, produced and distributed by local people from up and down the valley. We have in our grant a small sum of money allocated for that purpose.

## EXPERIENCE

The communities we have worked with have mainly been in areas threatened by demolition, redevelopment or extinction by cumbersome and insensitive planning. We basically believe that the people who live and work in a particular area should have the major say when it comes to debating that area's future, not faceless local government departments or profit minded developers. Our work has been all over the country, in Liverpool, South Wales, Covent Garden and most recently in the London Borough of Ealing, working with the residents of these areas trying to prevent the destruction of their homes and work places. We realize that the situation in the Colne Valley is a little different, but no planning can be just as destructive as too much planning, particularly when an area is subject to the kind of problems that seem to be afflicting the Colne Valley.



A very familiar sight.

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The recently published information about West Yorkshires forthcoming publicity exercise to find out what people in the area want in the future is a typical example of so called 'Public Participation in Planning'. This participation usually consists of specifically prepared questions which some how manage to avoid the contentious issues in an area. The Colne Valley does not just need more industry, or a better bus service, or a cleaned up environment. The proposed public meetings being held up and down the county will tell the planners nothing - the questions they will ask will not get right to the root of the areas problems. *They will not be considering the dignity, self respect or aspirations of the people of the areas, because most planners and bureaucrats are incapable of working at that level.* Until they come down from their ivory towers to the street level and see reality, they have no right to plan for any area. *It is the people in the villages of the Colne Valley that should determine its future directly,* not local governments who are notorious for misrepresenting the aspirations and desires of people in their areas.

## HOPES

We hope we can work with the residents of Marsden, Linthwaite Slaithwaite, Milnsbridge and Golcar to try and revitalize some local industry and activity which will prevent the depopulation of the area and hopefully give the Colne Valley some of the vigour the declining textile industry seems to be sapping from it. We sense that the valley has many qualities and resources as yet untapped, which though not at first obvious, still exist. These can only be found in areas that have not been swallowed up by urban sprawl from nearby towns and cities. Unlike most planners and architects we are very aware of the real qualities of such places as exist in the Colne Valley. Through our work in other parts of the country we have learned that these qualities are *never* catered for in the grand master plans, local and central governments usually produce. Over the page are just a few initial ideas which might start the ball rolling, they are not proposals, just sketches which can be used to talk about the possibilities.

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VILLAGES ARE NOT PURPOSE-MADE SUBURBS	PAGE 8

## FREE FIRST ISSUES

There are five hundred copies of this first issue. With a subsidy from our grant, subsequent issues should work out around four or five pence each.

Figure 64. p.2, The Colne Valley News, issue 1, October 1976. An introduction to George Mills and some detail about the experience of him, and interestingly no mention of the ARC, calling themselves "Community Architecture" instead.



# INDUSTRIAL PROGRESS WITH A HUMANE CAUSE

WITHOUT THE EXPLOITATION OF RESOURCES OR PEOPLE.

Even though the part the Colne Valley played in Britain's mass industrialization was significant, that growth must be viewed in the light of what we know about its effects today. The type of industrial growth which we as a nation fostered all over the world, is being seen today as the major culprit behind the pollution of nature's systems and the ensuing scarcity of the earth's raw materials. So it would be detrimental to just say that industry in the valley must get back into full swing, without considering the wider implications of the effects of large scale industry on the lives of people and the places they live in.

The Colne Valley's own rise and fall highlights some of the effects mass industrialization can have on a place. When the area began its boom in the 18th Century it destroyed the old established textile industry in Norfolk, Devon and Oxfordshire. At present the industries of the Far East are threatening to destroy the industry in the West Riding. *The economic market cycle keeps turning, irrespective of social consequences, and the one-industry areas such as the Colne Valley are very vulnerable, because all their eggs are in one very flimsy basket.*

In reality the Colne Valley today is the product of two very socially destructive forces, one being that it developed around very big factory units, the mills, and the other that there were a great many of these concentrated in a relatively small area. So in local and national terms it would be suicidal to try and reinstate textile production in large mills and consequently it would be just as disastrous to find one industry of equivalent size to replace it.

LOUIS HELLMAN & GEORGE MILLS



The river below Golcar - ill used land.

On the global scale we are now experiencing shortages of most raw materials. When textiles first began in the area it was because the wool from the local sheep was particularly suited to making the fabrics for which the valley became noted and because the water in the River Colne was particularly good for dyeing and bleaching that material. That was a long time ago, if the industry had stabilized at a size where it could supply itself locally, it would not have grown so cumbersome and virtually reliant for all its raw materials on importation. *It would be fatal, in a radically changing world, to build up any new industries on a base that relies so heavily on imported material. Scarcity and cost would soon destroy such an industry today.*

(cont on page 7)



Figure 65. p.5, The Colne Valley News, issue 1, October 1976. The axonometric drawing is of the collection of mills in Milnsbridge, including Stanley Mills (far left, and centre left), Scarbottom Mills (centre), and Britannia Mills (right)

**TAKE ONE EMPTY MILL.....**IF A GROUP OF PEOPLE COULD RAISE THE CASH TO ACQUIRE ONE OF EMPTY MILLS IN THE VALLEY, THERE ARE MANY USES IT COULD BE PUT TO. MANY SMALL TRADES AND INDUSTRIES, USING THE RIGHT TECHNOLOGY, COULD FROM HUMBLE BEGINNINGS GROW INTO GOOD SIZE CONCERNS. MODIFICATION OF THE MILLS FOR TEMPORARY USES COULD BE MADE CHEAPLY. THE VARIOUS SKILLS IN THE AREA COULD COMBINE TO ALTER, THEN WORK FROM THE CONVERTED MILL.

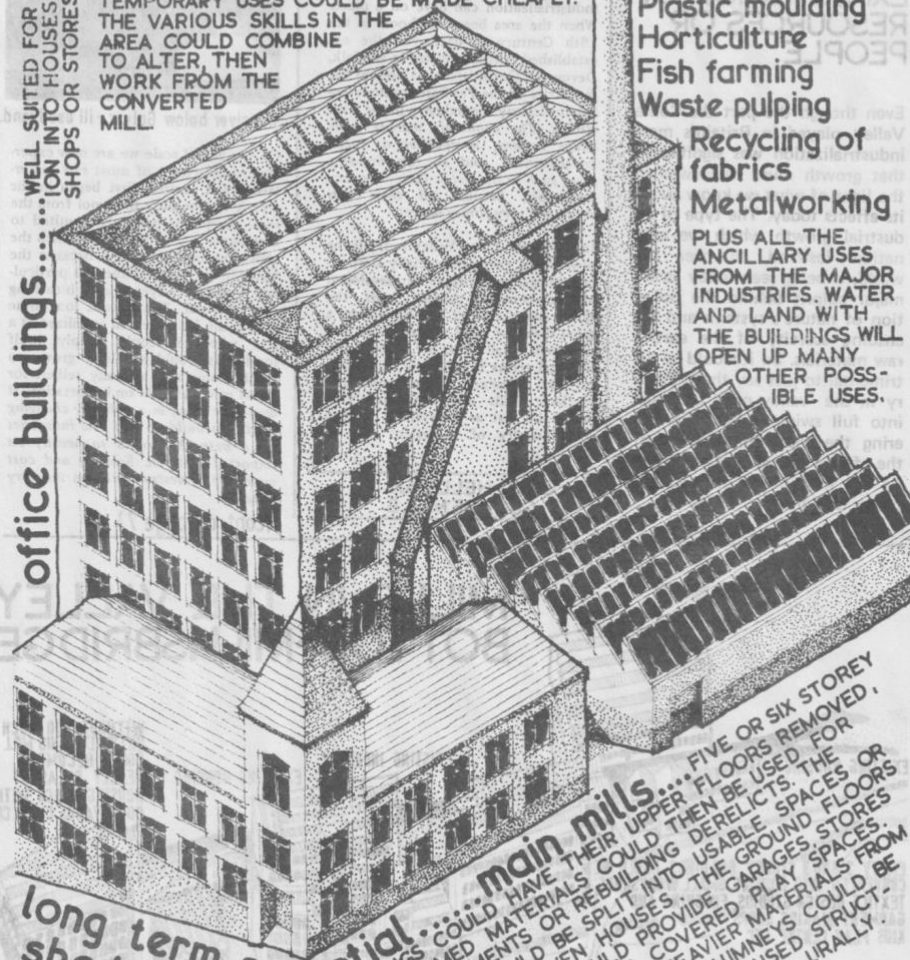
WELL SUITED FOR CONVERSION INTO HOUSES, SCHOOLS, SHOPS OR STORES.  
**office buildings.....**

**possible uses.**

- Woodworking
- Plastic moulding
- Horticulture
- Fish farming
- Waste pulping

Recycling of fabrics  
Metalworking

PLUS ALL THE ANCILLARY USES FROM THE MAJOR INDUSTRIES. WATER AND LAND WITH THE BUILDINGS WILL OPEN UP MANY OTHER POSSIBLE USES.



**long term potential.** IDEAL FOR RURAL USES....HORTICULTURE BUILT CLOSE TO THE GLAZED ROOFS COULD BE EXCELLANT GREENHOUSES WITH PRODUCE STORAGE BENEATH.

**main mills.....** FIVE OR SIX STOREY BUILDINGS COULD HAVE THEIR UPPER FLOORS REMOVED, THE RECLAIMED MATERIALS COULD THEN BE USED FOR HOME IMPROVEMENTS OR REBUILDING DERELICTS. THE LOWER FLOORS COULD BE SPLIT INTO USABLE SPACES OR EVEN HOUSES. THE GROUND FLOORS COULD PROVIDE GARAGES, STORES OR COVERED PLAY SPACES. HEAVIER MATERIALS FROM CHIMNEYS COULD BE USED URALLY.

**mill ponds...** WITH A FAIRLY MODEST OUTLAY A SUBSTANTIAL INCOME CAN BE OBTAINED FROM FISH FARMING. THIS INCOME COULD FINANCE MORE COSTLY ACTIVITIES AROUND THE MAIN BUILDINGS.

# POTENTIAL

Figure 66. p.6, The Colne Valley News, issue 1, October 1976. Here we see the image reproduced by the AJ in 1977, an axonometric drawing of a typical mill building listing all the possible uses to which it might be put.

Mills is clearly referring to the ARC but he prefers to call themselves the Community Architecture Team. This is perhaps because Community Architecture was a concept at the time,<sup>647</sup> or perhaps this is to avoid using the obviously provocative “Revolutionary Council” terminology, or perhaps as part of the funding arrangement with the Rowntree Trust the use of the ARC name was not appropriate. Mills did not mention in our conversations what this motivation may have been but sufficed to say it does seem to be a deliberate choice.

Mills makes clear reference to numerous ARC projects which we have already looked at which had begun by October 1976 saying:

Our work has been all over the country, in Liverpool, South Wales, Covent Garden and most recently in the London Borough of Ealing, working with the residents of these areas trying to prevent the destruction of their homes and work places. We realize that the situation in the Colne Valley is a little different, but no planning can be just as destructive as too much planning,<sup>648</sup>

Here Mills refers to two ARCs projects we have already looked at (South Wales and Ealing) as well as Covent Garden, though not strictly an ARC project, and a fourth project just described as being in Liverpool. The only other reference we have to this Liverpool project is in Anson’s CV (see Chapter 4), it appears along with a list of other ARC claimed projects. In addition, both Mills and Moloney made some oblique references to an early project in Liverpool in interview with me. The purpose of these first two pages of issue 1 seems to be to rally the community, to establish some credentials for Mills and his few AA students, with the occasional flying visits from Anson and other London based ARC-ers. Mills also gives us some insight into the purpose of this project writing in section subtitled ‘HOPES’ that ‘We

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<sup>647</sup> Towers, Op cit.

<sup>648</sup> Mills, “WHO AND WHY: An introduction to the Colne Valley News and the Community Architecture Team”, p.2.

hope we can work with the residents of Marsden, Linthwaite Slaithwaite, Milnsbridge and Golcar to try and revitalize some local industry and activity which will prevent the depopulation of the area.<sup>649</sup>

Later issues of the paper operate as more usual local rag, listing neighbour news, skateboarders, the pub not having a sign, but with numerous articles describing the planning and redevelopment of the valley. This includes plans for Crewe Chemicals expansion of their works at Linthwaite (September and November 1977), the potential demolition of the Marsden Mechanic's Institute being discussed by Kirklees Council with no consultation with the users of the building (December 1977), and on page 2 speaking up in support of the "firemen's" strike of November 1977–January 1978<sup>650</sup> which affected the valley with Slaithwaite Fire Station observing the strike. The January 1978 issues lists local views being ignored on the development of a health centre in Slaithwaite, and the opening of a new Youth Club in Slaithwaite, a community project with construction being documented repeatedly in the paper.

One of the longest and perhaps most relevant articles to the work of the ARC to appear in the issues of the paper to which I have access is in issue 17, March 1978. This article, entitled "Suburban Utopia by courtesy of your County Council" (see figure 51) details the plans of the West Yorkshire County Council to demolish hundreds of houses in the valley and to build hundreds more, but on a suburban model. This article, authored by Mills, takes aim at the County councillors and accuses the meeting held of having '...very little tangible

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<sup>649</sup> Mills, "WHO AND WHY", p.3.

<sup>650</sup> Fire Brigades Union, the. 'Nine-Week National Pay Strike Begins', *Fire Brigades Union*, 14 November 1977. [fbu.org.uk/history/nine-week-national-pay-strike-begins-14-november](http://fbu.org.uk/history/nine-week-national-pay-strike-begins-14-november) [Accessed 21<sup>st</sup> January 2022]

evidence that the County Council even knew of the existence of Colne Valley<sup>651</sup>. Proposing the demolition of 200 homes and construction of 700 new ones in order in Mill's view to turn the Colne Valley into '...one huge great suburb where women and young people especially, have no chance of secure or worthwhile employment.'<sup>652</sup> This demonstrates some of the agenda of the ARC, a.k.a. the Community Architecture Team, in the desire for regeneration of the Valley and the development of work and a functioning town community, not a suburb of Huddersfield. Similarly, towards the end of the article where Mills writes: 'If the West Yorkshire Plan is to be believed and put into operation the dereliction and decline [of the valley] will not be arrested, the young and eager will be forced out and the remaining people will be left to their own devices.'<sup>653</sup>

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<sup>651</sup> Mills, George (1978) "Suburban Utopia by courtesy if your County Council". *The Colne Valley News*, issue 17, March 1978, p.6

<sup>652</sup> Ibid.

<sup>653</sup> Ibid.

# Suburban Utopia by courtesy of your County Council

GEORGE MILLS

FRANK WINDSOR made an unannounced appearance in Colne Valley last month, as one of the narrators on the film designed to sell the West Yorks Structure Plan to the assembled masses (25 people) at a Public Meeting in Slaithwaite Town Hall.

The sincere and forthright tones of Inspector Watt assured the eager listeners of a bountiful and prosperous future through the West Yorkshire Plan, which he insisted was a plan for the people by the people. Wakefield and Leeds were seen as the economic growth centres but alas after having said that, there was little else of any substance that anyone could get their teeth into. Demands made at different times over the years for real action, not paper promises, on the declining textile industry, bus, road and rail improvements, schools and housing, which have been made by individuals and groups in this area, received little or no attention, apart from the usual "we're looking into all these problems".

After being informed that over the next fifteen years plans to build 700 houses and demolish 200 were in the pipeline, the



Sparse attendance at the West Yorkshire County Council Planning

Show held at the Town Hall in Slaithwaite in February.

It takes no account of the millions of square feet of rotting buildings and acres of derelict land which are all around us.

For a County Council like West Yorkshire to produce such a plan, and the truth is, it is the county officials, not the people, who have produced it, is ludicrous.

bad things about those days, but surely a body like the County Council with the vast resources and staff, should be able in their plans to capture the essence of the good and attempt to eradicate the seedier reminders of the bad, though from their plan the reverse seems to be painfully true. We

Figure 67. "Suburban Utopia by courtesy of your County Council", by George Mills, *Colne Valley News*, 03/1978

This article from March 1978 gives the impression that an article from the first issue of the *Colne Valley News*, "Villages re not purpose-made suburbs", co-authored by Paul Gorka and Brian Anson was rather prescient. It is not clear who Gorka is,<sup>654</sup> but in this article he and Anson say that: 'If the people of the Colne Valley do not begin to take a real interest in its future, the local and regional governments will get their way, and the area will become just another suburb.'<sup>655</sup> Gorka and Anson's fears had come to pass, to some extent, by March 1978. Indeed, the subsequent development of the towns of the valley, the expansion of Huddersfield down the valley essentially absorbing the towns of Milnsbridge and Golcar as suburbs of the larger town, has further accelerated this process. The demolition of many of

<sup>654</sup> Gorka authored a letter to *The Architects' Journal* in the name of the ARC in June 1976. "Letters: Ethics and Common Sense before Expediency and Self-Interest." v.165, no. 25 (Jun 23, 1976): 1214.

<sup>655</sup> Gorka, Paul & Anson, Brian. "Villages re not purpose-made suburbs". *The Colne Valley News*, issue 1, October 1976, p.8



the mills in part of whole for new housing is part of this process. These homes are occupied by people who commute via road or rail to work in Huddersfield, Leeds, and even Manchester, this has been a continual process for the last 40 years, most evidently with the Stanley Mills featured so prominently in the Colne Valley News.<sup>656</sup>

Much of the remaining content of the Colne Valley News is normal fare for a local paper and not of huge relevance to this thesis. Nonetheless the fact that this small locally printed and produced community newspaper served Colne Valley for two years, is an achievement in and of itself. The ARC's publications did not necessarily set out to have such wide audiences, *Red House* and *The Wild Duck* were essentially tactics of the ARCs campaigns, but the Colne Valley News appears to have become a solid part of the local community.



Figure 68. Mill View, a street of houses constructed on the site of part of Stanley Mill in 2010-12.

<sup>656</sup> Earnshaw. 'Former Lindsay's Allsorts Mill to Undergo Big Renovation',

## Politics of Colne Valley

The political situation in the Colne Valley in 1976 was complex. The local Labour Party was strong, and in competition with them was the local Liberal Party which ‘...wasn't radical by any means’<sup>657</sup>, and with whom the ARC had accidentally become allied via the Rowntree Trust, a staunchly Liberal organisation. When we look at the Parliamentary elections to the Colne Valley Constituency between 1945 and 1974, the seat is solidly Labour from 1945 until the well-known local Liberal Richard Wainwright won the seat for the Liberals in 1966, standing down in 1987<sup>658</sup>. Mills felt there might still be a radical undercurrent in the Colne Valley when he arrived in 1976, partly defined for Mills by the seat’s historic election of Victor Grayson for the ‘Colne Valley Labour Party’ in 1907.<sup>659</sup> Grayson’s victory was something of a national sensation and characterised a career which ended in a series of scandals leading to Grayson’s disappearance and possible murder in 1920<sup>660</sup> at the age of 39. Knowing of Grayson and reading perhaps too much into his election almost 70 years before Mills said: ‘I was thinking there is a radical nerve or nature in this place; I've just not found it. But after 16-18 months I realised it actually wasn't there anymore.’<sup>661</sup> The following year, in the historic May 1979 General Election that brought Margaret Thatcher to power, Colne Valley once again elected Richard Wainwright as their MP. The seat was won by the Tories in June 1987 with Wainwright’s retirement and remained so until 1997.

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<sup>657</sup> George Mills, in conversation with the author, Withington, Manchester, 16<sup>th</sup> July 2014.

<sup>658</sup> Cole, Matthew. *Richard Wainwright, the Liberals and Liberal Democrats: Unfinished Business*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011). [www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt155jb5t.15](http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt155jb5t.15) [Accessed 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2021]

<sup>659</sup> Clark, David. *Labour’s Lost Leader: Victor Grayson*. (London: Quartet Books, 1985)

<sup>660</sup> Coman, Julian. ‘A Century on, Whatever Happened to Labour’s Firebrand Lost Leader?’, *The Guardian*, 10/05/2020. [theguardian.com/politics/2020/may/10/a-century-on-whatever-happened-to-labours-firebrand-lost-leader](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2020/may/10/a-century-on-whatever-happened-to-labours-firebrand-lost-leader) [Accessed 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2021]

<sup>661</sup> George Mills, in conversation with the author, Withington, Manchester, 16<sup>th</sup> July 2014.



Colne Valley is a unique as an example of the ARCs work: it is the only place where they tried to “do architecture”, this is surprising given Moloney had said regarding Bridgtown ‘...the ultimate was to build something’<sup>662</sup>. However, if this was the ultimate aim little of the work of the ARC was attempting this, most was focussed on preventing architecture: Divis was about pulling architecture down. Bridgtown and Ealing were both about preventing architecture, as was Covent Garden.

There were versions of architecture and architectural schemes, being proposed as alternatives to the plans of local authorities, especially in Ealing and Divis. When I put this point to Mills in interview his reply was:

‘I think it's only that chemistry between the locals and the ideas really that was missing. And I think that's what the students found frustrating: because of the nature of the unit they were in, they were expecting to have a lot of local communication and the reality is we didn't get virtually any.’<sup>663</sup>

Mills uncovered that there was little appetite in the Colne Valley for the project(s) or the ideals of the ARC/Community Architecture Team. The tone of earlier articles from Gorka and Anson, and from Mills, in the first issue of the Colne Valley News, is one of trying to motivate, or perhaps scare, the community into action. As Mills says above, the chemistry between the ideas, and the ideals of the ARC was not there in Colne Valley. In other areas the ARC had worked up to now there was a degree of pre-existing activity and desire for change, this was what the ARC capitalised on. At Colne Valley there was an attempt by the ARC to create this chemistry, but without a uniting cause there was little to motivate the community. Community action and quietist anarchist modes of organisation are not developed spontaneously without some uniting factor that drives it. This was not a

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<sup>662</sup> Peter Moloney, in conversation with the author, Bloomsbury, London, 15<sup>th</sup> May 2013.

<sup>663</sup> George Mills, in conversation with the author, Withington, Manchester, 16<sup>th</sup> July 2014.

community that was already in fear for its existence (Bridgtown), or of the damage that large scale development seemed likely to do (Ealing and Covent Garden). As Mills put it:

‘...unlike Ealing or Covent Garden or Bridgtown, there wasn't any political motivation in the Valley itself. You had the four or five main towns, and they were quite lethargic – and there wasn't any real political activism in the Valley itself.’<sup>664</sup>

Within 18 months of the project beginning Mills went to London to see Anson, he recalls the gist of their conversation being him saying: ‘...“look, Colne Valley is driving me daft Brian, I'm just not getting any value out of it, I'm not getting any feedback from the students, I'm not getting anything from the community. There is not a group involved.”’<sup>665</sup> Mills summarised the situation towards the end of the Colne Valley News' run:

‘...the newspaper turned into... it kept some slight radical edge, but not massive. It turned into something that really wasn't doing what I wanted it to do, or what Brian envisaged. It was OK with the Liberals... in a strange sense we were apolitical. But I worked on that until late '78/early '79, and then I just got very demoralised about the lack of good projects coming through.’<sup>666</sup>

Though Mills does not give a specific date for the end of the Colne Valley project, the above approximate winding-up date of the Colne Valley News of early-1979 gives us a rough timeline for the end of the ARCs efforts. Once again, the general election of 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1979 seems to serve as a bookend to much of the activity of the ARC.

With the winding up of the Colne Valley project in early-1979 we see the end of the attempt by at least one member of the ARC to engage the public with their ideas in a way that would

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<sup>664</sup> George Mills, in conversation with the author, Withington, Manchester, 16<sup>th</sup> July 2014.

<sup>665</sup> *ibid*

<sup>666</sup> George Mills, in conversation with the author, Withington, Manchester, 16<sup>th</sup> July 2014.

have resulted in 'doing architecture', and the first attempt of any sort outside of London. But for Mills it was about the timing of the attempt not the politics of him or the ARC, there was no existential threat in 1976, no uniting or motivating factor in the Valley, nor was there the political will for substantial change, saying:

'...it just didn't produce anything like the spark it was supposed to. The architectural side of it never took off; there wasn't one project which caught anybody's imagination and it was... it's about timing, I think, Michael.'<sup>667</sup>

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<sup>667</sup> Ibid.

# CHAPTER ELEVEN

## THE DIVIS FLATS, BELFAST, IRELAND,

### 1983-86

'The Divis flats had been built by the Northern Ireland Housing Trust between 1966 and 1972, and consisted of twelve seven-storey deck access blocks and a nineteen-storey tower.'<sup>668</sup>

Divis Street is in the Falls Road (*Bóthar na bhFál*<sup>669</sup>) area of Belfast, a staunchly Republican and Catholic part of the city. The rehousing of the local community in the late-nineteen sixties occurred at a time of increasing unrest in the north of Ireland as the civil rights movement in the United States was mirrored by the disenfranchised and oppressed Catholic minority in the North.

As is explored below the ARC were, in the people of Divis, working with a local community who were not in any mood to cooperate with the local authorities. Whether that be the Protestant Unionist dominated Government of "Northern Ireland" at Stormont or the British military forces of occupation, in which I include the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC).

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<sup>668</sup> Hardy, *From New Towns to Green Politics: Campaigning for Town and Country Planning 1946-1990*. p.147

<sup>669</sup> Moloney, Peter. 'Peter Moloney Collection', *Peter Moloney Collection*, 2005. [petermoloneycollection.wordpress.com/2005/05/30/failte-go-dti-bothar-na-bhfal](http://petermoloneycollection.wordpress.com/2005/05/30/failte-go-dti-bothar-na-bhfal) [Accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2022]

## Divis as “streets in the sky”

As with so many mid 20<sup>th</sup> Century housing improvement projects, or slum clearances, in Britain and Ireland the Unionist Government at Stormont had begun the Divis flats complex in the mid-nineteen sixties. Having acquired cash subsidies from the British Government in London to carry out slum clearance and the re-housing of those displaced by the clearances.

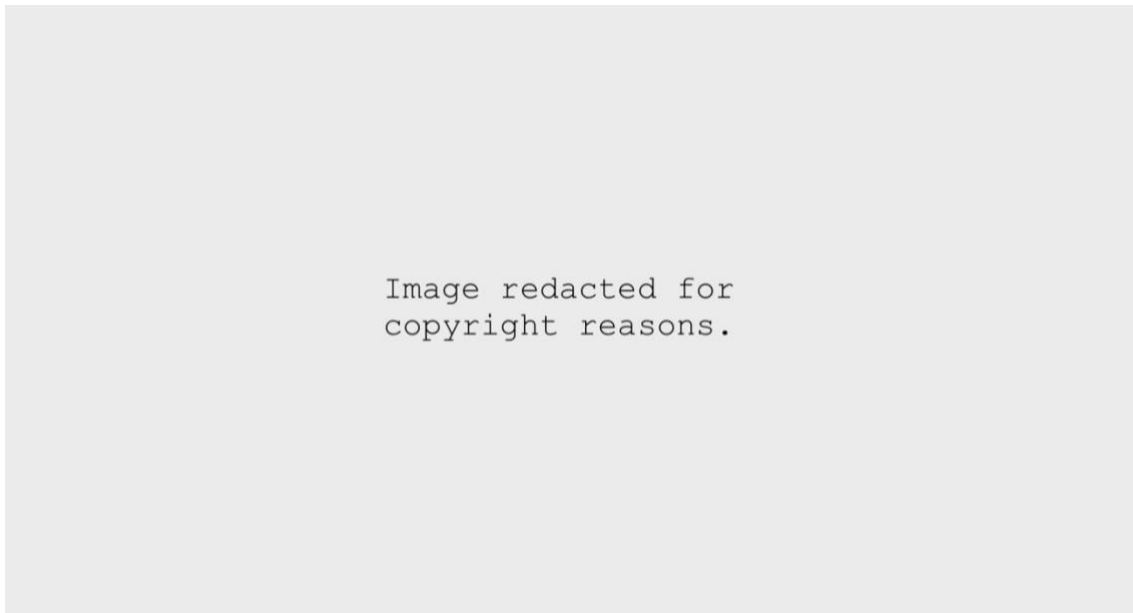


Figure 69. Students led by Bernadette Devlin march in Belfast, 9th October 1968.

Divis was an example of the ongoing manipulation of the Catholic Republican population by their Protestant Unionist rulers. It was a physical manifestation of the political underhandedness that infested the Government in Stormont and the wider Protestant elite controlling The Six Counties in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. As Sean O’Hagan wrote in 2018:

‘The Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (Nicra) had been formed the year before [1967] by a broad coalition – trade unionists, radical socialists, republicans and members of the Northern Irish Labour and Liberal parties – with the same basic aim: to challenge anti-Catholic discrimination in jobs and

housing. One of its defining slogans was the now quaintly sexist “One man, one vote”, which demanded an end to the system of plural voting that prevailed in Northern Ireland long after it had been abolished in the rest of the United Kingdom to be eligible to vote in a local election in Northern Ireland you had to be a homeowner, most of whom were middle- and upper-class Protestants. Many of them were business owners, which entitled them to several extra votes. To make matters worse, the state also employed gerrymandering (manipulating ward boundaries in local elections to maintain a false unionist majority).<sup>670</sup>



Image redacted for  
copyright reasons.

Figure 70. the Divis Flats complex, 1982. Photograph by Judah Passow.

Whilst speaking at EASA Anson made similar reference to the myriad of issues created by the powers that be, in his case pointing the finger at the Catholic Church rather than merely the British authorities, saying:

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<sup>670</sup> O'Hagan, Sean. 'Northern Ireland's Lost Moment: How the Peaceful Protests of '68 Escalated into Years of Bloody Conflict', *The Guardian*, 22 April 2018. [theguardian.com/politics/2018/apr/22/lost-moment-exhibition-northern-ireland-civil-rights-1968-troubles-what-if](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2018/apr/22/lost-moment-exhibition-northern-ireland-civil-rights-1968-troubles-what-if) [Accessed 5<sup>th</sup> December 2021]

'In the 1960s, ... the authorities and the planners, and incidentally with the backing of the Catholic Church, they decided to wipe out this community [Irish Republican Community around the Falls Road, Belfast]. And they produced the Divis flats. Typical 1960s architecture, 7 blocks and a tower. 6 storeys high with, you know, up in the air streets. All the stuff that they were building in other parts of Britain. It was the same mistake that was made so often in many other places. The people at first thought. "Well, yes, we'll have them because at least they would have indoor toilets".'<sup>671</sup>

Anson makes the case that whilst Divis was not unusual for the time in British social housing, it created uniquely northern Irish problems. Indeed, whilst on such estates in Britain, such as the Hulme Crescents, Hulme, Manchester; or the Heygate Estate, Elephant & Castle, London; both similar in design and materiality, one would find social deprivation, unemployment, and eventually drug dealing, associated petty crime, and vandalism. At Divis these problems manifested as well (minus the drug dealing, of which the IRA took a notoriously dim view<sup>672</sup>) they were accompanied by incursions by the British security forces, assassinations, raids, and kidnappings and constant video and human surveillance from the top of the Divis Tower.

Anson goes on to claim that '...almost from the very beginning they wanted the flats demolished.'<sup>673</sup> By 'they' we have to take it in context that Anson is talking about the Catholic Republican community that was being moved into these flats. The construction of the Divis Flats and many similar schemes across Belfast was seen by Catholic Republican

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<sup>671</sup> Anson, lecture at EASA, Op cit., 0–00:01:27.

<sup>672</sup> Pike, John. 'Irish Republican Army (IRA)', *Global Security*, no date. [globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/ira.htm](http://globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/ira.htm) [Accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2022]

<sup>673</sup> Anson, lecture at EASA, Op cit., 00:03:53.

communities as attempts to gerrymander the Belfast City Council electoral wards, by creating high density housing estates into which Catholic Republican communities were moved. This pattern had been repeated across the north of Ireland under Unionist rule, notably in Dungannon, Bann and Derry.<sup>674</sup>

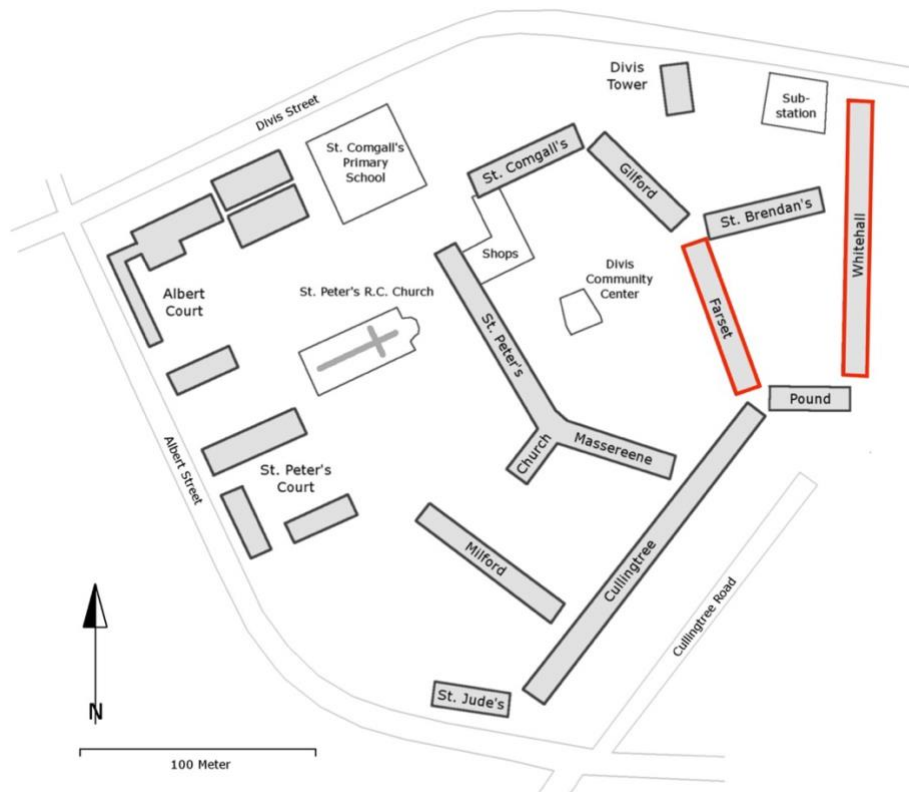


Figure 71. A simplified map of the Divis flats, c.1980

The Blocks outlined in red would be the first to be demolished in 1984. This was part of the security operation to remove Farset, which could not be surveilled from the Divis Tower. Whereas Whitehall was demolished to make way for a road widening scheme.

The campaign by the local community to have the flats demolished and for them to be rehoused has been going on for 14 years at the time the TCPA became involved in 1984, under the auspices of the Divis Residents Association since 1970 with no success. Given the construction of the complex began in 1966 this would tie in with his comment above that the residents had ‘...from the almost from the very beginning they wanted the flats demolished.’<sup>675</sup>

<sup>674</sup> Melaugh, Op cit.

<sup>675</sup> Anson, lecture at EASA, Op cit., 00:03:53



Anson placed the blame for the 14 years long campaign and the dismal conditions in which the people of Divis lived squarely at the feet of the British, saying:

'...because it was a very Republican nationalist housing estate, ... often occupied by first of all a party called the Irish Republican Socialist Party. Which was an armed group<sup>676</sup>, it got the nickname the "Planet of the Erps"<sup>677</sup>. And then it was just the general Republican, you know, it was a place where the fighters where came from and so it suited the British to sort of keep them together rather than have them in a more "civilized" community that you could move about in. It's always good to keep your enemy closed [in] like this.'<sup>678</sup>

Anson further reinforces this point when he says later in the same speech:

'...in the north of Ireland during the times of what they call The Troubles, the fighting of the conflict, they hardly ever built streets because the planning system was very much influenced by the military. The big architectural concept in Northern Ireland was to be the cul-de-sac. The cul-de-sac is easier to control. ... all you have to do is put a tank in front of it and a tank behind it, and it's much harder for the people to get out.'<sup>679</sup>

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<sup>676</sup> The Irish National Liberation Army was in fact the paramilitary wing of the Irish Republican Socialist Party (IRSP), which was not a paramilitary organisation.

<sup>677</sup> Footnote 11 in Hall, Michael (Ed.) *Preventing a return to conflict A discussion by ex-combatants*. (Island Publications, Newtonabbey, 2009) *The CAIN Archive, University of Ulster, cain.ulster.ac.uk/islandpublications/hall09-ip92.pdf* [Accessed 30<sup>th</sup> October 2021] reads 'Members of the IRSP (Irish Republican Socialist Party), whose paramilitary wing was the INLA (Irish National Liberation Army), refer to themselves as '*Irps*', pronounced '*Erps*'.

<sup>678</sup> Anson, lecture at EASA, Op cit., 00:11:59–00:12:47

<sup>679</sup> Ibid, 00:18:55–00:19:30

As Paul Bower (incidentally a former employee of George Mills at MBLC in Manchester), recounts in his blog article “Brian Anson, The Northern Irish Conflict & Wallace And Gromit” from 2013:

‘Divis Flats campaign in Belfast which was part of Brian’s ‘Mobile Planning Unit’ tour of Britain and Ireland in a converted camper van funded by the Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA) in the early ‘80s. Brian was joined for the ‘Mobile Planning Unit’ by Mike Beazley as they travelled between communities offering free planning advice and hands-on help where possible.’<sup>680</sup>

It is important to point out at this stage that the ARC was not a very visible presence at Divis. Primarily as the project was so closely aligned with the TCPA, for whom Anson was working at the time. Nothing is said here or by Mills or Moloney about Anson’s feeling at working for such a Liberal organisation. He has railed against Liberalism in other writings, quoted in in this thesis. But he also had contacts in the JRF and had used this before to fund the ARC’s work at Colne Valley. Therefore, it seems whilst they were certainly not radical enough for Anson, they were groups he was prepared to make common cause with.

Moloney also recounts how Anson offered him £500 to come and work on the project with him.<sup>681</sup> Moloney was by then working at Hackney Borough Council and decided to involve himself in Divis regardless. By the 1984 these three key members of the ARC, Anson, Moloney and Mills, had all moved on from the AA, and the ARC had in effect disbanded.

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<sup>680</sup> Bower, Paul. (2013) “Brian Anson, The Northern Irish Conflict & Wallace And Gromit”. 23/03/2013, *Beyond Post-Conflict Architecture*, [contestedterritories.wordpress.com/2013/03/23/brian-anson-northern-ireland-wallace-and-gromit](http://contestedterritories.wordpress.com/2013/03/23/brian-anson-northern-ireland-wallace-and-gromit), [Accessed 21<sup>st</sup> October 2021]

<sup>681</sup> Peter Moloney, in conversation with the author, Greenwich, London, 27<sup>th</sup> June 2013

### Strange bedfellows: The TCPA, The ARC, and The DRA

The relationship between the people of Divis, Anson, and the Town and Country Planning Association is also discussed in Dennis Hardy's, *From New Towns to Green Politics: Campaigning for Town and Country Planning 1946-1990*. Here Hardy describes how in 1982 Anson became involved with the Town and Country Planning Association:

'Trained as an architect, Anson brought to the unit, in his own words, 'twenty years of community activism'. He was soon joined by Mike Beazley, and together they formed the core of a group of 'Young Turks' calling for the TCPA to take more positive action 'to release latent local energy and initiative from the bottom up'.<sup>682</sup>

Mobile Planning Aid Unit was a Volkswagen Camper van which was depicted in a short document called *The Story of a Co-operative Idea* by Brian Anson. On the first page of this document there is an image of Anson and Beazley with the van (see figure 65). Again, in the talk to EASA Anson recounted how the Mobile Planning Aid Unit developed, referring to (now) Dr Mike Beazley of the University of Birmingham, and himself Anson said:

'We travelled Britain in that van. It was called the mobile planning aid unit. Where we gave planning aid for free to people who couldn't afford to pay for it, but like legal aid... *Medicines sans Frontières*. I travelled Britain for three years in that literally doing our work on the streets.'<sup>683</sup>

Anson and Mike Beazley were able to employ their skills to help the people of Divis, most particularly the Divis Residents Association (DRA) to make their case. As Anson said at

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<sup>682</sup> Hardy, Op cit., p.145

<sup>683</sup> Anson, lecture at EASA, Op cit., 00:08:38–00:09:13

EASA in 2008, he believed in solutions, perhaps this was true by 1983, and their involvement with Divis.

'...you can't criticise something unless you've got an alternative. That's hypocrisy... you've got to have an idea. So, one of the things the British... were saying was that, "oh, we can't demolish the flats because we wouldn't be able to get the same number of people on the site" and we proved them wrong. ... we proved that you could build streets and you could build spaces,'<sup>684</sup>

Anson and others did indeed develop plans for the rebuilding of Divis, which we will look at later in this chapter. The new plan proposed by the ARC and TCPA would presumably, though Anson does not quite get to this point in his talk, rehouse all the residents of the flats in houses.

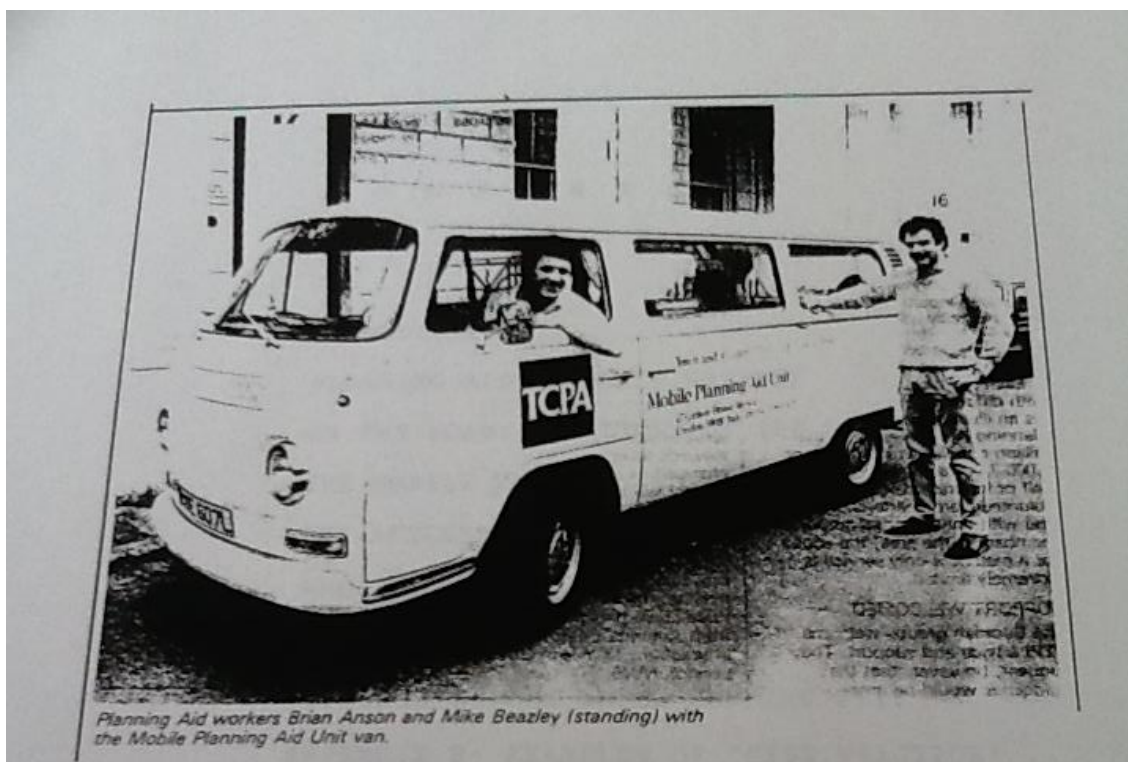


Figure 72. The Story of a Co-operative Idea front page showing the TCPA Mobile Planning Aid Unit.

<sup>684</sup> Anson, lecture at EASA, Op cit., 00:22:34–00:23:15

Peter Moloney also recalled the beginning of this project and his involvement as follows:

‘Brian and Mike were both appalled by just how bad Divis was and resolved that they had to do something about it. And I then got volunteered to do whatever we could. And that was done under the auspices of the Town and Country Planning Association. Brian wrote some articles in the TCPA journal about Divis, suggested that something needs doing about Divis,’<sup>685</sup>

The ARCs work in Divis and with the TCPA was not without its risks. Working in such an area at such a time was divisive. The P-IRA had begun a deadly bombing campaign on the British Mainland, primarily targeting London and military targets in the nineteen seventies. Therefore, there were significantly heightened security measures and surveillance of people travelling to and from the north of Ireland into Britain. Peter Moloney recalled the British security services responses to one such visit to Belfast after a meeting the Director of the TCPA, David Hall (1933–2006)<sup>686</sup>, had been able to arrange with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE):

‘But when we left the Housing Executive and were walking back towards Divis Estate, two police jeeps pulled up beside us. Police jumped out, had the two Divis residents up against the wall, and David Hall... [imitation] ‘Excuse me, my man, what do you think you’re doing? They’re with me’. Poor David... somewhat out of his comfort zone.’

‘Me and Brian... a couple of other people were arrested or we’d be questioned.

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<sup>685</sup> Peter Moloney, in conversation with the author, Greenwich, London, 27<sup>th</sup> June 2013

<sup>686</sup> Hall, Peter. ‘David Hall’, *The Guardian*, 9 February 2006. [theguardian.com/society/2006/feb/09/communities.guardianobituaries](http://theguardian.com/society/2006/feb/09/communities.guardianobituaries) [Accessed 27<sup>th</sup> June 2013]

Why are you meeting with these people? Don't you know the sort of people they are?'<sup>687</sup>

Similarly, Anson recounted at EASA how, whilst in Belfast he and residents from Divis were stopped in their car by the RUC and British Army:

'Imagine 2 o'clock in the morning. And you're in a car with a few people who live in the flats, as I was. and you're suddenly stopped by a crowd of policemen and British soldiers.... police got me out of the car, said "Who are you?" I said "I'm an architect and I'm working with the residents of the flats." And I remember his words... "What sort of a fucking architect are you!", he said.'<sup>688</sup>

The local British forces were evidently hostile towards the ARC and the TCPA's involvement at Divis. This perhaps inevitable a time of heightened tension and increased armed conflict in The Six Counties and in Britain. The campaign also drew the unwanted attention of Britain to the policies and behaviours of the various British controlled authorities in Ireland, thus we can presume that this did not dispose the RUC very well towards this work. The Architectural establishment was largely in agreement with the work the ARC did at Divis. Possibly the involvement of the venerable liberal institution such as the TCPA disguised or softened the edges of the ARCs usual radicalism and made the project more palatable to the establishment.

But as Anson said:

'...the architectural magazines you know backed us because it's a bit like Covent Garden became not so much of "cause celebre", but it was such a weird suddenly brought Divis flats into the limelight. You've got to look at this bloody place. It's so awful and the people are suffering so much.'<sup>689</sup>

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<sup>687</sup> Peter Moloney, in conversation with the author, Greenwich, London, 27<sup>th</sup> June 2013

<sup>688</sup> Anson, lecture at EASA, Op cit., 00:14:30–00:15:30

<sup>689</sup> Anson, lecture at EASA, Op cit., 00:17:40–00:18:30



Image redacted for  
copyright reasons.

Figure 73. War games in Divis flats. Photo: Brendan Murphy

### Divis: The Dreadful Enclosure

One of the major outcomes of the TCPA and ARC project at Divis was an exhibition on the awful conditions in Divis to be held in London as the “seat of power” of the British state. Anson describes this idea as “... we came up suddenly with two brilliant ideas... just [came] suddenly into our heads. We said we will hold the exhibition.”<sup>690</sup> This exhibition was held in 1985-6 at Carlton House Terrace, London; in the offices of the TCPA<sup>691</sup> was designed to raise the issue of Divis with the “right” people, the people in Westminster. Certainly not the authorities in the north of Ireland, who had demonstrated by this point a total disinterest in addressing any of the issues of Divis, beyond a somewhat dubious promise to “renovate” the flats.

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<sup>690</sup> Anson, lecture at EASA, Op cit., 00:20:15–00:20:31

<sup>691</sup> Sneddon, Jim, and Theobald, Caroline. (eds) *International Conference on Community Architecture Planning and Design* (1<sup>st</sup> Edn.: 1986 : Astoria Theatre, London), p.81. via [nickwates.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/19861126-BuildingCommunities ConferenceLoRes-ilovepdf-extreme-compressed.pdf](http://nickwates.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/19861126-BuildingCommunities ConferenceLoRes-ilovepdf-extreme-compressed.pdf) [Accessed 10th January 2022]

There are two documents which are key in understanding the ARC and TCPA project in Divis the first is the TCPAs *Draft Policy Statement: Divis Flats Belfast*,<sup>692</sup> (see figure 67) the second is the exhibition catalogue for the London exhibition *The Dreadful Enclosure*<sup>693</sup> (see figure 72) which I was given by Peter Moloney. I will give significant attention to both these documents.

*Draft Policy Statement: Divis Flats Belfast: The Town and Country Planning Association, October 1985*

In the preamble to the draft policy document which was directed to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (at the time in 1985 Tom King MP) the TCPA and Anson write:

‘The TCPA’s National Planning Aid Unit, through its extensive travels, has seen many deplorable living environments, but none which appear more prone than Divis to brutalise a community. It does not surprise the TCPA that Divis has been described by other experts in high-rise development as “The worst housing in Western Europe”.’<sup>694</sup>

This final line, “The worst housing in Western Europe” is an oft quoted phrase (both Moloney and Mills used it in conversation with me, as did Anson in 2008) but no actual source is provided for this. It has been quoted long since by politicians in the north of Ireland,<sup>695</sup> and

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<sup>692</sup> TCPA, (1985) *The Town and Country Planning Association Policy Statement: Divis Flats Belfast – DRAFT October 1985*. [cain.ulster.ac.uk/nai/1985/nai\\_DFA-2015-51-1463\\_1985-nd.pdf](http://cain.ulster.ac.uk/nai/1985/nai_DFA-2015-51-1463_1985-nd.pdf) [Accessed 7<sup>th</sup> December 2021]

<sup>693</sup> Divis Residents Association, the (DRA). (1985) *The Dreadful Enclosure*. Exhibition Catalogue - The Town and Country Planning Association, London 1985-6.

<sup>694</sup> TCPA, *Policy Statement: Divis Flats Belfast – DRAFT October 1985*, p.1

<sup>695</sup> Shanahan, Ella, and Murphy, Clare. (2001) ‘Reid Has Plan to Resolve the Ardoyne Crisis’, *Irish Times*. [irishtimes.com/news/reid-has-plan-to-resolve-the-ardoyne-crisis-1.326340](http://irishtimes.com/news/reid-has-plan-to-resolve-the-ardoyne-crisis-1.326340) [Accessed 27<sup>th</sup> January 2022]



it may be that Divis is in fact the origin of this phrase as Dennis Hardy implies.<sup>696</sup> Whatever the origin of this phrase it seems to be largely agreed that Divis defines it. When one sees photographs or film<sup>697</sup> from this time (see figs. 38-42) it seems entirely appropriate, the architectural failings and condition of the estate itself serve as clear exposition. In addition, the near constant presence of the British security forces, the British Army observation post atop the Divis Tower, as the TCPA say of the residents: ‘...they must also endure 24-hour army camera surveillance from the top of Divis Tower, and frequent incursions into the flats by army and police patrols.’<sup>698</sup> All these factors further compounded the feeling that Divis was little more than an open internment camp for those who opposed the continued British occupation of The Six Counties.

On page 2 of the report the TCPA quotes the local General Practitioner (GP):

‘The local GP, Dr Hendron, has publicly declared:

“I think it is criminal that the Government allows these flats to remain standing. Few of the people of Western Europe have been as socially deprived as the residents of Divis flats. What we have here is men, women, and children, thrown together and expected to live in conditions not fit for animals.”

Dr Hendron cites the high incidence of bronchial diseases, and particularly the abnormally high rate of depressive illnesses, which he encounters in the flats, to support his strong views on the matter.<sup>699</sup>

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<sup>696</sup> Hardy, Op cit., p.148

<sup>697</sup> ‘High Life’. (2010) Dir: Lewis Edmondson, BBC Northern Ireland. Broadcast: 21/10/2010, [bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00v9kl0](http://bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00v9kl0) [Accessed 28<sup>th</sup> January 2022]

<sup>698</sup> TCPA, Op cit., p.3

<sup>699</sup> *ibid* p.2

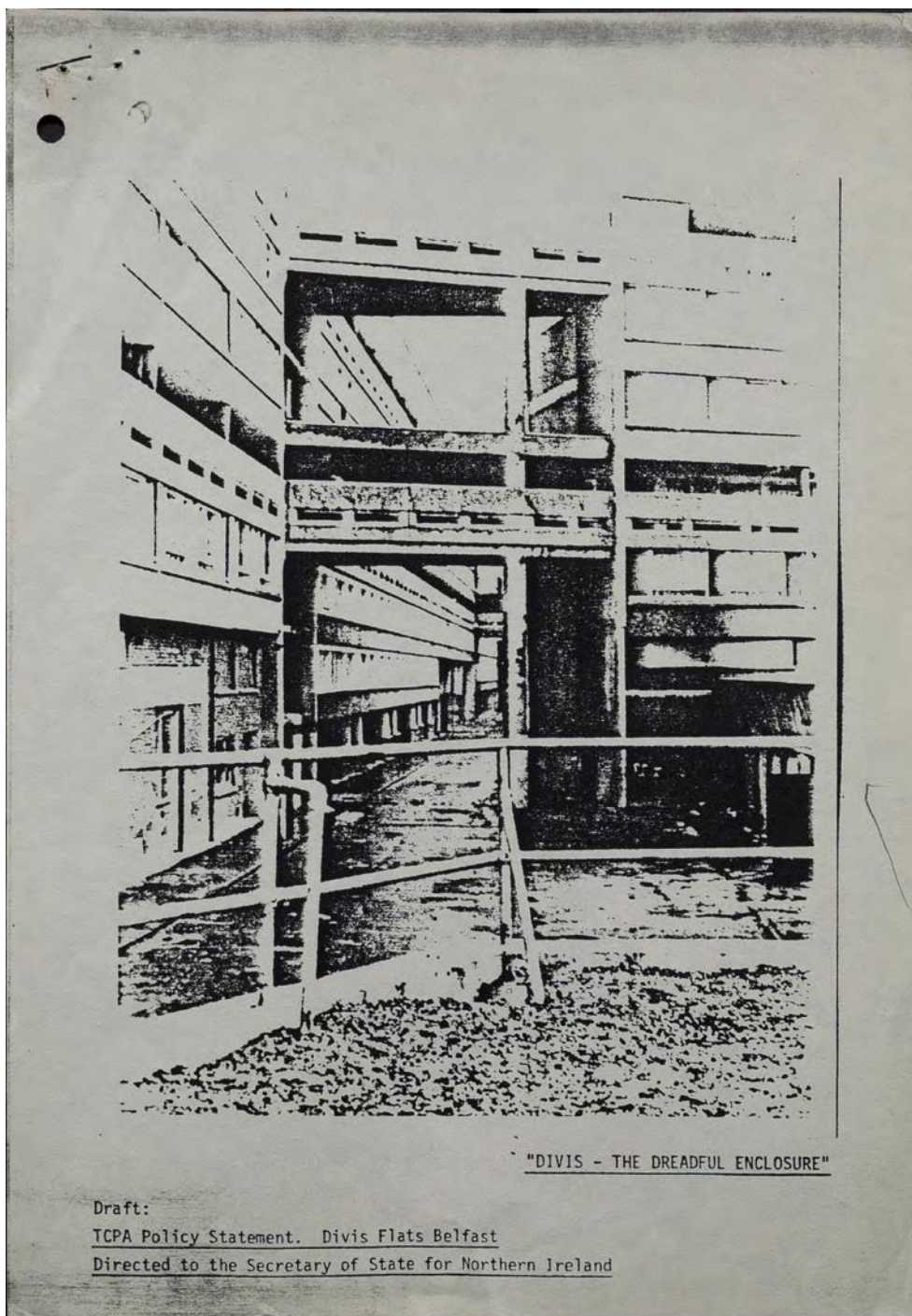


Figure 74. TCPAs Draft Policy Statement: Divis Flats, Belfast, October 1985.

Image redacted for  
copyright reasons.

Figure 75. Men in makeshift balaclavas at Divis Flats Belfast late 1970s/early 1980s

Image redacted for  
copyright reasons.

Figure 76. January 1989: Burnt-out shells from joyridden cars at wasteground near Divis Flats, west Belfast.



Image redacted for  
copyright reasons.

Figure 77. British Troops line Divis Street, Belfast, during the Troubles

The issues of poor housing conditions creating health conditions was recognised in England as early as 1898 with the founding the Garden Cities Movement, the forerunner to the TCPA<sup>700</sup>. Similarly, the “New Town Blues” were diagnosed by GPs in Harlow and Stevenage<sup>701</sup> in the nineteen sixties. Nevertheless, it seems such recognition had not yet reached the NIHE.

The TCPA acknowledges that whilst the problems of Divis, and estates like it elsewhere in Britain and Ireland did not make it unique, but they do stress that Divis is unique in other ways:

‘The design of the flats is brutal and gives the lie to the grand concepts of the planners and architects concerning 'streets in the sky'. None of these problems are particularly unique to Divis - they can be found in most of the 'sink' estates

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<sup>700</sup> Onslow, John. *Garden Cities and New Towns: Five Lectures* (Hatfield, England: Hertfordshire Publications, 2001)

<sup>701</sup> Llewellyn, Mark. (2004) “Producing and experiencing Harlow: neighbourhood units and narratives of New Town life 1947–53”, *Planning Perspectives*, 19:2, 155-174.

in the inner areas of all our cities and play their part in the continuing urban conflict. But the TCPA acknowledges that, in Divis, such problems are excessive and that the Divis community, in addition, has to contend with special problems related to its location.<sup>702</sup>

The Divis Flats provided a uniquely 'dreadful enclosure' precisely because they are in West Belfast, not despite that fact. The oppression of the Republican Catholic population of the north of Ireland, including but not limited to, the attacks by the British Army, RUC, as well as the attacks on Nationalists by Unionists during the riots of 1969 prompted by the 1968 civil rights marches.<sup>703</sup> The context of Divis meant it was not only beset by the "usual" problems of so many "jerry built" concrete housing estates in Britain, but was under literal siege as well.

Architecturally, there are notable similarities with the problems of the Hulme Crescents for example, which were largely occupied by Manchester Irish and Black British people, which were described as a 'British Bantustan'<sup>704</sup> at the same point in the nineteen seventies. The conclusion of the TCPA draft report begins with the sentence.

'Having studied the facts the Executive Committee of the Town and Country Planning Association gives its unequivocal support to the Divis Residents

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<sup>702</sup> TCPA, Op cit., p.3

<sup>703</sup> On the night of 14<sup>th</sup> August 1969 RUC Shortland Armoured cars peppered the occupied Divis Tower with high velocity gunfire from Browning .30mm Machine guns killing a 9-year-old child. Later that night Unionists burned the houses of Nationalist civilians on Divis Street whilst the Divis Flats were still under construction meaning families fled into the unfinished flats.

<sup>704</sup> Boughton, John. 'The Hulme Crescents, Manchester: A "British Bantustan"', *Municipal Dreams*, 11 March 2014. [municipaldreams.wordpress.com/2014/03/11/the-hulme-crescents-manchester-a-british-bantustan](http://municipaldreams.wordpress.com/2014/03/11/the-hulme-crescents-manchester-a-british-bantustan) [Accessed 28 January 2022]

Association in its campaign for total demolition of the Divis complex, and a replacement housing scheme for the existing community.<sup>705</sup>

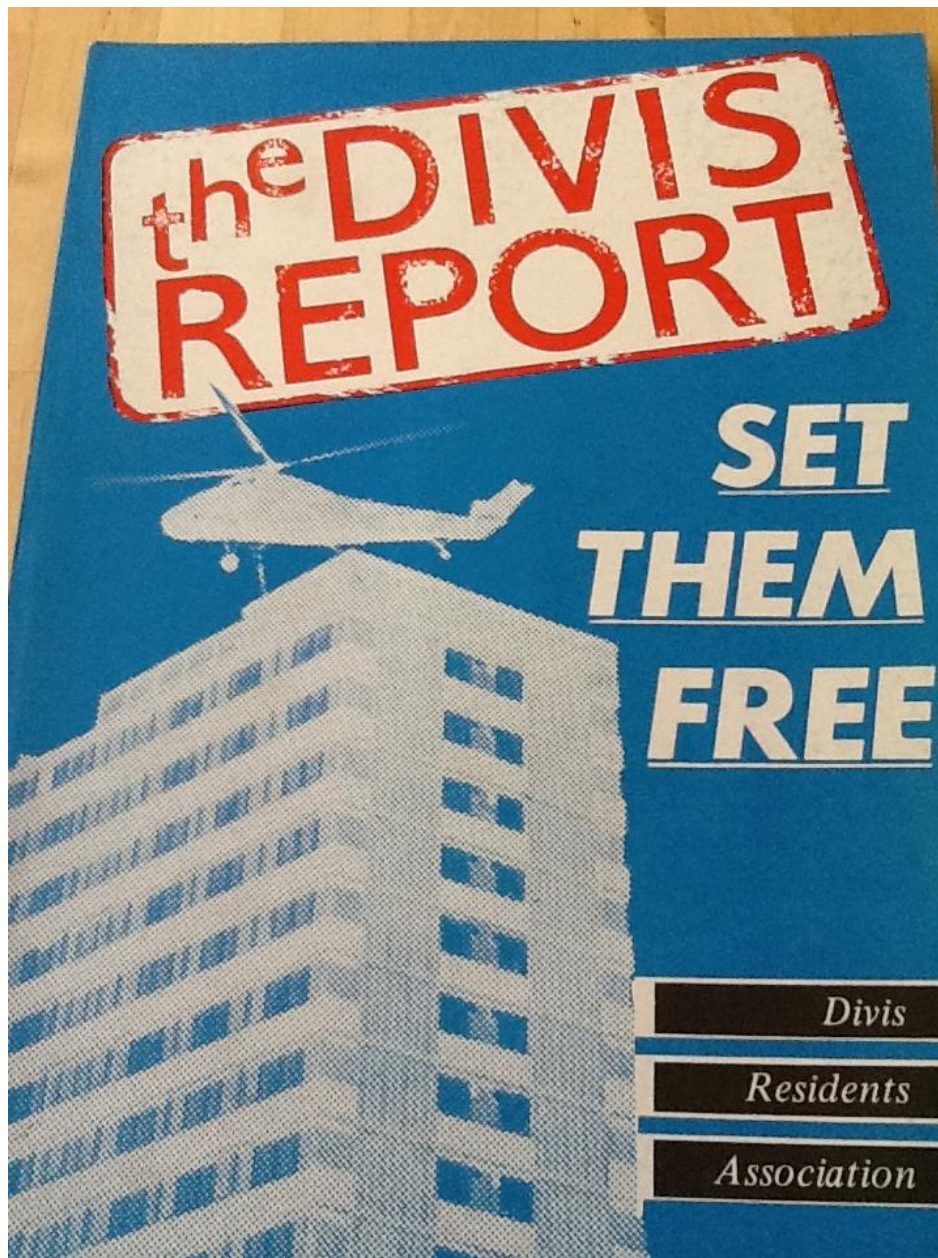


Figure 78. The front cover of the final Divis report depicting a British Army helicopter resupplying the Army observation post atop the Tower. The observation or spy post occupied the roof in the 1970s and by the 1980s was expanded to include the top two floors (18+19) of the tower.

The TCPA also refer to 'accepting the report of our Mobile Planning Unit' therefore meaning Brian Anson and Mike Beazley. Therefore, we might reasonably conclude that much of this

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<sup>705</sup> TCPA, Op cit., p.5

draft report was authored by these two individuals the visit to Divis of David Hall undoubtedly cemented in the minds of the TCPA Executive Committee that Divis was unsalvageable, and they acknowledge in their report they were rather “late to the party” on this, with the Divis residents concluding as early as 1974 that this was the case.<sup>706</sup>

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<sup>706</sup> TCPA, Op cit., p.6



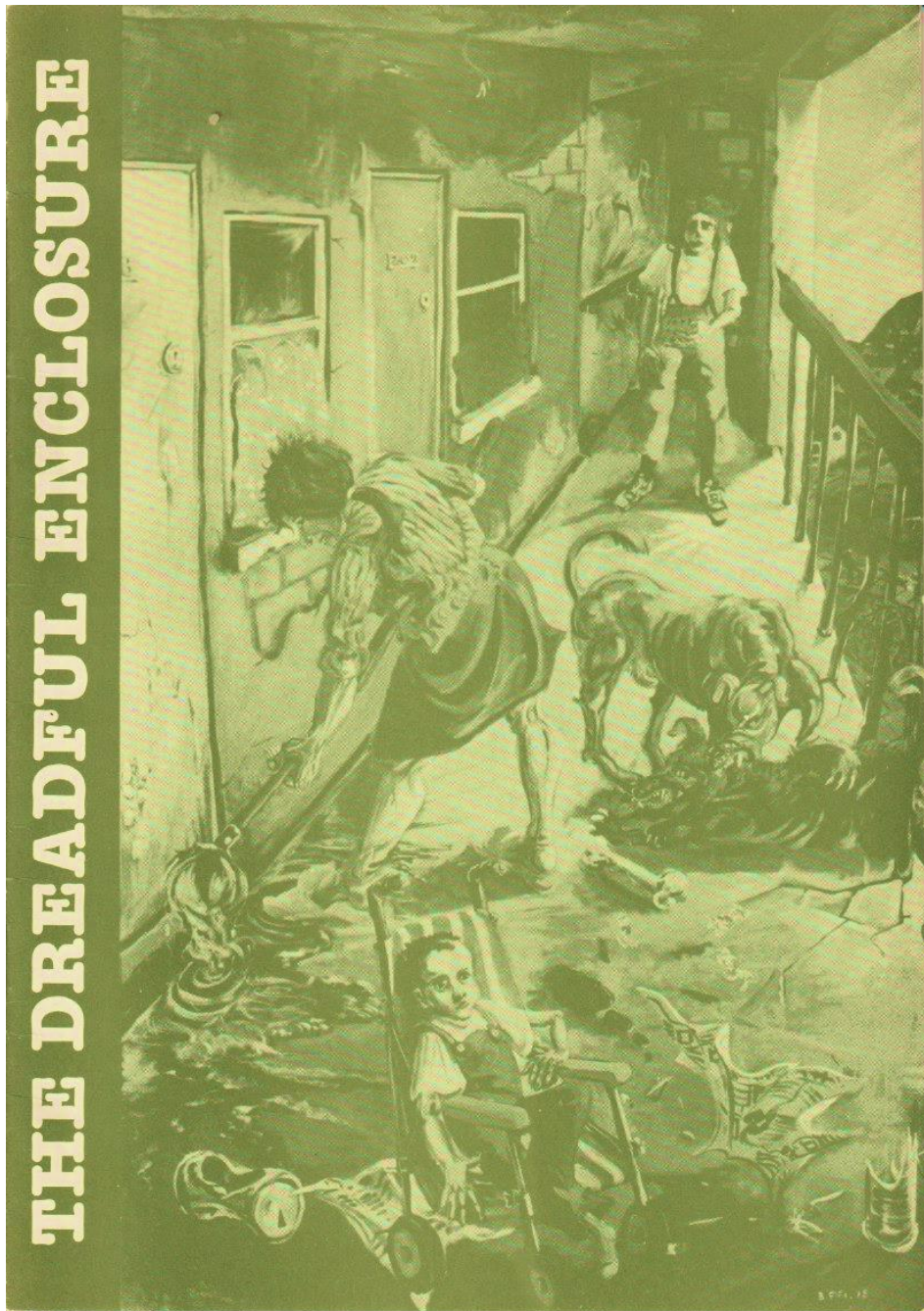


Figure 79. The front cover of the catalogue which accompanied TCPA exhibition, 'The Dreadful Enclosure', November 1985.

The Dreadful Enclosure Exhibition, The Town & Country Planning Association, Carlton House Terrace, London, 25<sup>th</sup> November 1985.

The exhibition that resulted from the report and the ARCs work in Divis is seemingly all but lost. No online resources hold any information about the exhibition and except for some



conference proceedings from 1986 virtually no published material exists demonstrating this exhibition ever took place or the nature of the exhibition.

When I interviewed Peter Moloney who recalled that:

'... we [ARC] developed this big exhibition; 8x4 boards, about 20 or 30 of them; ... it was decided that an exhibition about Divis in London would be quite, in one sense, pointless without having the residents... [laughs]... as part of the exhibition. So, we were able to bring over 20... they were poor people, although very clever.'<sup>707</sup>

It is also stated in a news article in the *Architects' Journal* from January 1986 that the exhibition was staged at the TCPA 'in November'<sup>708</sup>, so we can assume this is November 1985. Additionally, an article by Anson and Moloney from *The Architects' Journal* in July 1986 refers to the TCPA mounting: '... a major exhibition in London...'<sup>709</sup> in 1985, before referring the exhibition travelling in 1985/86.

The exhibition was designed to reveal to visitors the horrific circumstances in which the people in Divis were living. The exhibition being staged in London, on Carlton House Terrace literally minutes' walk from Whitehall, Westminster, and Buckingham Palace; was a conscious choice to bring Divis to the attention of those at the seat of British power. The tactics for the exhibition are detailed in Anson's record of a meeting (see figure 38). The meeting is dated 19<sup>th</sup> November 1985, a Tuesday. From this we can conclude that the exhibition opened on the following Monday, 25<sup>th</sup> November, as the notes say that they must put the exhibition up 'that weekend' meaning 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> November.

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<sup>707</sup> Peter Moloney, in conversation with the author, Greenwich, London, 27<sup>th</sup> June 2013

<sup>708</sup> Architects' Journal, the. "DOE ATTACKS TCPA STAND ON DIVIS." *The Architects' Journal*, 183, no. 4 (Jan 22, 1986): 24.

<sup>709</sup> Anson, Brian, Moloney, Peter, Fordyce, Paul, and Walker, Lewis. "CITY UNDER SIEGE." *The Architects' Journal*, 184, no. 28 (Jul 09, 1986): 35-38.

Divis Meeting. 19. November 1985

Note: This will be the last meeting; it is our last chance to tie up all the arrangements. I have seen the finished artwork and it's very powerful. I won't know till later in the week whether it will be ready to assemble (rehearsal) on Saturday or Sunday. We can either leave ourselves ready for either day or agree to the Sunday - but we MUST assemble it this weekend. Apart from this the arrangements are precise and will have to be co-ordinated.

WEEKEND: Assemble in Bradshaw Room and also in Meeting Room if possible. Then disassemble.

MON. 5pm. Assemble permanently in Bradshaw Room.  
Mount the Ad-hoc exhibition in Meeting Room.

WED. 6pm. Disassemble exhibition and assemble immediately in Meeting Room.

We will also need a team for cleaning up after the reception on Tuesday night.

.....  
Agenda.

1. Security.
2. Written programme for exhibition. Any other sheets (Pink one)
3. Bookstall.
4. Using the artwork in Meeting Room.
5. Press articles (to date)
6. Accommodation for Divis group. *(2 To accommodate)*  
All those helping MUST be here on Monday evening.
7. Hosting/Welcoming etc. (Mainly TCPA)  
Catering.
8. Filming or photographing the event.
9. Meal on Wed.?
10. Latest on who's coming etc.
11. Contract with Federation of Artists.

I'm sure I've missed things out...but this meeting is to try to see we have everything organised as far as possible.

Brian.

Figure 80. Meeting notes written by Brian Anson.

No details are given in the meeting notes (see figure 67) of the nature of the artwork beyond Anson saying they were 'very powerful'. Figures 68-80 show each page of the original copy of the exhibition catalogue given to me by Peter Moloney.

We can see in the following figures that this document shows some of the contents of the exhibition, but the catalogue does not make clear, exactly what did and did not appear in the exhibition. I will take some time to examine this document here to provide us with as comprehensive an assessment of the exhibition as it possible today.

Starting with page 2, which gives us a simple timeline of the history of Divis and provides us with the origins of the name the Pound Lonely, which helps contextualise the name in another *Architects' Journal* article which I will look at in more detail later in this chapter.

Page 3 sets out the many architectural and structural problems of Divis as discussed previously in this thesis.

Page 4 looks in more detail at the maintenance and management issues created, or not addressed by, the NIHE blamed “The Troubles” and consequently the people of Divis as Nationalists and supporters of an Island of Ireland free from British rule, for their own plight. The authors go on to say ‘But worse still was the feeling of betrayal-of having been let down by their leaders-of being condemned to live out the rest of their lives in an environment that was fast deteriorating into a squalid slum.’<sup>710</sup>

Pages 5 and 6 have images and a poem of life in Divis, and page 7 a photo of protestors for the DRA, all undated.

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<sup>710</sup> Divis Residents Association, *The Dreadful Enclosure*, p.4

# THE POUND LONEY

The original site of the Divis Complex and the surrounding area was known and is still remembered fondly as the Pound Loney. The name is thought to be derived from the word "lonn" meaning Irish for "swift water" because of a stream running through the area and the evidence being that at the junction of Pound Street and Barrack Street an enclosed plot of land had been used as a cattle and dog pound.

In the years preceding 1840 Catholics had been congregating in the Pound. This stemmed from the first Catholic settlement in Belfast which developed outside the city walls. (Catholics were not allowed within the walls). The first Catholic Church in Belfast was built in the Pound, and the Falls Road, which terminated in the Pound, was the main road into the city from the rural west along which Catholics fleeing from the famine would come.

## The Linen Mills

In 1861, the population of the Falls Road had increased from 4,000 in 1812 to 40,000.

*"This dramatic increase which particularly affected the Loney area was due to a number of factors, not least the development of the linen industry and the subsequent rise and growth of industrial Belfast.*

*—By 1861, the streets of the old Pound Loney were built. Mill St. was renamed Divis St. and new streets had appeared between Cullingtree Road, Milford St. and Pound St.*

*—Mills lined the right hand side of the Falls Road and the road itself was developed as a main route for traffic bringing raw and finished material to and from the mills".*

**(Gerry Adams M.P. 'Falls Memories').**

The mills were, for the people of the Pound Loney, a lifeline providing work and an income for the many families in the area for whom the women were the breadwinners, right up to the decline of the linen industry after the second World War.

The homes of the workers were those which were originally built during the growth of the mills in the mid-19th century. Tiny, cramped two-ups, two-downs without sanitation were the houses for as many as 12-15 people.

## Community Spirit

Much of the life of the Loney revolved around the mills and children would watch and wait for the great black wave of women flowing arm-in-arm out of their gates in the evenings once the siren blew. Thus, the community worked together, lived together and struggled to survive together, forging a strong bond of unity and warmth that appalling working conditions and abject poverty only served to strengthen.

Like many working-class communities, the centre of activity was the corner shop where the people not only bought their meagre provisions, usually "on tick" but where women met to talk, swap news and discuss the births, deaths and marriages in the area. Norah's, Humpy John's and Alex's were all such focuses for the Pound Loney and its people.

Whilst children played on the streets, swinging on lamp posts, conducting games of handball against the gable wall and hopscotch on the paving stones, they were rarely at risk, as they could be "kept an eye to" by neighbours and friends whose houses looked directly on to the streets.

A far cry from the endless view of concrete and anonymous windows of Divis. The planners may have thought they were doing the people a favour providing them with the material necessities of modern living—hot water, bathrooms, indoor toilets—but they were successfully destroying a community, and building the foundation for an eruption of social and environmental ills that would cause years of misery and hardship for thousands.

Figure 81. The Dreadful Enclosure, p2.



# THE NEED FOR A TEN.

Divis Flats were officially opened in May 1968. The new flats replaced the old Pound Loney district of West Belfast, an area of 19th century sub-standard housing, but an area in which there were strong neighbourhood ties and a great feeling of community.

## Utopia

The first people to be transferred from the old back-to-backs were delighted with what they found in their new homes. For the first time in their lives they had hot and cold running water, indoor toilets and a bathroom of their own. A Belfast newspaper could quote them as saying "*It should have happened 20 years ago*" and again "*it's the best thing that has ever happened to us*". (Belfast Telegraph, May 24th 1968).

## Nightmare

Yet five years later the Lower Falls Residents Association was to launch a campaign which has lasted to the present day and which has been taken up by every tenants group ever associated with the problems of Divis Flats. A campaign which calls for the total demolition of the Divis Flats complex and the re-housing of its residents in conventional terrace houses. What had happened to turn the planners' Utopia into a residents' nightmare?

Many reasons have been advanced for the failure of Divis Flats. There are the structural defects in the construction of the flats themselves. There are the social problems of vandalism and lack of opportunity. There is the neglect of a paternalistic housing Authority **that has consistently failed** to have meaningful consultation with its own tenants and there is an added difficulty brought about by the civil unrest that has become a feature Northern Irish society over the past sixteen years.

## The Dreadful Enclosure

However, the greatest single factor to influence the residents in their calls for total demolition has been their feeling of hopelessness, of being trapped in Divis. The thought of having to spend the rest of one's

life in what has been described by one sociologist as a 'Dreadful Enclosure' and of not being able to do anything about it.

Unlike other housing authorities, who tend to look on places like Divis as short stay accommodation where tenants can look forward to being re-housed within a few years; the Northern Ireland Housing Executive have always treated Divis as permanent housing and have only been willing to transfer tenants who could prove a need for priority treatment. Little wonder then that 93.4% of Divis residents see demolition as their only acceptable solution (Divis Study Group Survey 1982).

Vandalism which had been practically unknown in the Pound Loney became a way of life for many young people in the new environment of Divis Flats and yet it would be wrong to say that living in Divis caused people to act in an anti-social manner; if that were the case then everyone in Divis would have become a vandal. What Divis did do was to provide an environment in which vandalism could go unchecked. An environment in which a relatively small number of uncaring people could make it difficult for the many.

Not only did Divis have its native vandals but due to its sheer size, its many entrances and its maze-like design it has always attracted a fair share of outsiders as well.

## Dampness

One of the main flaws in Divis Flats arose from the rigid application, by the Government, of the cost yardstick which resulted in Divis being built with poor standards of heating, ventilation and insulation, all factors which were to manifest themselves in severe problems of dampness brought about by condensation. People who have been glad to leave homes riddled with rising damp now found themselves victims of another form of dampness only this time they were told by their landlords that the dampness was their own fault: because they cooked too much or even in some cases because they breathed.

Figure 82. The Dreadful Enclosure, p.3



# ANTS ORGANISATION

## Vested Interests

Both the clergy and local politicians had a vested interest in retaining a high population density in the Pound Loney area. One to support church activities and the other to prevent constituency boundary changes. Their insistence that the new development must rehouse everyone already living in the area resulted in a density of 180 people per acre. This means that almost all the land was built on, and few open spaces were left for recreation.

The masking effect of the Northern Ireland "troubles" in many ways obscured what was happening in Divis, but more particularly provided housing management with the perfect excuse for doing nothing.

True, they were operating against a background of civil unrest in which the British Army had imposed a state of undeclared martial law and were occupying the flats like an invading force, (29% of all flats were squatted in by people who had been forced to flee from other parts of the city to the comparative safety of Divis).

However, when the lifts broke down and were not repaired or when communal areas became vandalised the stock answer of the Housing Executive was that these things were all due to the "troubles" and would all disappear with the re-introduction of "good housing management practice". What the Housing Executive failed to recognise was that similar flat developments to Divis, in America and in the rest of the United Kingdom were experiencing the same problems. While housing authorities throughout the United States and the U.K. were searching for solutions to the problems of vandalism, poor rubbish disposal and the growing apathy of tenants the housing authorities in Belfast were content to sit back and do nothing in the erroneous belief that everything would go back to normal once the "troubles" were over.

## Services

By 1972, when the Lower Falls Residents Association was formed, not one of the ten

lifts in the Divis Complex was working. There was no street lighting. No lighting on any of the complex's many staircases or balconies. No cleaning had been carried out to any of the public areas of the flats for over two years and no repairs other than those necessary to isolate dangerous services had been carried out since the Main Contractors had left the site over twelve months previously. Housing Officers seldom if ever visited the complex.

## Betrayal

The people, who a few years previously, had moved into Divis with such high hopes now found themselves isolated within their own flats. Often afraid to venture outside their front door after dark and having to put up with damp conditions and an almost complete lack of services.

But worse still was the feeling of betrayal—of having been let down by their leaders—of being condemned to live out the rest of their lives in an environment that was fast deteriorating into a squalid slum.

During the early seventies the more able and better off started to move out of Divis. In a report commissioned by the Housing Executive it was stated: "*We believe that if it were not for the present polarization of the community there would be an uncontrollable exit of residents from the complex.*" (Deck access blocks in the Lower Falls—a report by M & D Consultants).

## Demand for Demolition

It is hardly surprising that when the Lower Falls Residents Association held their first Annual General Meeting in 1973 that the only resolution passed at the meeting was one calling for the total demolition of the Divis Complex. A demand that has, in the twelve years since then, been endorsed many times. It is true to say that in the intervening period, although the committees have changed and the personalities have changed, the only mandate that any representative group from the Divis Flats has ever had has been a demand for the total demolition of Divis.

Figure 83. The Dreadful Enclosure, p.4





## IF HE WAS LIV THIS WUD OF

BY SANDRA

They've knocked my wee kitchen house down  
And dumped me in this oul flat  
Oh they think they're doing ye a favour  
Well believe you me they're nat

They don't give a damn about yer feelings  
They just send ye a letter til say  
Yer in the re-development  
So get packing yer on yer way

And who am I til argie  
For I suppose when all's said and done  
Til them it's just bricks and mortar  
Til me it was my wee home

Seventy years I was in it  
Lord we'd some quare oul times  
It's as well ya can't knock down memories  
At least they'll always be mine

I had it like a wee palace  
My windy sill was rubbed every day  
Aggie Murry next door used til swear  
I'd rub the bloody thing away

Oh I had the best of neighbours  
Like one big family we were  
Ach I never see a one of them ni  
For they're scatterd here and there

Sure ya wudn't see a sinner round here  
I can't even go out til the door  
Y'know til have a wee yarn wi somebody  
For they don't bother like that no more



Figure 84. The Dreadful Enclosure, p.5



# IVING THE DAY ' KILLED HIM

A MARSHALL



D'ya see in the days when I worked in the Mill  
There was none of this oul carry on  
Everybody had time for each other  
And at least then ya felt ya belonged

And I cud roar at my ones  
They'll say, "Ach Ma you're just an oul moan",  
Jasis the only time I see themmins  
Is whenever they're lukkin a loan

If my Alfie was living this wud of killed him  
Oh he wudn't of liked this at all  
For her always loved thon wee house of ours  
Aye it's a blessing he got the call

Well I suppose there's one thing that's handy  
Like especially on a coul winter's night  
No more getting myself happed up  
Ta go til the yard for a shite

And all these fancy names yiv ta use  
Oh ya daren't say the scullery no more  
And it's nat the kitchen it's the living room  
And a fire with a bloody door

And nobody puts blinds on their windys ni  
It's this fancy net curtain instead  
The only net I ever had  
Was the one I put on ma head

Ah content yerself Maggie I keep saying til myself  
And enjoy it while ya can  
D'yknow if I passed away the marra  
I wudn't give a damn



Figure 85. The Dreadful Enclosure, p.6



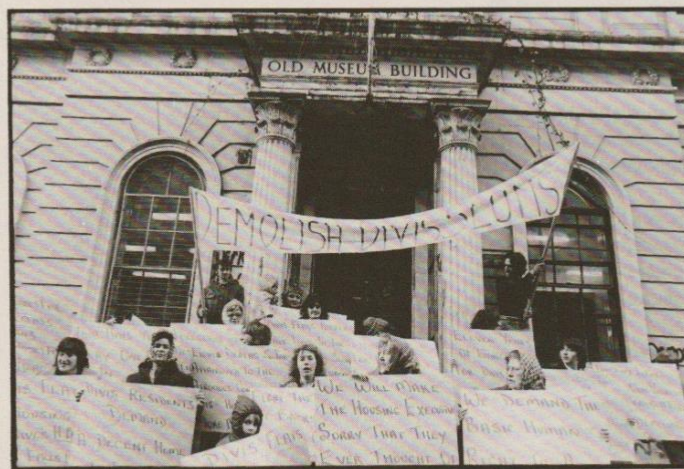


Figure 86. The Dreadful Enclosure, p.7

# DIVIS DEMOLITION COMMITTEE

For a few years in the late seventies, no residents' committee operated. The Lower Falls Residents Association had tried for years and made no progress despite their well-organised and concerted efforts.

People still wanted more than ever the demolition of the complex and it was out of sheer frustration and desperation that the Divis Demolition Committee was formed in 1979. There have been many opinions put forward on the rights and wrongs of the DDC and it has been the subject of much debate, but no-one can dispute the fact that they were responsible for bringing Divis back to the public attention and the headlines of the media. They were also among the most representative of any committee established, with around 40 people from the complex actively involved in its meetings and activities, and many other residents felt for the first time that demolition was a viable reality.

It was the methods of the DDC which brought them into conflict with the N.I. Housing Executive, N.I. Office and various politicians. The DDC believed that only a more militant campaign would force the British Government into demolishing the flats. Their idea was simple but effective: when someone moved out of a flat the DDC would prevent it from being re-let by completely wrecking the interior of the flat. They believed that over a gradual period they would be able to leave so many individual flats unusable, that demolition would be the only option.

Alongside these activities, they launched a massive publicity campaign to highlight the conditions of the complex and their reasons for taking such drastic action. Despite the illegality of their tactics, many people were sympathetic to their cause, but it had also served to make the Housing Executive even more hostile to their demand and moves were afoot to destroy the committee. The R. U. C. raided their offices and removed files naming the leading members of the committee who were subsequently arrested. The three spokesmen were held at Castlereagh Interrogation Centre for 3 days and then charged with causing malicious damage amounting to £28,000.

## Vindication

At the trial, the committee members pleaded guilty and explained why they felt it necessary to take such action and a verdict was delayed until the afternoon. The Housing Executive was so confident of the outcome that they did not find it necessary to remain in court for the judgement. They should have stayed. The judge, to the great surprise of all present, found the DDC guilty as charged but then proceeded to give them only a nominal fine and used the occasion to criticise the Housing Executive: *"It is terrible that, in 1981, I have to sit in a court in Northern Ireland and listen to such a state of affairs. Something should be done about Divis and soon"*. **Judge Doyle, 1981.**

Figure 87. The Dreadful Enclosure, p.8

Page 8 (see figure 74, above) begins to describe the campaign by the residents to have the Divis Flats demolished, describing the founding of the Divis Demolition Committee (DDC):

'...it was out of sheer frustration and desperation that the Divis Demolition Committee was formed in 1979. There have been many opinions put forward on the rights and wrongs of the DDC and it has been the subject of much debate, but no-one can dispute the fact that they were responsible for bringing Divis back to the public attention and the headlines of the media.'<sup>711</sup>

The controversial tactics of the DDC are described slightly further down the page, and the militancy would inevitably have upset the NIHE and the Northern Ireland Office, which was undoubtedly their primary aim.

'Their idea was simple but effective: when someone moved out of a flat the DDC would prevent it from being re-let by completely wrecking the interior of the flat. They believed that over a gradual period they would be able to leave so many individual flats unusable, that demolition would be the only option.'<sup>712</sup>

Wrecking flats would undoubtedly have been very effective in preventing Divis being occupied, if the NIHE was unwilling to spend money to maintain the Flats (due to The Troubles) we must assume they would similarly be unwilling to refurbish a flat wrecked in such circumstances. Ironically in the 1969 local council bailiffs used the same tactics to prevent empty properties being used by squatters, particular in Wanstead, London; following the campaigns of the London Squatters Campaign.<sup>713</sup> The leaders of the DDC

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<sup>711</sup> Divis Residents Association, Op cit., p.8

<sup>712</sup> *ibid*

<sup>713</sup> May Day Rooms, the. (2019) 'Squatting Is Part of the Housing Movement: Practical Squatting Histories from 1968 to 2019'. *maydayrooms.org*, [maydayrooms.org/squatting-is-part-of-the-housing-movement](https://maydayrooms.org/squatting-is-part-of-the-housing-movement) [Accessed 29th January 2022]

were arrested by the RUC and taken to trial where they pleaded guilty, to everyone's surprise however Judge Doyle<sup>714</sup>, whilst accepting the defendants guilty pleas '...but then proceeded to give them only a nominal fine and used the occasion to criticise the Housing Executive [saying]: "It is terrible that, in 1981, I have to sit in a court in Northern Ireland and listen to such a state of affairs. Something should be done about Divis and soon."'<sup>715</sup>

By November 1983 a familiar tactic from ARC's heyday in the late-seventies emerged '...to issue the 'Divis Bulletin'. This is a community newspaper delivered to the residents on a monthly basis and also available to other interested groups.'<sup>716</sup> Whilst I have been unable to find copies of the Divis Bulletin in any publicly accessible archives we can presume that they follow the model set up by the ARC with *The Wild Duck*, or the *Colne Valley News*. But we might presume that with Anson and Moloney being so key in the Divis campaign that they would have brought some of their ARC style and experience to this community newspaper.

By page 10 the DRA argument is wrapping up, with the final lines on this page reading:

'What more can be expected from this concrete prison? Total demolition is the only solution.

### **Mandate**

The Divis Residents Association is committed to preventing any attempt at refurbishing and will accept only the concession to the mandate given them by the people of Divis—**Demolition.**' [original emphasis]

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<sup>714</sup> Whilst unclear this may be County Court Judge William Doyle who was assassinated by the IRA in 1983 for "working with the enemy". (Irish News, 2018)

<sup>715</sup> Divis Residents Association, Op cit., p.8

<sup>716</sup> *ibid* p.9



# A NEW COMMITTEE

November 1983 saw a new committee, elected to the Divis Residents Association. At the first meeting of the new committee the main topic of discussion was the total demolition of Divis Flats and the organisation of a campaign that would help us to achieve this goal.

We realised that it would take a long time to force the British Government to concede to demolition and every means at our disposal would have to be used in that campaign. Our first priority was to form a strong committee with the backing of the Divis people, and one of the initial steps we took to ensure that all the residents of Divis were kept informed with everything the new committee was doing, was to issue the 'Divis Bulletin'. This is a community newspaper delivered to the residents on a monthly basis and also available to other interested groups.

## The new DRA meets the NIHE

On the 7th February 1984 we held our first meeting with the NI Housing Executive, who were represented by Mr Sean Gallagher. We heard from him that the planned demolition of the Whitehall and Farset blocks would go ahead and that the Housing Executive had recommended that the Pound and St Brendan's blocks also be demolished but the minister of housing had rejected this proposal. Mr Gallagher then laid down the Housing Executive proposals for vertical isolation in the complex which means taking the links that connect the blocks away, breaking up the complex into three units, and the refurbishment of the Milford block. It is proposed that £11,000-£12,000 be spent on each unit in this block and with sixty-two flats the total cost would be approx £744,000. The plans were to lower the density of living accommodation to mostly one and two bedroomed flats for old people, young couples and single tenants. There

would be a garden, car-park, new lift system, front doors controlled from the flats, plastic doors at each end of the balcony to reduce noise levels, a caretaker to ensure that only tenants gained access and the whole block would have a fence around it.

The NIHE had still refused to learn from their original mistake of allowing Divis Flats to be maintained: they now intend to throw good money after bad on a refurbishing scheme which the people do not want. We continue to extend our invitation to the planners, architects, housing ministers, Housing Executive and DoE to take up residence in the complex because that is the only way they will ever fully comprehend the problems the Divis community face.

## Asbestos

The next issue we discussed was the problem of asbestos—we wanted to ensure that the contractor employed to remove the asbestos during the demolition was licensed to do so. Our fears were founded due to an experience earlier in the year, when workmen removed asbestos panels from all the walkway ceilings—no safety regulations were adhered to and no consideration given to local residents. Workmen themselves had no protection, they were walking up the balconies smashing panels with hammers and the walkways were completely littered with broken asbestos. At that time no-one on the Residents Association Committee had any idea of the danger involved. When it came to the demolition of the Whitehall and Farset blocks we were determined that people properly trained in the removal of asbestos would be used. When it actually came to the demolition very little was done to protect the safety of residents yet again. The only protection given was to the men removing the deadly material—they were issued with 'space suits'. Broken asbestos lay all around the complex, skips full of the

# DIVIS RESIDENTS

Figure 88. The Dreadful Enclosure, p.9



stuff were left hanging from a crane and the Housing Executive tried to convince us that safety standards were met. We now know differently and in any future demolition we will make sure that the situation never recurs.

### **Divis Joint Development Committee**

The Divis Residents Association then mounted a publicity campaign to raise the public's awareness of conditions in Divis. We also saw a need for the community to organise and come together and this resulted in the founding of the Divis Joint Development Committee—an umbrella organisation made up from members of five community projects in the complex and representatives from Statutory Agencies to co-ordinate activities and do the necessary administration and fund raising for its member groups.

This group has been of enormous assistance to the Residents Association and a valuable forum to discuss strategy and establish alternative methods of community control and self-help.

At this time also, small estates started developing around Divis and a few residents of Divis were allocated houses in these estates. This made the need for demolition stronger than ever before. Despite being only fifty yards from Divis Flats the difference is unbelievable, a great community spirit and pride reminiscent of the old 'Pound Loney' has taken over again, in the new developments.

Meanwhile work is still continuing in the complex with the Divis Environmental Health Project. This is a project undertaken to establish a relationship between conditions in Divis and the detrimental effect it has on the mental and physical well-being

of its inhabitants. It is hoped this project will be completed in early 1986.

### **Stigma**

One of the biggest problems faced by residents of the complex is the attitude of those outside Divis towards them and the stigma attached to living in the complex. When applying for jobs, it is hard enough if you come from West Belfast to be successful but if you come from Divis Flats it is many times more difficult and no amount of refurbishing this complex would ever remove that stigma. There are actually people living on the Falls Road, close to Divis, who have never been in the complex and at the very mention of where you live they are horrified.

Along with the intolerable living conditions, there is approx 85% unemployment, no shopping facilities, no recreation facilities for OAP's or young children, a bad repair service and little or no co-operation from the NI Housing Executive or any other Government agency—what community activity there is, has been created by the people themselves.

The hostile environment and anonymity which characterizes Divis has given rise to extensive social problems.

Over the past few years joy-riding has been a blight on our community, petty crime is rampant and vandalism is a major problem. What more can be expected from this concrete prison? Total demolition is the only solution.

### **Mandate**

The Divis Residents Association is committed to preventing any attempt at refurbishing and will accept only the concession to the mandate given them by the people of Divis—**Demolition.**

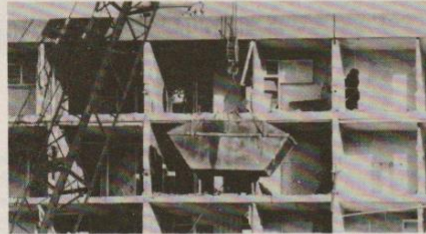
Divis Residents Association

# **ASSOCIATION 1983.**

Figure 89. The Dreadful Enclosure, p.10



# SOME SUCCESS OCCURS



It would appear on the surface that the residents campaign for demolition has had a degree of success with the demolition of two blocks in 1984, those of Whitehall and Farset. Yet, the residents found themselves questioning whether or not it was as the result of pressure from their campaign and partial recognition of their wishes that the demolition was to go ahead. The doubts arose over the particular two blocks chosen for demolition. They were not the oldest blocks nor were they, in comparison to others in the estate, in the worst condition; although once demolition had been decided, the Housing Executive allowed them to deteriorate rapidly, despite the fact that tenants would have to remain there for 2-3 years before they could be rehoused.

## **Whose Demand?**

It transpired that the Whitehall Block would be seriously affected by the construction of the new motorway link taking place less than 100 yds behind it. Much more ominous reasons were felt to be behind the decision to demolish Farset. The residents believe the decision was influenced by the N.I. Office for defence purposes.

The highly-developed surveillance equipment on the roof of the Divis Tower Block provides a birds-eye view of the entire complex and surrounding area, except for the Farset Block because of the angle at which it stood in relation to the tower.

Nevertheless, the residents welcomed any development towards demolition and continued to campaign for the remainder of the complex to have the same fate, in particular St. Brendan's and Pound which were by far in the worst condition and would be severely affected by the demolition of the two blocks with which they were directly connected via links and walkways.

## **Death-traps**

The two blocks were very gradually vacated and left lying vacant for almost a year. Thus they were easy prey for vandals, a death-trap for children and an attractive proposition for scavengers who ripped out all saleable construction materials, aluminium, copper etc. Meanwhile, the Housing Executive who knew of the presence of asbestos throughout the structures allowed it to be accessible and it was not until the residents association threatened various legal and public action that a cordon was drawn around the vacant blocks.

## **Who Pays?**

The sight of two large blocks which had deteriorated into nothing more than shells surrounded by debris in the midst of the complex further served to create an atmosphere and environment of squalor and dereliction.

The entire procedure and operation was characterised by a complete disregard for the well-being of the complex's inhabitants and the neglect of responsibilities to them. Success may be measured in the absence of two blocks in the complex but what of the price that residents have had to pay in hazards to health and personal safety?

Figure 90. The Dreadful Enclosure, p.11



There are practical and moral reasons for the total demolition of the Divis Flats Complex which fully justify the expense of such an operation. It is the considered opinion of a wide-ranging number of experts from Alice Coleman of the Land Research Unit, Kings College, to members and Staff of the London Hazards Centre and Shelter that the estate is irredeemable; but it is the belief and the experiences of those forced to live within its confines whose voices are the most convincing and the most haunting.

### **Brutality**

No amount of cosmetic renovation or rehabilitation will soften the harshness that is Divis or compensate those who have survived its brutality. An entire generation has now been brought up in Divis Flats and their successors can already be seen toddling around its barren walkways and refuse-strewn stairs. Some of them have fallen over its balconies, another down a gaping open rubbish chute and yet another lost its life when it tumbled into an open sewer drain. Those that remain can with good reason be termed survivors.

### **Problems**

Recently, a pest control inspector from City Hall called out to investigate complaints in a top storey flat, described the antics and size of the rat population behind the walls and under the floors of the dwelling as similar to

a Kentucky Derby. The response of tenants is to keep dogs in an attempt to keep the rat populace at bay, consequently the dogs pose other problems in the confined spaces of a system-built estate, the communal balconies and walkways are strewn with their faeces and urine.

Dampness, first reported 6 months after residents moved into the newly-built flats continues to issue forth fungi and mushrooms in bedrooms, leaves clothes green and walls black. Such conditions have played havoc with the health of householders, in particular the very young children. The inadequate sewage disposal system is characterized by regular regurgitations resulting in flooded bathrooms and periodic saturation of entire households. Families have lost the whole of their house contents either from flooding or in an effort to rid their homes of the stench it leaves in its wake.

### **No Problem?**

The Housing Executive tells us that the large quantities of asbestos used in the construction of the complex and present in no fewer than five areas of each individual flat will do us no harm if undisturbed. Yet, their own workmen rip it out and break it up when making repairs without any concern for themselves or tenants. During the demolition of two blocks, vast amounts were

# TOTAL DEMOLITION IS THE GOAL

Figure 91. The Dreadful Enclosure, p.12



removed without proper regard to safety regulations and the site left strewn with large pieces of the materials which today, a year later, can still be seen scattered over a wide area of the complex.

The asbestos in households was never identified by the Housing Executive so unsuspecting tenants have drilled holes and hammered nails into asbestos panelling in their own homes.

Children wander aimlessly along its miles of walkways, seeking a space to play, teenagers use its darkened stairways and derelict flats as convenient drinking dens and hideaways for glue-sniffing sessions.

### **Purgatory**

Only demolition can obliterate the mess that is Divis. After 16 years these people have done their purgatory on earth and deserve their reward and their right to decent housing and a safe place for their children to live and play.

### **Imprisoned Population**

The authorities would have us believe that Divis is a breeding ground for terrorists—but who are the terrorized? If not the people who live there in such conditions. Constant surveillance, raids, the stopping and searching of residents on a whim by members of the continuous patrols of soldiers or police who walk the balconies, are all used effectively to suppress any physical

manifestation of insurrection, but also to compound the impression that Divis is a prison, that its tenants are the prisoners and as such are there to be punished, not accommodated.

### **The Longest Campaign**

The residents of Divis have had to watch as other estates have been given dates for demolition, watched as other tenants groups have been successful in having their communities rehoused. Yet Divis remains, despite having waged the longest campaign of any housing group in N. Ireland. Since 1974, the tenants of the flats have been organising and canvassing support for their demands. Public sympathy is very much on the side of the residents and more and more public figures and individuals with an interest in housing and environmental health issues have lent their support to the campaign.

They, like the tenants of the flats have recognised that only total demolition is the answer, that any genuine attempt to make all the extensive necessary repairs and renovations would prove so expensive that rehousing would prove the more feasible and financially viable alternative.

It would appear that for the Department of Environment to concede to demolition would be tantamount to admitting culpability for the mistake that Divis is and the problems it has spawned.

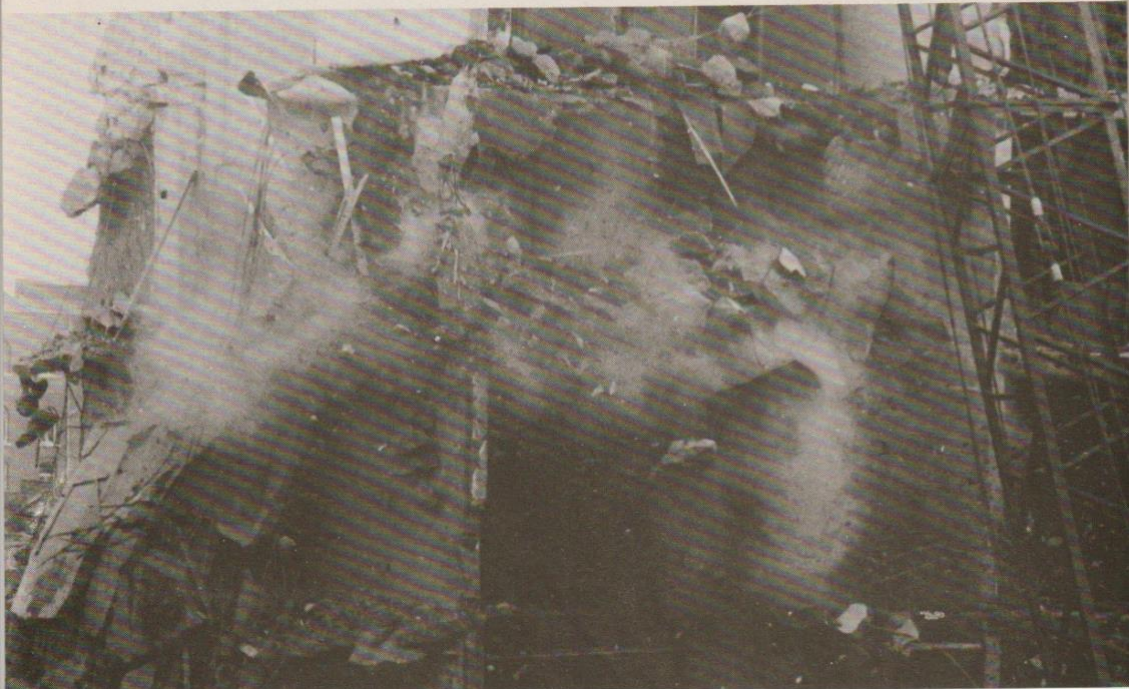


Figure 92. The Dreadful Enclosure, p.13

## THANKS

The people of Divis and the **Divis Residents Association** would like to take this opportunity to thank the **Town and Country Planning Association** for the efforts which they have taken to support and promote their demand for demolition of the Divis Flats Complex. Also, for lending us both the facilities and staff to make the Divis Exhibition possible.

Many others contributed to make this exhibition possible, among them,

**George Mills**  
**Cedric Price**  
**Rob Thompson**  
**Louis Hellman**  
**The Architects Journal**  
**Arthur Gibney**  
**Dennis Skinner M.P.**  
**Barry Cooper**  
**The Welsh Socialist-Republican Clubs**  
**Joseph Rowntree Social Services Trust**  
**Community Technical Aid (Manchester)**  
**Roger Foreman Shelter**  
**Phil Easton**  
**Jermey Corbyn M.P.**  
**Steve Bundred**  
**Richard Wall**  
**The Recketts Trust**  
**Norman Foster Associates**  
**London Hazards Centre**

Those who created the exhibition are,

**Brian Anson, Peter Moloney, Paul Fordyce, Lewis Walker, Alan Gallery, Roslyn Perkins, John McQuillan, Ronald Scott, Mike Beazley, Sally Scarlett, David Boyle, Phil Easton, Christine Edgerton, Rose Tanner, Audree Johnson, Marie Mulholland—and the people of Divis**

Design and lay-out of exhibition by  
**Anthony Michael**

Photographs courtesy of:  
**Falls Community Council**  
**Belfast Exposed**  
**Joanne O'Brien/Format**  
**John Kelly/Proamfoto**  
**Sean McCaffrey**  
**Peter McGuinness**

Figure 93. The Dreadful Enclosure, p.14

The residents would get their wish in that two small blocks named Whitehall and Farset (see figure 64) would be demolished in 1984. Although on page 10 of the catalogue the DRA express suspicion this was for reasons related to security and road building,<sup>717</sup> rather than any sign of the NIHE responding to the needs of the residents of Divis.

The catalogue wraps up its argument focussing on the human costs of the Flats listing the injuries to residents, including the drowning of small child in a sewer and the extreme hazard of asbestos which lies in rubble piles resulting from the demolition of two blocks. The final page of the catalogue restates the overarching theme of Divis, this is not just another problem council housing estate, but an open prison run by the British Army and RUC, the DRA recount how the people of Divis experience these organs of the British State under the heading 'Imprisoned Population', they write:

'Constant surveillance, raids, the stopping and searching of residents on a whim by members of the continuous patrols of soldiers or police who walk the balconies, are all used effectively to suppress any physical manifestation of insurrection, but also to compound the impression that Divis is a prison, that its tenants are the prisoners and as such are there to be punished, not accommodated.'<sup>718</sup>

It is worth noting the recognisable names in the credits on the back cover of the catalogue (see figure 57), they include the three key members of the ARC, George Mills, Peter Moloney and Brian Anson, alongside Rob Thompson, Louis Hellman, and Mike Beazley; and additionally two notable politicians, the now former Labour MPs Jeremy Corbyn and Dennis Skinner. These two long-time left-wing rebels of the British Parliament are noted alongside

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<sup>717</sup> Divis Residents Association, Op cit., p.10

<sup>718</sup> Ibid, p.12

Cedric Price, Norman Foster Associates, and *the Architects' Journal*, these names perhaps demonstrating some of the "respectability" in architectural circles that the TCPA/ARC coordinated effort had managed to achieve for the people of Divis and their campaign to demolish the Divis Flats.

### CITY UNDER SIEGE

One final article worthy of attention here is that published by *the Architects' Journal* on 9<sup>th</sup> July 1986 "CITY UNDER SIEGE." Written by Anson and Moloney, along with Paul Fordyce and Lewis Walker, both of whom were at the time planners at Hackney Borough Council with Peter Moloney, and whom he recalls worked for nothing on the project along with him.<sup>719</sup> The article begins with 'A message to the people of Divis', in which the authors talk about the exhibition of the previous year (1985) and introduce the article in which they are publishing their proposals for rebuilding Divis. They are at immense pains to make clear in the article that they are not deciding, as the NIHE and the Government at Stormont did in the nineteen sixties, what the redevelopment of Divis will look like, but marking proposals and developing ideas. As they say early on 'This is not a fully worked out scheme... and you will no doubt discover many flaws in it.' They go on to add 'The following ideas are only concerned to indicate how the process towards a new environment can be *started*.'<sup>720</sup> [original emphasis].

The plans they proposed in 1986 are reproduced as figures 87 and 88 below. We can see from these proposals that there was a suggestion of phased demolition of all the blocks,

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<sup>719</sup> Peter Moloney, in conversation with the author, Greenwich, London, 27<sup>th</sup> June 2013

<sup>720</sup> Anson, Brian, Moloney, Peter, Fordyce, Paul, and Walker, Lewis. "CITY UNDER SIEGE." *The Architects' Journal* (Archive : 1929-2005) vol. 184, no. 28 (Jul 09, 1986). p.35



including the Tower, and the replacement of these with streets of houses to be built in phases.



Image redacted for  
copyright reasons.

Figure 94. Part 1 of Anson, Moloney, Fordyce, and William's proposal for Divis.



Image redacted for  
copyright reasons.

Figure 95. Part 2 of Anson, Moloney, Fordyce, and William's proposal for Divis.

The DRA and TCPA joint campaign was of course ultimately successful. Redevelopment of the Divis Flats site, the Pound Lonely, was begun in the late-nineteen eighties. Total removal of all the blocks, save the Divis Tower, was completed in 1994. The redevelopment was

initially planned to cost \$15million<sup>721</sup> according to the Los Angeles Times in 1993.<sup>722</sup> The new scheme replaced the brutalist blocks with red brick terraces, modern re-creations of ‘...the same streets and houses their grannies had...’<sup>723</sup> according to Jackie Boyle, chief architect of the redevelopment.

The Divis Tower still remains today in 2022, having been retained at the insistence of the British Army as to continue their surveillance of the Lower Falls area from its roof. The observation post was finally dismantled in August 2005 as part of the Good Friday Agreement.<sup>724</sup>



Image redacted for  
copyright reasons.

Figure 96. Divis Tower (background) and recreated red brick terraced houses (foreground) which replaced the linear 7-storey slab blocks during the redevelopment in the late-1980s/early-1990s.

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<sup>721</sup> \$15 million in 1993 is \$28.5 million in 2021, which is equivalent to £20.8 million.

<sup>722</sup> Pogatchnik, Shawn. ‘Wrecking Ball Brings Hope to Slum : Northern Ireland: Gunmen and Criminals Have given Way to Trees and Driveways in Belfast’s Infamous Divis Flats’, *Los Angeles Times*, 31 October 1993. [latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1993-10-31-mn-51598-story.html](https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1993-10-31-mn-51598-story.html) [Accessed 30<sup>th</sup> October 2021]

<sup>723</sup> Ibid.

<sup>724</sup> Keenan, Dan. ‘Dismantling of Divis Tower Post Begins’, *The Irish Times*, 3 August 2005. [irishtimes.com/news/dismantling-of-divis-tower-post-begins-1.475632](https://www.irishtimes.com/news/dismantling-of-divis-tower-post-begins-1.475632) [Accessed 10<sup>th</sup> January 2020]

As can be seen in the maps of the area from the times in question (see figures 89-91) the street plan of the Pound Lonely (figure 89) and the post-Divis Flats development (figure 91) are similar. There has not been a return to the grid iron terraces of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century but, a more domestic and human scale has been achieved with the new housing, quite reminiscent of the TCPA/ARC plans produced in 1985. Both are worlds away from the concrete megastructure of Divis Flats.

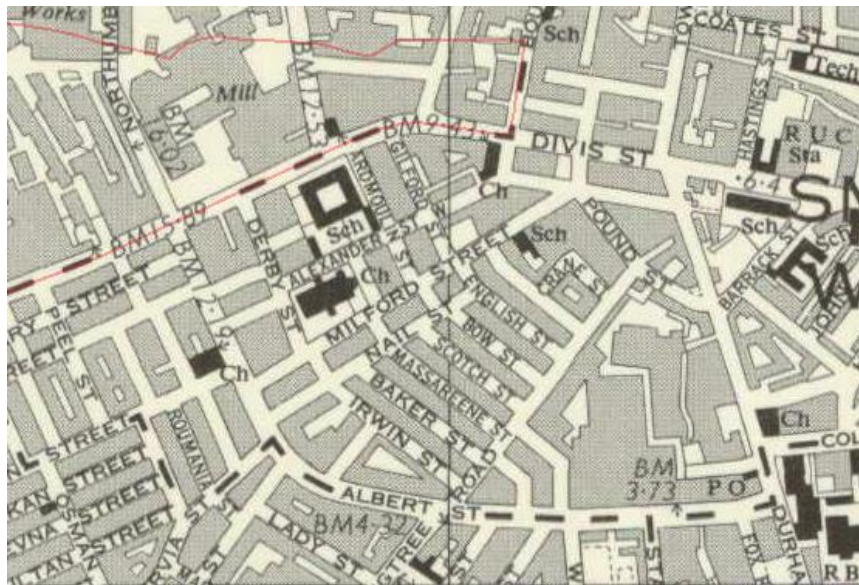


Figure 97. The Pound Lonely, c.1967

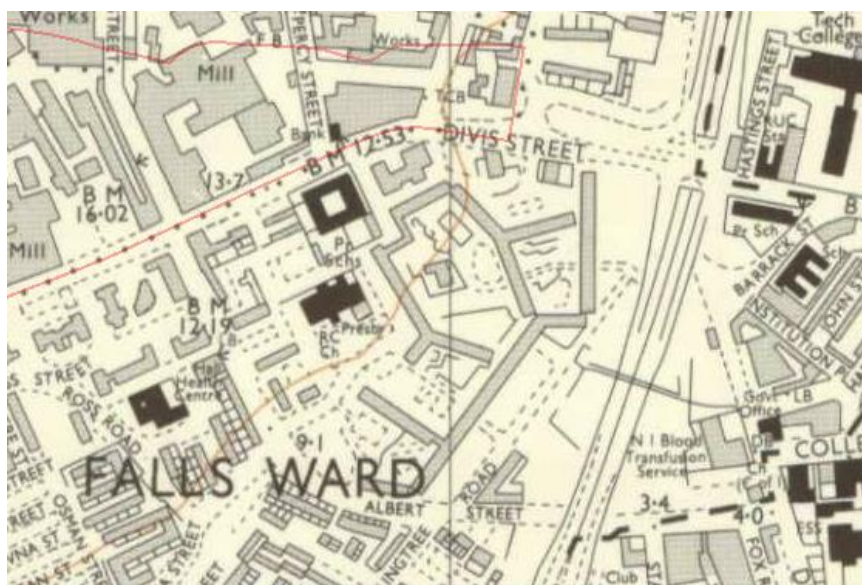


Figure 98. Divis Flats, c.1986



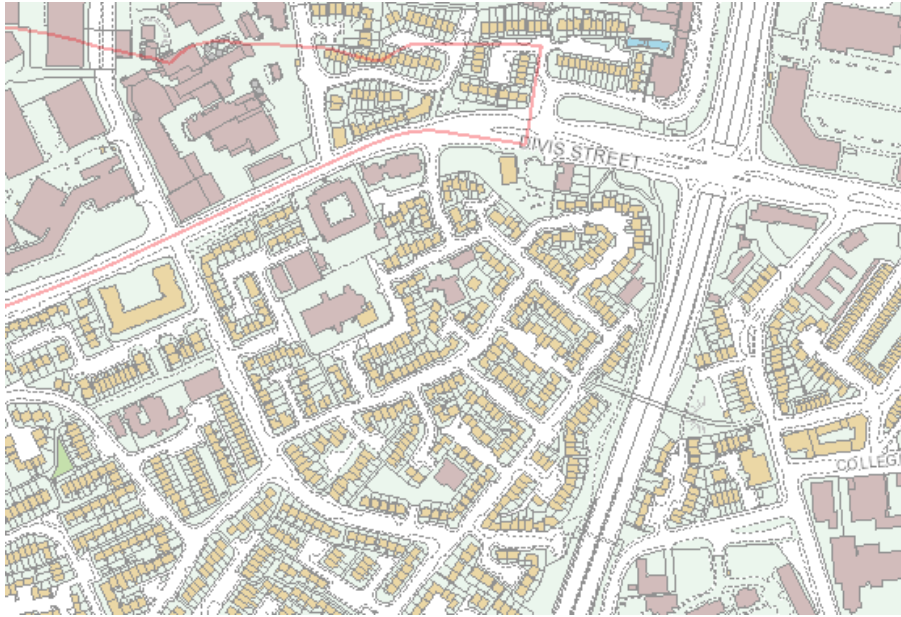


Figure 99. post-Divis Flats, c.2010

We can see from the above that Divis was not a solely ARC project, as in fact were none of their projects, perhaps apart from Colne Valley. But here the ARC do not really get a mention in the literature at least. The distinction here is that there has been an evolution. As Anson's own timeline for the Divis struggle states the TCPA (in the form of the Mobile Planning Unit) did not become involved until 1985. We do not know if this is first time the ARC or Anson became aware of the problems at Divis, but Peter Moloney suggests not. He recalled that 'Brian was working in Derry around the same time and knew of [the problems in] Belfast'<sup>725</sup> implying some prior contact with Divis possible via Moloney. Therefore, whilst key members of the ARC were involved in the Divis struggle, it was not carried out under their auspices. The people of Divis, like those of Covent Garden, Ealing, or Bridgtown had already been opposing the local authorities, differently, and for very different reasons and in very different ways, but these are all nonetheless community instigated projects. These are, in terms of the modes of organisation set out earlier, anarchistic, or Quietist anarchist methodologies.

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<sup>725</sup> Peter Moloney, in conversation with the author, Greenwich, London, 27<sup>th</sup> June 2013

The people of Divis were of course, due to their environment and the time in which they lived, far more prepared to use rebellion, violence and what would be seen as criminal acts, to achieve their aims. These were not actions that other communities were prepared to engage in, but they were not where or when the people of Divis were in 1975 or 1985. Whilst civil discourse, using local representative democracy, following the planning appeals processes, and public enquiries might have worked in London or Staffordshire in the nineteen seventies, these were not paths open to Nationalist civilians in Belfast at that time. For the ARC, or for Anson and Moloney at least, the Divis struggle provided them with an almost ideal environment for their ideas of community architecture and revolution within and against the Architectural establishment could be realised.

The fact that Anson and Moloney's roles in the Divis struggle occurred under the auspices of the TCPA, rather than ARC, does not change the nature of the involvement of these key ARCers. It also does not change the very considerable reputation as a rebel and critic of architecture that Anson had accrued by this point. As Anson said of regarding his reputation as it stood in 1971:

'I was, without sounding egotistical, ... well known as a troublemaker, ... and after that I couldn't get work and then I was employed by the Architectural Association which is, was, a very prestigious school.'<sup>726</sup>

The Divis struggle and the ultimate success of the struggle, in no small part due to the involvement of the ARC and TCPA, serves as a suitable bookend to the work of the ARC. The Divis project provided these two warriors of the ARC with one last victory, a victory they shared with the people of Divis.

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<sup>726</sup> Anson with Crowley, Op cit., 00:04:50–00:05:51.

Anson, Moloney and Mills would never again work on a project together, Anson emigrated to France in 1991, Moloney continued his career at Hackney Borough Council until his retirement in 2010. George Mills was already a partner in Stephenson+Mills Architects (with Roger Stephenson) in Manchester by 1979,<sup>727</sup> and would go on to found MBLC in 1988.

Therefore, we should see Divis as the final overture of the Architects' Revolutionary Council, working with revolutionaries in the north of Ireland, on a project to destroy Architecture, and create at least space for a new place to come into being. They may not have designed that new Pound Lonely, their involvement stopped in 1988, but their work before their involvement in Divis provided them with vital skills and experience they gave freely to the people of Divis. This is true to the letter of the ARC manifesto offering their '...skills and services to the local communities who have little chance to work directly with architects and architecture'<sup>728</sup> as the ARC had set out to do some 14 years before at that founding press conference at the AA in 1974.

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<sup>727</sup> Unger, Paul. 'COMMENT | Stephenson's music', *Place North West*, 20/04/2021, [placenorthwest.co.uk/news/comment-stephensons-music/](http://placenorthwest.co.uk/news/comment-stephensons-music/) [accessed 6<sup>th</sup> January 2022]

<sup>728</sup> Mills, & ARC. Manifesto draft.

# CHAPTER TWEELEVE

## CASE STUDY SYNTHESIS

There is an essential contradiction at the heart of the process when a revolutionary group works with the wider populace, or The People as is so often the phrase. This contradiction is the appetite for wholesale and wide ranging change and revolution amongst The People is often less than that of such radical political groups. The ARC was and continued to be in every project, with the honourable exception of Divis, working with local people who were not interested, for the most part, in ARCs revolutionary ideals. There were individuals in all places, Colne Valley's couple of people '...who would come and sit in the office and chew the fat.',<sup>729</sup> or people like Sylvia McRobie in Ealing,<sup>730</sup> but the desire for such change is limited to specific circumstances and particular vested interests. This self-, or vested, interest may seem self-serving or short sighted to the internationally minded revolutionary (Anson), but it is the motivating factor in the daily lives of most people.

The motivation for the people of Covent Garden, the first ARC-esque campaign, to involve themselves (egged on by Anson) in opposing the plans the bureaucracies of local government had for their homes and community was a vested interest. The working class community that lived there in until the nineteen seventies may have had its origins in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century peasants who worked the gardens of the Abbey of St Peter Westminster,<sup>731</sup> and

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<sup>729</sup> George Mills, in conversation with the author, Withington, Manchester, 16<sup>th</sup> July 2014.

<sup>730</sup> McRobie is quoted in *RED HOUSE* as saying 'If only the architectural profession as a whole could operate in which ARC has done.'

<sup>731</sup> Burford, Ephraim John, *Wits, wenchers and wantons : London's low life : Covent Garden in the eighteenth century*. (London: Hale, 1990; 1986)

had a lineage of some 500 years, but the market workers who fought the Greater London Councils plans were not doing so out of such abstract concerns. They did feel they had a right to be heard and not to be swept away, that was based on 500 years of history, but the here and now, was to save their homes, their streets, and their community. Those of us on the political left may like to intellectualise this struggle but all the Sammy Driscoll's or John Thomey's of Covent Garden were not concerned with this, they fought to protect their homes. There is nothing inherently incorrect about these motivations or tactics based on them.

Anson may have seen this attitude as short sighted or self-interested, that these people failed to defend their communities adequately, bemoaning as he did the rehousing away from these areas that was accepted by so many people in Covent Garden, Divis, and Ealing. Anson saw these facts, the vested interests and the hope for better lives elsewhere, as negatives of the struggles, not positive outcomes for those individuals. As Anson recognised as cited earlier, people from his own hometown of Bootle shared '...the dream of many in the community was a "nice" semi with a garden and all mod cons.'<sup>732</sup> But this seems to not be enough for him. For Anson these "selfish" vested interests were the reason the concerns of the working class community were overtaken by those of the bourgeois middle class, e.g. the theatre crowd of west London, as the primary concerns of the Covent Garden campaign. But even for these people whilst they may not have lived in Covent Garden their lives and livelihoods were every bit as much a part of Covent Garden.

Similarly, whether we consider Covent Garden, Ealing, Bridgtown, or Divis, all had local communities who wanted their built environment improved, not destroyed. This may have

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<sup>732</sup> Anson. 'Architecture as Colonialism: Part 1. Anger, tragedy and celebration', p.32.

involved blocking development at Ealing, stopping demolition in Bridgtown, or advocating for demolition in Divis, but all were focussed on the vested interests and the improvement of the lives of the residents. The motivations for all these campaigns with which the ARC became involved came from the people on the ground. As Habraken said:

'We have the need to concern ourselves with that which touches us daily. Through this concern it begins to belong to us, and becomes part of our lives. There is therefore nothing worse than to have to live among what is indifferent to our activities.'<sup>733</sup>

But can we consider what happened as being anarchist, as proposed in Chapters 2-6 of this thesis? Absolutely, the Quietist and accidental anarchism of the people of these places is entirely apparent in the preceding case studies. No, they had not read Kropotkin, or Read, or Bookchin, and nor did they need to. As Read set out anarchism, self-organisation and mutual aid, are for anarchists a natural way of being. There is no need, as was the case for Alex Comfort, for one's anarchism to be determined by these texts, as much as they provide a helpful theoretical framework, they are not anarchism in practice. Anarchism and mutual aid in practice is the people of Bridgtown setting up a warning system to alert the village when a house was about to be demolished, and occupying that house to stop that process. It is the people of Covent Garden forming the CGCA to resist the might of 3 of the biggest and most powerful local authorities ever to exist in Britain in the GLC, and the London Borough of Camden and the City of Westminster. It is also the people of Divis barricading their flats to stop the invasions of the British forces, to protect themselves and their neighbours from the worst predation of Ulster's rigged political system, and to defend themselves with arms when necessary. These are all wildly different forms of mutual aid and

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<sup>733</sup> Habraken, Op cit., p.17

anarchist modes of organisation, but they are all inherently and fundamentally anarchist in character.

It is therefore evident that despite the 3 key players in the ARC (see Chapter 6) not being declared anarchists themselves (more being Socialists), the people they worked with gravitated to anarchist modes of organisation and behaviour. Because was the logical and best way to organise, it was not moved by high flown political theorising, it was driven by necessity. How else does a group of ordinary working people resist the plans of their local authority and elected representatives, when all the instruments of the State and social mores are stacked against them. They have to rethink that context, to move outside of that space, and revolt, sometimes quietly, and politely standing up and saying “no”, sometimes my smashing things, but always collectively.

### The meaning of Ealing

The campaign at Ealing serves as starting point for the ARC. Post-Covent Garden, Ealing was their first major campaign despite the way in which this is presented in RED HOUSE, i.e. a distraction from the imminent national campaign, a campaign which ultimately went nowhere. Ealing was an important learning experience for all those involved. It was the ARCs first encounter with more middle class elements of the community who were more willing to follow the rules than they had experienced with the community at Covent Garden. Anson wrote about how the immediate community in what had been the residential areas of central Ealing in Wells’s Place and Oak Street, had moved on or drifted away early in the campaign. These people had no vested interest, they had been offered their new lives ‘...in council

tower blocks...<sup>734</sup> and they had no interest in being involved in a campaign to build a less ugly shopping centre in Ealing. The nearest council tower blocks worthy of the name were in Acton or Hanwell, some miles from Ealing Town Centre and certainly far enough for the residents there not to consider the redevelopment in Ealing to be 'of immediate concern to their lives' as Habraken would say. The ARC's involvement in Ealing was short lived, which RED HOUSE certainly claimed was all ways the intention, this is somewhat undermined by Hellman's view that the ARC were not concerned with changing the aesthetics of the EMI-Grosvenor scheme, the implication being of course that this was the primary concern of the members of the Alliance of Ealing Residents Associations.

The organising of the local groups and the provision of an alternative were certainly contributions that ARC made early in the campaign, but as would prove to be the case at Bridgtown ultimately it was through the extant planning system that Ealing residents changed the scheme. This where we see ARC's primary contributions to these projects, by providing alternatives, speaking in the language of the Architect to other architects, planners, and politicians. This was the work they could do and they were doing it for free as Anson believed they should. They provided this knowledge freely and simply, and this was of immense value. They stirred communities to more militant behaviours, sometimes this was necessary and accepted, other times (like at Ealing) it was not, and by-and-large (beyond some post campaign griping) the ARC accepted these decisions and moved on.

There were individuals at Ealing who were more interested in the revolutionary politics and anarchic modes of organisation, but what we ultimately have is less in the mould of these ideas and ideals. We have at Ealing more a movement that was invigorated and supported in its early stage by the ARC and Louis Hellman, rather than a group of radicals determined to redefine public engagement with the built environment and local democracy.

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<sup>734</sup> RED HOUSE, Op cit., p.3



## Freeing Bridgtown

Bridgtown whilst ultimately playing out in a similar way to Ealing began quite differently. Again, the local community were already up in arms by the time ARC-er Rob Thompson became aware of their plight via the Sunday papers. ARCs involvement therefore came early, but at a point where the local community had, mistakenly in Anson's view, begun to engage with the local authorities in the planning process. The people of Bridgtown who were unrepresented politically below County Council level were already angry and active. The ARCs campaign was able to move quickly due to the initial overwhelming community support and the tactics used were more aggressive than at Ealing. The gable end mural harking to the new conflict in the north of Ireland, the setting up of ARCs paper *Wild Duck*, and the deception of the local council into sharing their plans and documentation with an ARC front organisation, show that the local community was willing and able to aggressively defend their homes.

The effect of this solidaric community action was the formation of BRAG and this provided the residents of Bridgtown with a collective voice that forced the local council to engage. We know that the ultimate result of Bridgtown was, similarly to Ealing and Covent Garden, the sparing of the physical fabric and a significant change in local council planning policy. The ultimate result of which was the establishment of a Parish Council which gave the area a mechanism by which they could be represented at other levels of government. None of these facts may seem particularly revolutionary or anarchist, but their initial motivation and emergence of the various pressure groups and actions to stop the plans of the council were. This again is where we see the natural modes of anarchist organisation emerging. The almost spontaneous local resistance to the schemes of Cannock Chase Council, the organisation of this in a way that worked for the local people, trying to achieve collective agreement on issues, abandoning other tactics (which might be seen by the academic or

theoretical anarchist as necessary) as consensus could not be reached amongst the community, the solidaric behaviours and mutual aid displayed by the members of BRAG to support each other and defend their community collectively. Ultimately resulting in the outcome they wanted (perhaps not always the outcome the ARC wanted) and the disbanding of this group once its aim of saving Bridgtown had been achieved, all certainly fall under the Quietist or accidentally anarchist modes of organisation set out earlier in this thesis. The fact that ultimately another form of representative democracy was established post-the campaign might seem to detract from this “anarchist moment” but does not change the nature of these initial motivations or the emergence of local resistance.

Again, this is not how the ARC, or at least Anson, saw it. His statement regarding what he saw as a sort of petty power monger seizing an opportunity to ‘become mayor’ belies his disapproval of these tactics and the ultimate outcome of the Bridgtown campaign.

This conclusion by Anson is a parallel of his disappointment at Covent Garden and at Ealing, the fact that no Trotskyist Permanent Revolution emerged from this struggle is to him a failure on some level. But as with vested interests in these previous examples, the motivation of the local community to revolt was only in so far as it achieved their immediate aims. The ‘permanent revolution’ had no place in their village.

## Outcomes in Colne

Colne Valley might at first glance be seen to be the outlier here, there was no local campaign, but the ARC's intention here was to stimulate a local campaign. The failure of this project was due to the lack of the local campaign, which meant that the ARC's intended work at Colne Valley never got off the ground, and their work prior to Colne Valley had not prepared them for being the instigators of such a campaign. I see the failure of the Colne Valley project being due to the fact it was not initiated by the people of the valley, but by the incomers of Mills and the ARC. The failure to 'building something' at Colne Valley as about timing, the ARC were either too early or too late.

Colne Valley was, by its very nature Mills' project. He was aware of the situation in the valley, and indeed in many such communities across northern England. Having been born in Salford, Lancashire (now Greater Manchester) and familiar with Colne Valley particularly due to his collective home at New Hagg on the hills overlooking the valley. This project was also another step in the previously mentioned national campaign made so much of in *RED HOUSE*. The intention here was after all to stimulate activity and action from the local community. But the self- or vested interest that motivated people in the aforementioned campaigns and places was missing. ARC in the person of George Mills and under the guise of Community Architecture arrived in the Colne Valley to "make a difference", and they certainly did that, but not in the way Mills or ARC envisaged. The most significant contribution here was the money and support provided to the team and to the valley more widely via the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF). They were the principal funders of the ARC project and supporters of Mills and the Colne Valley News. Once the money ran out, friction began to develop between the local Liberal MP and the editorial position of The Colne Valley News, and so Mills' ability to continue the fight in Colne ebbed. Mills did not have the support of the local community, as he said there was no radicalism, no real political activity

in the valley any longer. The few locals who sympathised with Mills and ARCs aims, were not enough for engender the spontaneous formation of community movement. There was no clear and present danger in Colne Valley, the decline, was slower and more insidious. There were not council bulldozers and wrecking balls at the gates as at Ealing and Bridgtown so the community was not threatened. Therefore, the same issues pertain here as at the aforementioned campaigns, but the roles are reversed. The ARCs attempt to start something here did not result in the outcomes they wanted, even if regeneration along with its evil twin gentrification did reach the valley eventually, there never was a radical uprising of the people.

This is the primary issue with Colne, whilst there was an opportunity there was not an existential threat, and if the ARC was to achieve its aim in overthrowing Architecture, they had to be able to provide a positive prospectus of what the work of architecture, but not Architecture, would look like. The architectural opportunity at Colne were various, but the local motivation to take advantage of those opportunities was negligible if not non-existent. Colne therefore serves as an example that the ideas of the revolutionary are no good on their own. The community organisation and motivation *have* to come from within, through accidentally anarchist, non-hierarchical and 'natural' ways of people working together cooperatively. This can be motivated by all sorts of things, but as Covent Garden, Ealing and Bridgtown earlier demonstrated an outside threat is a powerful motivator for such spontaneous emergence of anarchist modes of doing. The lesson from Colne is you cannot make people cooperate if they have nothing to gain collectively by that cooperation.

### The revolution at Divis

Of course, not all the above projects had the same issues in motivating the local populace as Colne Valley or Bridgtown. The Divis Flats campaign was well underway by the time Anson and later Moloney became involved, having begun as early as 1974. As Moloney said 'The other revolutionaries [Sinn Féin and the IRA] weren't ready. And they'd been too busy being part of a very different process.'<sup>735</sup> The people of Divis were, the DRA had formed to defend the people of Divis from the machinations of the NIHE and the '... "securocrats" of the British state'.<sup>736</sup>

With the arrival of the TCPAs Mobile Planning Unit with Anson and Mike Beazley in 1983, and later Moloney and his colleagues from Hackney, the DRA had their opportunity to make their case on a bigger stage and to the people really in power in Belfast, the Civil Service in Whitehall, and the Secretary of State in Westminster. Divis was fundamentally different, here on the Island of Ireland the people were revolting, and had been for hundreds of years against Oliver Cromwell, King William, and all the power of the British Empire. This context was the ideal environment for the ARC, a population already up in arms, literally and metaphorically and a shadow state of the various Republican movements which controlled the area, meant they had a powerful base.

Ironically by the time the TCPA and Anson became involved in Divis in 1983, the ARC only really consisted of Anson and his undying commitment to revolutionising Architecture.

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<sup>735</sup> Peter Moloney, in conversation with the author, Bloomsbury, London, 15<sup>th</sup> May 2013.

<sup>736</sup> Freedland, Jonathan. 'The Strange Collusion between Downing Street and Sinn Féin', *The Guardian*, 21 December 2005. [theguardian.com/politics/2005/dec/21/northernireland](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2005/dec/21/northernireland) [Accessed 6<sup>th</sup> February 2022]

Having resigned (or having been dismissed) from the AA in 1980 Anson was working largely alone at the TCPA, certainly separated from his ARC comrades of Mills and Moloney. Anson and Moloney considered Divis to be an ARC project, perhaps not in name but absolutely in spirit. The TCPA banner gave the work they did more legitimacy in British society and Architectural circles as is demonstrated by some of the high-profile names from the establishment of Architecture who were cited as being involved.

The general narrative around State-built social housing architecture and concrete megastructure estates, like that at Divis, shifted significantly by and during the nineteen eighties. The two seminal texts that demolished the reputation of this kind of social housing in the eyes of many had been published. Oscar Newman's *Defensible Space* and Alice Coleman's *Utopia On Trial* published in 1974 and 1985 (in the US and UK respectively) attacked the modernist view of systematised social housing architecture and blamed concrete and link bridges for social deprivation. The Divis Flats therefore served as a '*sine qua non*' of such criticisms, and again its unique political and geographical context made these problems worse by orders of magnitude, but the problems themselves were familiar.

The ARCs work at Divis was more straightforward in many ways, the community wanted to revolt, they knew how to resist the British but perhaps not the Architect, and they were not averse to real revolutionary action to achieve their aims. This is where the power of Anson and Moloney's experience of architecture and planning once again became valuable. They could bring that dimension to the resistance provided by the people of Divis. Ultimately though this was not an anarchist project, but a Irish Republican one. So one cannot really argue that these actions are spontaneous and the result of 'naturally occurring solidaric action', *a la* Read and Ward. The Irish resistance against British rule had been going on for

centuries and groups like the INLA who operated at Divis Flats were more revolutionary Marxist-Leninists in their political dimension with the Irish Republican Socialist Party (IRPS, or “The Erps”)<sup>737</sup>. Regardless of the political and historical motivations of the people of Divis, the self-interest of the people of Divis was there, stronger than at any of the ARC’s previous campaigns, it was in many cases a literal fight for survival.<sup>738</sup>

Whilst we cannot truly consider the Divis Flats project to be 100% ARC but the fact that it bookended Anson, Moloney, and Mills’ work with each other and with the ARC makes it of value in this respect alone. Their work at Divis once again highlighted the contradictions and conflicts within ARC, the varying degrees of revolutionary fervour of each of these 3 main men, and the last attempt by the ARC to move their agenda forward. In many ways they got closer than ever at Divis, architecturally speaking. Enlisting the TCPA to help them attack the Architectural establishment, in the form of NIHE and their backers at Stormont. They succeeded here also in proving the people of Divis with access to the world of professional Architecture and Architects, and the tactics necessary to undermine them. The production of the documents, The Dreadful Enclosure especially, and the exhibition in London, were very effective tactics, developed by Anson and ARC over the 10-15 years of activity, and struck right at the heart of British policy to the north of Ireland.

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<sup>737</sup> Irish Republican Socialist Party, *Perspectives on the Future of Republican Socialism in Ireland*, 2010. [web.archive.org/web/20170202000852/www.irsp.ie/programme/Perspectives Document.pdf](http://web.archive.org/web/20170202000852/www.irsp.ie/programme/Perspectives%20Document.pdf) [Accessed 29<sup>th</sup> January 2022]

<sup>738</sup> 19 people, including 4 children and 5 British soldiers were killed at Divis from 1969-1989. See: ‘CAIN: Sutton Index of Deaths’, [cain.ulster.ac.uk/sutton/chron/1969.html](http://cain.ulster.ac.uk/sutton/chron/1969.html) [Accessed 17<sup>th</sup> November 2021]

## The Four Fights

We have seen at Ealing, Bridgtown, Colne Valley, and Divis, in all cases the politics of these places was markedly different. Ealing a well-off suburban borough of London, with a prominent Tory MP throughout the late-nineteen seventies and eighties, Bridgtown a former mining village of the Midlands, a place influx politically in the nineteen seventies mirroring the national picture, and Divis a defiantly Republican area of West Belfast represented from 1983 by Sinn Féin leader, and avowed enemy of the British state, Gerry Adams. But regardless of their personal politics, the people of each place were motivated by a degree of vested interests, and this desire to as Habraken put it ‘...concern ourselves with that which touches us daily’ as the primary motivation evident in all cases studies. These people wanted to be engaged by and to engage with their built environment. The pattern began at Covent Garden in 1968, whilst not strictly an ARC project it was fundamental to the formation of Anson’s identity as the key protagonist of the ARC which would emerge from this struggle.

As a group of four projects, campaigns, and revolts these case studies demonstrate several key markers that serve as a fingerprint of the ARC. All four were built on the concept of community action, this concept, and the origins of the ARC in Covent Garden, was cited by Hellman as integral to the work of the ARC and its politics.<sup>739</sup> Community Action, i.e. the activities of groups of local people, political activists, and community groups in the early part of the nineteen seventies emerged from the anti-authoritarian movements of the late-nineteen sixties, not least the revolutions of 1968. The formation of the SNAP project<sup>740</sup> took place in the following year as did the passing of the seventh Housing Act (1969) which

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<sup>739</sup> Hellman, Op cit., p.38

<sup>740</sup> Clay, Op cit., p.37



created GIAs<sup>741</sup> which were exploited by the many housing co-ops of the time.<sup>742</sup>

All the examples cited in Chapter 1 of this thesis, the Black-E, and the co-operative housing groups in the GIAs of Liverpool 8, and in Chapter 2 with SOLON and Segal can be considered Community Action, the former more so than the latter. In Liverpool Community Action spawned multiple groupings of residents of state owned and managed housing who organised themselves into a temporary syndicate, a co-operative, on the basis of vested interests and mutual aid.<sup>743</sup> The residents achieved their aims and the syndicate was disbanded, the members of the Corn and Yates Street Co-operatives recognised in the spirit of Mutual Aid they could give other proto-groups the benefit of their experience. They recognised some of the key mutual aid and anarcho-syndicalist modes of organisation impetus for such modes must come from within the concerned group not from well-meaning outsiders or revolutionary architects, as the vested interests of the community are fundamental.

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<sup>741</sup> Power & Mumford. Op cit., p.vii.

<sup>742</sup> Clay, Op cit., p.37

<sup>743</sup> Kropotkin, Op cit.

## Just bloody build something!

'Bridgtown was what Brian saw as what architecture should be, and architects should be doing it for free. There were little successes, but the ultimate was to build something.'<sup>744</sup>

This quotation has appeared a few times already in this thesis already and it summarises a key contradiction at the heart of the work of the ARC, and indeed of Brian Anson himself. This was also made clear by George Mills when he said of Anson.

'That was always my frustration with him [Anson] if he'd have just stepped back once or twice and said: "Right. This is an avenue we can now pursue, which is not quite as radical as the one I'd like to pursue, but it could be more fruitful; could be more *product* out of this in terms of..." whatever. But he never did.'<sup>745</sup>

The claim that '...the ultimate was to build something' whilst seemingly obvious for a group of architects and planners, is not reflected in the tactics, practices, or policies of the ARC in any of these examples. There were on paper proposals for both Ealing and Divis, suggesting modes of redeveloping and rehousing the residents of the two areas respectively. But these were not plans the ARC intended to carry out, they make this clear in both campaigns, discussing how at Ealing they had '...an urgent national campaign to get off the ground...' <sup>746</sup> and intended to spend a limited amount of time there. At Divis they describe how they (the Anson, Beazley, Moloney, ARC and/or the TCPA) were making a proposal to kick off a local discussion about how the Divis Flats might be replaced. Their campaign consisted of demolishing or preventing building. How then are we to interpret this claim that '...the ultimate was the build something'? Fundamentally this comes down to the distinction

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<sup>744</sup> Peter Moloney, in conversation with the author, Greenwich, London, 27<sup>th</sup> June 2013

<sup>745</sup> George Mills, in conversation with the author, Withington, Manchester, 16<sup>th</sup> July 2014.

<sup>746</sup> *RED HOUSE*, issue 1, p.4

between thought and deed, and between the different members of the ARC. Mills the architect, Moloney the housing manager, Anson the revolutionary. As Mills said of Anson by the time of Divis in the early-nineteen eighties:

'Brian had become a completely political animal whereas I, first and foremost, was an architect who'd got leftish leanings. That was the fundamental difference between us, I'd always wanted to practice architecture. Pete, working in Hackney, he was kind of political animal in housing, ... and that suited Pete's nature very well.'<sup>747</sup>

As Mills moved away from the ARC after the winding up of the Colne Valley project in 1979, so went a significant part of the ARCs motivation to 'build something'. Mills partnered with Roger Stephenson to form an architectural practice in 1979,<sup>748</sup> because, as he said '...there was only me that actually ended up as a practicing architect out of that original group, because that's what I'd always wanted to be.'<sup>749</sup> Mills was perhaps therefore the main driving force behind the ARC building something, as co-author of the ARC Manifesto and as right-hand man he was central to the ARC throughout the nineteen seventies and it was only with the disappointing outcome of the of the Colne Valley project in 1979 that he moved on to be the '...big fat architect'<sup>750</sup> Anson never wanted to be.

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<sup>747</sup> George Mills, in conversation with the author, Withington, Manchester, 16<sup>th</sup> July 2014.

<sup>748</sup> Unger, Op cit., 2021.

<sup>749</sup> George Mills, in conversation with the author, Withington, Manchester, 16<sup>th</sup> July 2014.

<sup>750</sup> George Mills recounted how 'Brian saw no value in it. I was a big fat architect now and all that kind of stuff.' Withington, Manchester, 16<sup>th</sup> July 2014.

## Endings

The examples provided in this thesis have given us a series of stories and paths from which we can draw together several strands illustrating the development of anarchist ideas and modes of working in architecture in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

The protagonists of this thesis, the ARC, would not and did not describe themselves as anarchists. Anson, as its most significant member, was ideologically firmly in the Revolutionary Marxist/Trotskyist camp and he drove the theory and action of the ARC from this position. The groups that the ARC worked for and with fall more fully into the category of unconsciously anarchist. From Covent Garden to Cannock, they were motivated by vested interests, not pure political ideology, socialist, Marxist, or anarchist. Their desire was to save their homes, and their wider community, from destruction. Their desire to self-organise, to engage in anarchist practices, was therefore motivated by a more “natural” desire to protect their homes. The wider work of the housing co-operative, the self-builder, the groups who seized control of their built environment for their greater good, can all be described as unconsciously anarchist acts. Some people such as Ward and Read were more explicit in their anarchism whilst also recognising the lack of anarchist motivation or ideology in the general populace.

When attempts were made by the profession of Architecture and the Architect, however revolutionary, to radicalise the populace politically, they invariably failed. This I attribute to the mismatch between the politically and ideologically motivated Architect (or architect, lowercase ‘a’) and the personally and emotionally motivated people. Of course, one can imagine a Venn diagram of motivations where these fields cross over but, as the Bridgtown and Covent Garden examples illustrate, this is not often the case and not matched by action.

Ultimately however if the field of Architecture is to become one in which anarchist modes of doing and organisation can develop it is up to the profession to surrender its power and control over the process. Continuing the process of building buildings (architecture) does not require the profession (Architecture) to exist. The “secrets” of Architecture, which are established and defended by the profession at large, are what maintains the Architect’s social status. It is this social and professional status that Architecture exists to defend.

It is important before concluding to differentiate between the idea of a profession as a group of skills, expertise or as “a job well done,” and a profession as a means of accruing and retaining power, wealth and status. This distinction is perhaps a difficult one to draw as the two have become almost entirely synonymous in our society and in the profession. One can understand with only a vague appreciation of anthropological concepts how in early human civilisations an individual with a particular skill, useful to the “clan”, would have been feted, and given social status because of this. However, this remains the mode by which professions continue to manifest and accrue power and influence today, albeit in a more a complex, multifaceted, technological society where more professions exist, and different skills are needed. Bison hunters are less in evidence than web designers for obvious reasons. It does not follow that the possession of a certain skill has to convey special status: the now unimportant skill of hunting bison means the bison hunter no longer has high social status, as their skills are no longer of use to our society. Architects however are still largely of use and benefit but if rather than seeing the status of the architect as an inevitable consequence of the use-value of the skills, we decoupled the skill from the social status we could truly democratise the skill set of the architect. This need not mean the diminishing of those skills, but the dissemination of those skills, as the ARC and Anson did in every ARC project addressed in this thesis. They often referred to their art, in that the art of architecture

and architects was sullied and besmirched by its association with Architecture and Architects as embodied by the RIBA. A suitable analogy would be literacy. Now almost everyone in the Global North has been educated to a level where they can read and write fluently. Thus, the scribe as a profession has ceased to exist. So might it be with the architect. If all people were taught (or more accurately retaught) how to design and build there would be no more need for Architects, they would merely cease to be.

A counter argument to this might be that buildings have become so technically complex that people who are not architects, or one of the manifold professions associated with building, cannot build or design them in this day and age. Then the question must be “are these the types of buildings we want and need?” If we have created an architecture so complex that only architects can design or understand it then whom does this benefit the most? Us, or the Architect? Who is this Architecture for? Us, or the Architect as a social class? As Read said, cited earlier in this thesis: ‘...there is no need to become primitive in order to secure the essentials of democratic liberty. We want to retain all our scientific and industrial triumphs – [...] We do not propose to revert to the economy of the handloom.’<sup>751</sup>

If, as I and ARC argue, we want Architecture to lose its mystique, its elevated social status, its elite focus, etc. and be made by “the people for the people”, then Architects and Architecture must cease to be, and be replaced by architects and architecture. This is not a radical reinvention, as much as a return to first principles of building for need and use, not speculation and profit.

### The ARC: with the benefit of hindsight

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<sup>751</sup> Read, Op cit., p.25

Anson and Moloney were by the time of the Divis Flats campaign in 1983 the last active members of the ARC, and they were operating almost independently, Anson at the TCPA and Moloney at Hackney, but they came together for this final hurrah of ARC activity. Mills was only partially involved with Divis, being credited for assisting with the realisation of *The Dreadful Enclosure* exhibition in London in 1986 (see figure 77). As Mills said of Anson: ‘...by that time Brian was involved in Divis, he was becoming more and more... I suppose on the fringes of things.’<sup>752</sup> In 1991 Anson would emigrate to France, Divis was the last campaign or project we can safely ascribe to the ARC, and certainly the last time these three key figures would work together.

By the time that Anson attended the 14<sup>th</sup> EASA in August 2008 he was 73 years old, essentially retired, if a man like Anson ever stops. As he recounted to Duncan Crowley, he had been accidentally invited, he explained this with some noticeable glee in his voice in an interview with Crowley that summer: ‘... I have no contact with these guys, but I’m here by accident, pure accident. I’m not like an ‘invited shooter’ as such.’<sup>753</sup> Having sent what can be described as a ‘pack’ of seemingly his own work and a rather self-important claim to want to ‘re-engage’, as if he himself had decided to step back and everyone was clamouring for his return. As he said to Crowley ‘...it was polite. It contained good testimonials, and I said I want to re-engage. Again, because I like to engage’<sup>754</sup> Anson goes on to complain about the lack of response he received from the Heads of Schools of Architecture in Ireland, bemoaning ‘Where’s courtesy gone?!’<sup>755</sup> an amusing position from a man who once fronted an organisation that called the RIBA “The Royal Institute of Bullshitting Aristocrats.” Anson

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<sup>752</sup> George Mills, in conversation with the author, Withington, Manchester, 16<sup>th</sup> July 2014.

<sup>753</sup> Anson with Crowley, Op cit., 00:32:20

<sup>754</sup> Ibid, 00:32:59

<sup>755</sup> Ibid, 00:33:51

clearly still believed then his “radical” activist profile was still so strong and such a threat to the architectural establishment (even in his favoured land of Ireland) that he was purposely excluded. As opposed to the, frankly far more likely scenario, that people have never heard of him and here he was asking the Heads of Schools to ‘...get together ... and find a way to just get me to Ireland. I'd come for free. You know if they could get me there just to discuss with students.’<sup>756</sup>

The failure to motivate the people of Bridgtown and numerous other ARC projects (Ealing, Colne Valley, and pre-ARC Covent Garden) to outright resistance or to revolution highlights the contradictions of revolutionary architecture. Can a practice that results in such a permanent presence as buildings or the built environment more generally ever be revolutionised? The attempts throughout history to build a revolutionary architecture, whether that be the Constructivists of the years pre-Stalin in the Soviet Union, or Futurists in pre-World War I Italy, have never resulted in permanent structures that can respond to every changing ebbs and flows of any given revolution.

The practice of Architecture as is so reliant on the *status quo* and on money, power structures, authorities, governments, and professionalism, that only its wholesale destruction (as advocated by the ARC) can address the need for an architecture of the people. This definition of Architecture is not new, even at the time of the ARC, but it is still the basis on which I have proceeded in this thesis as today, with the continual advancing global capitalism where billionaires now build themselves space programmes, rather than

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<sup>756</sup> Anson with Crowley, Op cit., 00:32:20



mansions, we have an architecture than is moving further and further out of the reach of 99% of people.



Image redacted for  
copyright reasons.

Figure 100. Occupy Wall Street Movement sticker, 2012

# CHAPTER THIRTEEN

## THE LEGACY OF ARC

The long term legacy of the ARC is multifaceted and complex, a few other groups emerged from the architectural and social revolutions of the nineteen seventies, whilst some of these owe their origins to the ARC, others emerged independently, but pursued similar aims to the ARC. One of these groups emerged directly from the ARC, NAM or the New Architecture Movement will be looked at here in assessing the legacy of the ARC and concomitant and contemporaneous movements to revolutionise architecture. Mills provided me with his view on the legacy of the ARC saying:

‘The essence of the ARC was the empowerment of people to determine the physical nature of their place as far as I’m concerned, and that never fully happened. But it did spawn a whole kind of route of thinking that did shift the balance slightly away from major developers to a more socially-oriented kind of thinking about place. If that’s its legacy then ...<sup>757</sup>

Whilst the ARCs work has been the focus of the contribution of this thesis, we must look now at the outcomes and the legacy of the ARC. Their work was not only architectural, but it was also political, social, and revolutionary and thus they had an impact in all these areas.

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<sup>757</sup> George Mills, in conversation with the author, Withington, Manchester, 16<sup>th</sup> July 2014.

## The New Architecture Movement

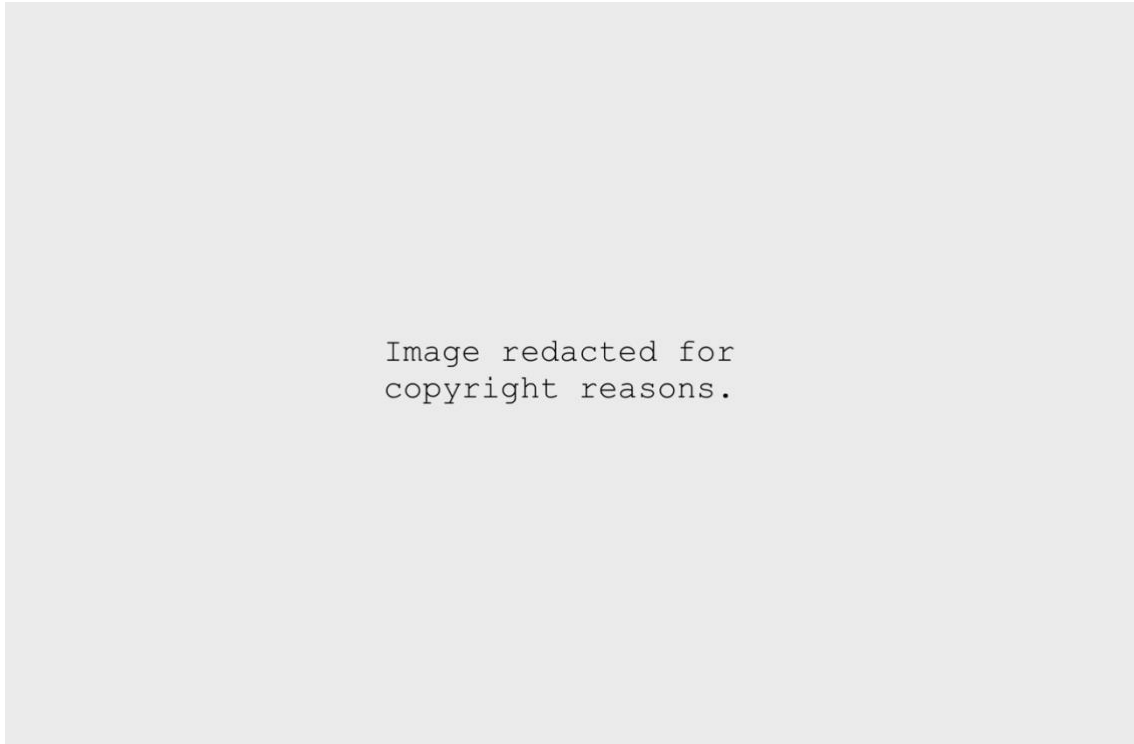


Figure 101. "Working For What?" front cover of a pamphlet produced by NAM, 1977

The momentum that the ARC initiated in London in 1974 itself went on to spur the development of various subsequent and contemporaneous groups. The most notable of these being the New Architecture Movement (NAM).<sup>758</sup> Whilst active primarily in Britain and Ireland the ARC was, theoretically at least, international movement in its outlook if not in actuality. As Mills and Moloney wrote in 1976: 'As well as agitating for community architecture in Britain and initiating NAM (the New Architecture Movement) ARC has kept close links with radical architects in a dozen countries.'<sup>759</sup>

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<sup>758</sup> Spatial Agency. 'The New Architecture Movement', *Spatial Agency*, no date. [spatialagency.net/database/new.architecture.movement.nam](http://spatialagency.net/database/new.architecture.movement.nam) [Accessed 19<sup>th</sup> April 2012]

<sup>759</sup> Mills, & Moloney, Op cit.

There is little to demonstrate the ARC did any work outside of Britain and Ireland. There were visits to Miami, Florida; Berkley, California; Boston, Massachusetts;<sup>760</sup> and the legendary visit to Pula, Croatia (then in Yugoslavia) that founded the ARC, but no work, campaigns or projects took place outside of the Anglo-Celtic Isles.<sup>761</sup>

In the above Mills refers to NAM which was founded shortly after the above document was written as the *Architects' Journal* journalist Nick Webber recorded on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1975.

In an article entitled 'Marching towards the new architectural dawn' Webber says:

'The New Architecture Movement was successfully born at Harrogate Baths Conference Centre two weekends ago, ... 23 hours of sometimes intense, sometimes woolly debate,'<sup>762</sup>

From this vague indication of date was, we must assume 22<sup>nd</sup>-23<sup>rd</sup> November, only a couple of weeks after Mills wrote 'The Future for the ARC'.

Webber continues:

'Fears that the organisers, the Architects' Revolutionary Council, would impose their radical manifesto upon the congress were unfounded. For the predominant views were instead those of the salaried architects and technicians who made up the majority of the 60 delegates.'<sup>763</sup>

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<sup>760</sup> George Mills, in conversation with the author, Withington, Manchester, 21<sup>st</sup> May 2012

<sup>761</sup> I am using the term Anglo-Celtic Isles in place of the problematic term "British Isles". See The Irish Times 'The Anglo-Celtic Isles?', *The Irish Times* (26/12/2020) [irishtimes.com/opinion/ letters/the-anglo-celtic-isles-1.4444930](https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/letters/the-anglo-celtic-isles-1.4444930) [Accessed 6<sup>th</sup> October 2021]

<sup>762</sup> Webber, Nick. "The Week: Marching Towards the New Architectural Dawn: Estrangement between Partners and Employees." *The Architects' Journal*, 162, no. 49 (03/12/1975): 1163.

<sup>763</sup> Webber, "The Week: Marching Towards the New Architectural Dawn: Estrangement between Partners and Employees." p.1163.

Webber goes on to discuss, in a somewhat sarcastic tone, the nature of the debate at Harrogate, and the criticisms of the profession, the nature of the client and the big business which dictate the nature of architecture practice, supported by the elite of the elite, the partners in the major architecture practices. Towards the end of the short article under the sub-heading "Umbrella for all radical architects" Webber writes:

'The obvious difference between NAM and the RIBA is that while the latter exists to protect professional interests, NAM has been formed to fight for all people and to change completely professional groupings...' leading to the '...proposed "National Design Service", in which locally controlled bodies would offer free consultancy with both builders and architects.'<sup>764</sup>

On 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1976 Louis Hellman authored an article in the *Architects Journal* regarding NAM titled "NAM working to redistribute power in architecture." Here the question of the National Design Service (NDS) is discussed in a little more detail by Hellman:

'Details of the NDS idea are still vague except that it would operate 'through the state' since this is the way in which the majority of people can gain their rightful access to the resources necessary to have control over their environments.'<sup>765</sup> This centralising Statism is clearly an anathema to the anarchist ideals I have advocated in this thesis and indeed was viewed as such by Anson who Hellman reports as firmly rejecting '...corporate statism and state socialism but supported the NDS idea.'<sup>766</sup>

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<sup>764</sup> Webber, "The Week: Marching Towards the New Architectural Dawn: Estrangement between Partners and Employees." p.1163.

<sup>765</sup> Hellman, Louis. "The Week: NAM Working to Redistribute Power in Architecture." *The Architects' Journal*. 163, no. 22 (02/06/1976): 1067.

<sup>766</sup> Hellman, "The Week: NAM Working to Redistribute Power in Architecture.", p.1067.

In the formation of NAM and the discussions in 1976 we see again the idea of an architectural version of the NHS, an NDS, this would be a mechanism for 'doing architecture' without Architecture or Architects. The issue here, is one I have addressed previously so will only touch on again here. How is this paid for? It seems the members NAM partaking in the seminar Hellman is reporting on favour State funding, so this must be general taxation. Therefore, as discussed earlier in this thesis a sea change in the priorities of British society would have to occur for the NDS to emerge. Architecture would have to be seen as on a par with Health and thus the NHS. Whilst in the mid-nineteen seventies with Statism and national ownership of industries at its height this may not seem such a bold claim, but clearly for us today a quarter of the way into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century it is unfathomable. The centralising State control of many aspects of peoples' lives has been lost, initially to eager capitalists hungry for the assets of the State, and now to more autonomous, decentralised, direct, and, dare I say, proto-anarchist society.

That the architect, it is argued, should work directly for and with "The People" and not the powers that be; and that they should work for free fatally undermines the "profession" which is of course a major part of the reason for ARCs advocations of this.<sup>767</sup> If one is working for free as architects it is assumed, under existent social mores, that this cannot be one's profession. Therefore, one must concede that being an Architect, as redefined as this term would then be, must be an extra role, a voluntary duty that former "Architects" perform for the community at large, or one they carry out via the likes of NDS as if a nurse in the NHS.

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<sup>767</sup> Mills, & Moloney, "ARC: its history and its present aims". p.9.

## NAM and ARC letters

There are also two letters from 1976 written by Anson as “Director of Policy for ARC” sent by Anson to Mills, which are worthy of attention here. The first dated 29<sup>th</sup> July 1976 are Anson’s notes of an ARC/NAM Meeting and this notes the distinction between the two groups, with Anson writing:

‘NAM is ... awaiting the repercussions of it's [sic] submission to the Monopolies Commission; NAM's report had been well recieved [sic]. It is now clear that the strategic objectives of the two groups are quite different; this also affects their style.’<sup>768</sup>

The Monopolies Commission submission is addressed in an article in *The Architects Journal* published on 26<sup>th</sup> May 1976, under the title “Fixed Fees deprive poor says New Architecture Movement”. In this the *Journal* writes that NAM have protested: ‘...by denying architects to those potential user-clients who would be less able to pay... the fee system acts as a barrier.’<sup>769</sup> Anson reports in his meeting notes that this report was ‘well received’ the commission.

These approaches to modify and reform the architectural profession through “proper channels” are reflective of Anson’s next note, where he writes:

‘ARC will logically continue it's[sic] ‘guerilla’[sic] campaign and aim to be a continual thorn in the side of the establishment. Complimenting this it will develop it's[sic] community design work. NAM on the other hand is in the ‘numbers game’, that is building a mass movement. Logically the organisational

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<sup>768</sup> Brian Anson, minutes of meeting titled “ARC/NAM Meeting. Thursday, 29<sup>th</sup> July 1976”

<sup>769</sup> Architects' Journal, the. "The Week: Fixed Fees Deprive Poor, Says New Architecture Movement." *Architects' Journal*. 163, no. 21 (26/05/1976): 1020.

structure of the two groups is also totally different... NAM is developing quickly as a decentralised organisation.<sup>770</sup>

This distinction is also reflected in language used by the ARC, Anson uses the word “guerrilla” above and as discussed in Chapter 9, the use of terms such as “cells” and “active service units” are indicative of ARCs more insurgent and revolutionary credentials. Whilst NAM tries to steer a more moderate path and recruit more and more members of the profession to attempt affect change from the inside.

A second letter in my possession, also sent by Anson to Mills, dated 6<sup>th</sup> September 1976 Anson includes note from a meeting which took place on 2<sup>nd</sup> September 1976 at which the ARCs relationship with and towards NAM was discussed. Those present at this meeting are named as Paul (Gorka), Louis (Hellman), Peter (Moloney), Rob (Thompson) and Anson himself. It is also noted that ‘George was busy arranging an office in the valley’,<sup>771</sup> presumably Colne Valley. According to Anson’s notes, they would: ‘...wait a little while longer before devising what action ARC should take over NAM, but it was generally accepted that it may be strategically valuable to eventually give NAM a little public ‘kick’.<sup>772</sup>

ARCs relationship with NAM was then one of “revolutionary” versus the acceptable face of “new” architecture. This is not to say that NAM was popular with the Architecture establishment, but that it nevertheless had ambitions to be a mass movement, designed to recruit many practicing architects to its ranks. Whereas the ARC would remain a more fringe and fast moving “cell” of the revolution in architecture.

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<sup>770</sup> Brian Anson, minutes of meeting titled “ARC/NAM Meeting. Thursday, 29<sup>th</sup> July 1976”

<sup>771</sup> Brian Anson, minutes of meeting titled “NOTE OF ARC MEETING. 2nd. Sept. 1976. Percy Street. London W1.”

<sup>772</sup> Ibid.



NAM was thus one of the offshoots of the ARC, one that developed an identity and life of its own independent of the ARC. They produced the “NAM Handbook of 1978/9” and the “Working for What?” pamphlet from 1977,<sup>773</sup> the former of which is comprehensive document setting out the various positions of NAM. These are intriguing subjects of study, but they are not the central concern of this thesis so will not be analysed here. Sufficed to say, as *Spatial Agency* has already documented, NAM survived until 1980, as did its journal *SLATE*.

‘*SLATE* ceased publication in 1980 and NAM moved into different existences, including 'Women in Construction', which was the starting point for Matrix, one of the first explicitly feminist architecture practices in the UK. However, by the mid 1980s most of the initial energy of these groups had been dissipated, overwhelmed, one suspects, by the ascendant values of the Thatcherite era.’<sup>774</sup>

It appears that NAM, like the ARC and the revolutionary work of Mills, Thompson, Hellman, Purser and Gorka could not survive the “Thatcherite Purges” of the early-nineteen eighties and dissipated as the reforms of Thatcher’s Governments bled away funding and support for their causes.

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<sup>773</sup> Architectural Workers. ‘Resources’, *Architectural Workers*, no date. architecturalworkers.wordpress.com/resources [Accessed 17<sup>th</sup> January 2022]

<sup>774</sup> Spatial Agency. ‘The New Architecture Movement’, *Spatial Agency*, no date. spatialagency.net/database/new.architecture.movement.nam [Accessed 19<sup>th</sup> April 2012]

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copyright reasons.

Figure 102. NAM Handbook of 1978/79.

This dissipation of NAM and ARC was slow process, and those members of the ARC continued to work tother up to and including Divis campaign, bring us up to 1988. George Mills knew of some of the lives and careers of former ARC members saying that:

'Adam Purser... was a communist but he was a member of ARC... he runs a clipper ship out of Cornwall now.' And '...Dag Fasting went back to Norway and practiced architecture, Dave Taylor became a big wheel in John Prescott's little group when Labour came to power. Andy Burrell became a millionaire developer in Edinburgh...'

The death of revolutionary architecture movements such as ARC have been reported by *Spatial Agency* before now,<sup>775</sup> but these organisations, notably the ARC, and their surviving founder members insist these groups continue to exist in one form or another. When asked if the ARC was dead Peter Moloney said categorically: "No, no, certainly not. If I was asked now to undertake some work, or develop a project with a community group, I would still sign it "Peter Moloney, ARC".<sup>776</sup>

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<sup>775</sup> Spatial Agency. 'The New Architecture Movement'. *Spatial Agency*, no date. [spatialagency.net/database/new.architecture.movement.nam](http://spatialagency.net/database/new.architecture.movement.nam) [Accessed 19<sup>th</sup> April 2017]

<sup>776</sup> Peter Moloney, in conversation with the author, Greenwich, London, 27<sup>th</sup> June 2013

# CHAPTER FOURTEEN

## CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have set out to tell the history of “a movement which has not been called a movement”. That of a group of architects, planners, designers, students, and residents of many places across these Islands. Between them coalesced into an architectural movement that provides us today with a clear example from history of how to democratise architecture and possibly destroy the RIBA, and the elite social class within which architects and their institutions sit.

To briefly recap the contents of this thesis here, Part 1 “The Architecture Establishment & Anarchism” addressed the theoretical and historical context of both the architectural profession(s) and anarchism in relation to the built environment. This provided a basis for my contribution made in later chapters of the thesis. Chapter 1, “An anarchist approach: Methodology” provides the reader with an anarchist theoretical context and set out my methodology. Chapter 2, “Architecture and Architects: The Profession(s) and Others”, addressed the concept of the Architect and the emergence of the profession. I set the scene of my approach to architectural history with reference to the extant literature in the field. The second part of this chapter looked at the ‘Others’, non-architects and how they have ‘done architecture’ and built buildings without or with the assistance of architects. The last chapter of Part 1, Chapter 3, “Anarchism In Architecture” defined in detail the relevant anarchist theories principally the work of Colin Ward and Herbert Read and contexts as the various lenses through which I analysed the work of the ARC in the second part of the thesis. Chapter 3 forms the basis of the later analysis seen in the Case studies, in Chapter 6 and indeed here. This investigation of relevant (to nineteenth seventies Britain) anarchist political

contexts thus informs and expands upon the practices and accidental anarchism of all the groups with which the ARC worked.

“The Architects’ Revolutionary Council” study, Part 2 of the thesis defines the contribution to knowledge being made here. Chapter 4, “The ARC is born” described emergence of the ARC as a movement in British architecture in the nineteen seventies. As well as addressing the centrality of the AA in the formation of the ARC.

Chapter 5 analysed the many writings of Brian Anson as Director of Policy and chief theorist of the ARC. The collection of unique documents in the form of letters, policy papers, essays, speeches and draft journal articles written by Brian Anson were central to this, with Chapter 6 tying together these various strands.

Chapters 7-12 defined and analysed the case examples of ARCs activity in the built environment looking at Ealing, Bridgtown, Colne Valley, and The Divis Flats. Each case studies provided us with a different example of the job the “real world” work of the ARC.

I have therefore established using anarchist ideas and theories of organisation the ways in which these movements, whilst not having a single political credo, have conformed in almost all cases to anarchist modes of ‘doing architecture’. The doing of architecture is not however always about building buildings, as many architects and architectural theorists and historians would have those of us outside the professional believe. Architecture, as John Turner said of housing, is a verb not a product, not a beautifully rendered CAD image used to sell a product to a client. The end point of few of the examples cited in this thesis, from SOLON to ARC, was the building of a building. There are minor examples to be certain, the work of Walter Segal for one, but in all cases, there was the process of ‘doing architecture’ taking place. The people of Bridgtown, Colne Valley, Covent Garden, Divis, Ealing, and

others were not architects, they were ordinary people, spontaneously originating grassroots organisations to take control of and have their say in their built environment. In every case this was about stopping capital 'A' Architects and capital 'A' Architecture from realising the many plans they have for us. The absolute certainty Modernist-inspired Architects of the nineteen seventies had in the correctness of their designs was shaken by the Community Action groups of the late-nineteen sixties and early-nineteen seventies, as ordinary people decided to take action to defend their own interests. The energy from these movements, and the opportunities that the ongoing political and economic instability of the decade, provided the springboard for some in the myriad architectural professions to start to question themselves. From this emerged the key group, the history of whom forms the new contribution to knowledge made by this thesis, a group who forced many in Architecture to deal with the issues created by their arrogant and cloth-eared application of all their 'book learning' to the real lives of real people.

The Architects' Revolutionary Council was a roughly formed, militant, loud, and brash response by working class people in architecture to Architecture having divorced itself from the vast majority of people in these islands. As Brian Anson said in 2008:

'I left architecture because I found that it didn't serve my people. I fell in love with architecture when I was a teenager in Bootle, Liverpool; ... I thought it would help my people, and then I slowly discovered ... That was only for the rich. It wasn't for the poor.'<sup>777</sup>

But perhaps Anson was wrong, perhaps Architecture left him. Architecture, and Modernist Architecture in particular, set out to be more than just yet another style, it was to be a social and political project too, but it had led to the situation that Anson and so many others found

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<sup>777</sup> Anson with Crowley, Op cit. 00:02:02–12

themselves in 1969. The energy that emerged from the uprisings of 1968 and the social and sexual liberation of the nineteen sixties more generally, gave impetus to a new group of young(er) people to try to forge something different in the nineteen seventies. The ARC is the British architectural manifestation of that, a real attempt to forge a new architecture. The founding of the New Architecture Movement, whilst short lived, went on itself to form the Feminist Design Collective, later followed by Matrix, which was subject of recent exhibition at the Barbican Arts Centre.<sup>778</sup> This exhibition marking 40 years since Matrix foundation is significant in the context of this thesis as it demonstrates the ongoing relevance of Matrix ideas and the battles they fought in architecture. Battles for which the groundwork was set by groups like the ARC as one of their forerunners.

As Matrix made clear 40 years ago the Architectural professions in this country, then as now, a quarter of the way into the twenty first century, far too white, too middle class, and too male. The ARC was at least not middle class and in this they challenged the image of what an Architect was in the nineteen seventies. Working class men with regional accents were certainly working in Architecture at the time, but as draftsmen and technicians, respectable working class, not the highly qualified gentleman architects of the RIBA in Colvin's characterisation.

There are numerous ways in which the ARC can be criticised and some of these have been explored in this thesis, but it was not my primary focus. They were too dogmatic, despite Anson's claims later in life to not being a dogmatist, they did not choose their battles as Mills might have had them do, or compromise where compromise was called for to achieve their aims. For these reasons, and numerous others, they never truly tried to 'build something'

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<sup>778</sup> Hannigan, Christine. 'How We Live Now: Reimagining Spaces with Matrix Feminist Design Co-Operative: Level G, the Barbican Centre. Until 23 December 2021', *The London Journal*, 1–5.

which Moloney and Mills at least believed was their ultimate aim: they were too political or ideological to succeed in many ways.

They can be criticised for being a group of white, male, socialists, they were typical of their time in their lack of diversity, it seems no women were involved with ARC at all. At a time that saw the rise of second wave feminism, and the founding of Feminist Design Collective (which emerged from NAM, which in turn emerged from ARC) there is little to excuse this omission beyond the fact that they lived and worked in male dominated profession. Similarly, their lack of ethnic diversity might be seen through the same lens. One might excuse this as being “of its time” Moloney was Irish, Anson Welsh by heritage, but this hardly qualifies as ethnic diversity and certainly not by today’s standards. Their view was therefore partial, white and male, and whilst being from Bootle, Derry, and Salford; the three key ARCers, Anson, Moloney, and Mills, respectively, worked largely in London at the AA or the TCPA, at the London Borough of Hackney, and in Manchester as the M in MBLC.

They were London-centric for most of their time working as the ARC, even if their projects and campaigns were farther afield. As the ARC headed paper shows, Percy Street was their primary base and they were “Also at New Hagg” (see figure 90), their London-centricity was evidently a flaw for an organisation that proclaimed to be international but was in fact confined to Britain and Ireland on terms of its work.

The history of the ARC presented in this thesis has never before been told. I have been hugely privileged to speak with George Mills and Peter Moloney, their contributions were vital to the production of this thesis. I have also had access to the recordings made by Duncan Crowley of Brian Anson reflecting candidly on his life a matter of months before his death. George and Peter also provided me with access a raft of letters and other documents



of Brian's, and generously donated other materials of their own including the posters, pamphlets, and community newspapers. All these primary materials are uniquely available to me, and this forms the basis of the contribution of this thesis. In support of this material, I have here presented an extensive body of secondary research gathering all the written material thus far available on the ARC and their work between 1974 and 1983/5. This combined with the primary material or oral testimony provides a partial picture of the ARC. I am relying on 40-year-old memories from three men in their 60s or 70s, one of whom I was unable to interview myself. This combined with the secondary accounts meant that my interpretation of these documents of events relies on the broader field of enquiry. My own knowledge after 18 years of teaching design and architecture theory and history in higher education in Manchester Metropolitan University has been invaluable to me in formulating this thesis.

However, all this does mean that I have had to extrapolate or reasonably conclude certain elements of my argument. Knowing the historical and architectural context that the ARC operated in has come from my nearly two decades of teaching, and the assessment of anarchist theory comes from nearly 25 years of subscribing to such a political leaning myself. The primary contribution to the field that I have made is to write a critical history of the ARC, through the synthesis of primary material with modes of critical historical enquiry, I have told a history that has not previously been known in toto and defined a movement in British architecture in the nineteen seventies that had not previously been called a movement.

This thesis in part fills the gap of the nineteen seventies architecture history and theory. In linking the many individuals who challenged the status quo in Architecture in the nineteen eighties to the social revolutions of the nineteen sixties. The Seventies have been described as a highly contested decade in the historical field, disregarded by historians both

architectural and general until comparatively recently. But as is here demonstrated the Seventies serve as a vital bridge between the social revolution of the Sixties and the implosion of late Capitalism and the emergence of Neo-Liberalism in the Eighties. The Seventies were a perhaps an all too brief period in which many social and political alternatives were being born, living, and dying. In the world of Architecture, the ARC was one of those which burned most brightly.

Fundamentally this thesis provides a leaping off point for further study to others who wish to further interrogate the other architectural pressure groups of this period. The recent attention given to Matrix by the RIBA<sup>779</sup> and the 2021 Barbican Exhibition 'How We Live Now: Reimagining Spaces with Matrix Feminist Design Co-Operative', the 2014 book *The revolutionary urbanism of street farm: Eco-anarchism, architecture and alternative technology in the 1970s* by Stephen E. Hunt suggest a reappraisal of the period.<sup>780</sup> The ARC were one of many groups questioning the nature of architecture in the Seventies in Britain, as Anne Karpf described in 1977.<sup>781</sup> But the questioning then and the questions asked are still by-and-large applicable to architecture now as ARC said nearly 50 years ago in their manifesto:

'ARC calls on all those architects and others involved in the built environment who believe that we should cease working only for a rich powerful minority... and offer our skills and services to the local communities who have little chance to work directly with architects and architecture.'<sup>782</sup>

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<sup>779</sup> Buxton, Pamela. 'Work Still to Be Done: Jos Boys on the Continuing Campaigns of Matrix', *Royal Institute of British Architects Journal*, 08/03/2021, [www.ribaj.com/culture/matrix-feminist-design-co-operative-barbican-inclusion](http://www.ribaj.com/culture/matrix-feminist-design-co-operative-barbican-inclusion) [Accessed 19<sup>th</sup> January 2022]

<sup>780</sup> Hunt, Stephen E. *The revolutionary urbanism of street farm: Eco-anarchism, architecture and alternative technology in the 1970s*. (Bristol: Tangent Books, 2014)

<sup>781</sup> Karpf, Op cit.

<sup>782</sup> Mills & Moloney, Op cit. p.9.

The examples of people seizing control of their built environments, from the Corn Street Coop to Bridgtown and Ealing are all examples of the Quietist mode of anarchism that is alive and well in British society, and arguably anywhere where humans organise themselves for their own benefit and without recourse to hierarchy or the hand of Authority or the Professional. Quietist anarchism is the most feasible, most applicable, and most 'natural (to cite Read one more time) forms of anarchism. It emerges from the grassroots, it is not imposed by high minded academics or theoretical treatise, it is just obvious or logical to many. This is not to say it is easy, by no means is rebelling against the *status quo*, of seizing control of what does not belong to you (legally at least) and making changes you want to make in the teeth of powerful opposition easy, it is however natural. That is what we can see in Liverpool, Covent Garden, Ealing, and Bridgtown; it is what we might have seen Colne had Mills and the ARC's timing been better. Divis is the exception that proves the rule a wildly different context that suited Anson and Moloney down to the ground. Here Anson could do more than shout radical rhetorical and did not have to lament the lack of revolutionary fervour amongst the working class of West Belfast. But the true spirit of anarchism does not come from revolution it comes from ordinary people, and our willingness to step outside the bounds of a hierarchical society and do what we believe is right in solidarity and cooperation with our peers.

The products of professions of Architecture nonetheless remain the province of the rich and powerful, whilst Architects may only build a small proportion of homes in Britain,<sup>783</sup> this simply means that Architecture by Architects as a professional class remains accessible only to the

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<sup>783</sup> Marris, Colin. 'Third of Biggest Housebuilders Don't Employ Own Architects', *Architects' Journal* 26/01/2015, [architectsjournal.co.uk/archive/third-of-biggest-housebuilders-dont-employ-own-architects](http://architectsjournal.co.uk/archive/third-of-biggest-housebuilders-dont-employ-own-architects) [Accessed 9<sup>th</sup> February 2022]

wealthy minority. No, Architects may not be able to be entirely “blamed” for much of the built environment constructed today, but the status of their profession and allied professions places them in an elite tier of society. Consequently, the ‘art of architecture’ is not available to masses as the ARC argued in 1974. The provision of the valued skills of architects to ‘...the local communities who have little chance to work directly with architects and architecture<sup>784</sup> has still not been achieved. One could question whether Architects and Architecture even want such a democratisation, imperilling as it does their elevated status in society, the evidence of the last four decades suggests not. These failings still trouble a large percentage of architects, but not the organisations that defend the profession from the threat of a loss of status. The ARC were right that if we want to have a truly democratic accessible form of architecture in Britain we have to look outside of the profession. Architects, like ARC, like Segal, like SOLON, can enable that democratic architecture but only people, non-architects, can make that happen. Architecture should not include non-architects out of a sense of duty, or in some lip service to participation, but because they realise that they cannot succeed in their mission to provide for them without their contribution. As that unnamed self-builder said to Segal sometime in the Seventies:

‘Walter, you couldn’t do a thing without me – you may be able to draw things, but you need me to carry them out.’<sup>785</sup>

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<sup>784</sup> Mills & Moloney, Op cit., p.9.

<sup>785</sup> McKean, Op cit., p.172.

*'...and so I say to my people's masters beware the thing that is coming,  
beware the risen people who shall take what ye would not give....'*

*"The Rebel" P.H. Pearse.*



**THE ARCHITECT'S REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL**

11 Percy Street, London W1      01 636 0974 x.14

Also at NEW HAGG, Oldfield Road, Oldfield, nr. Honley, Yorks.

*Legal Adviser: John Hendy LLB (Lond) DipLL (Belfast) LLM. Barrister-at-Law.*

*Economic Adviser: George McRobie Bsc Econ. FRSA.*

Figure 103. ARC headed paper created 1976.

## Epilogue

Brian Anson who started it all with his defection from the Greater London Council in 1969, whom Richard Rogers described in his obituary as being ‘...tireless in his battles for the rights of those whose problems others overlooked or thought insurmountable. He was driven by a profound understanding of, and sympathy for, the underdog...’<sup>786</sup> died of a heart attack aged 74, at his home in France on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2009. He is remembered fondly by many who knew him as, an *agent provocateur*, radical, rebel, outsider, and revolutionary.

I never met Brian, but I feel I know him from everything I have read and heard. I suspect we would have disagreed on a lot, and he would have taken issue with most of the ways I have critiqued his work and that the ARC in this thesis. But that is perhaps to be expected of a man who, as George Mills remembered of his friend, ‘...stuck by his principles to the day he bloody died!’<sup>787</sup>

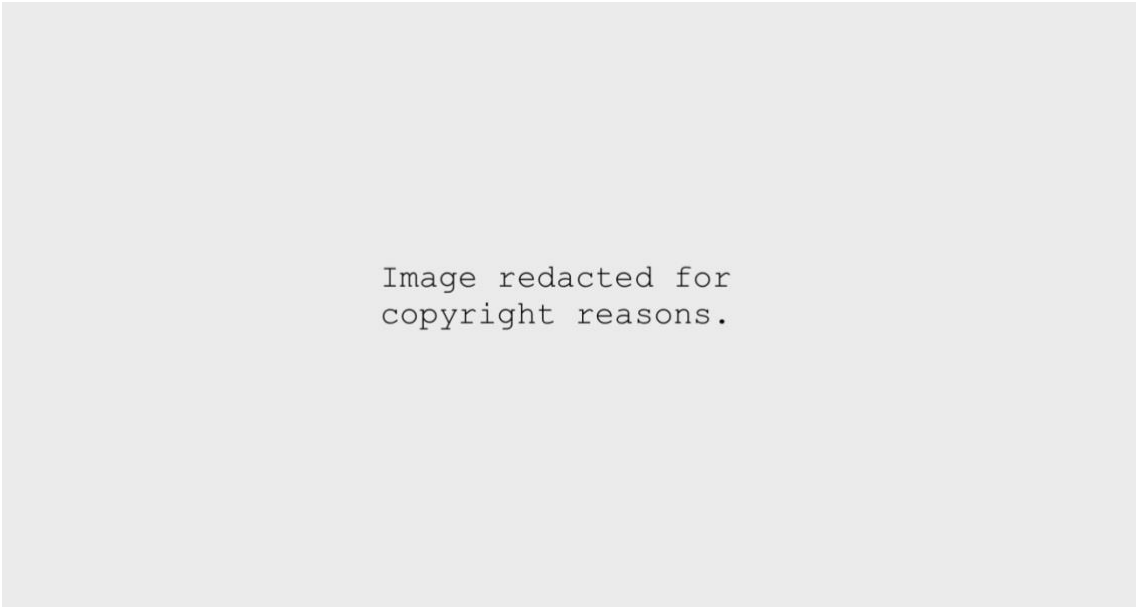


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Figure 104. Brian Anson, the rear cover of *I'll Fight You For*

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<sup>786</sup> Rogers, Op cit.

<sup>787</sup> George Mills, in conversation with the author, Withington, Manchester, 16<sup>th</sup> July 2014.

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## Timeline

- 1966 Anson began working for the Greater London Council (GLC).
- 1966 Covent Garden Market Act passed to close the fruit and vegetable market
- 1966 Plans to redevelop Covent Garden announced by GLC.
- 1966 People of Covent Garden begin to resist plans for redevelopment.
- 1966 General Election – Labour returned to power, Harold Wilson PM
- 1967 4 May – machine gun attack US Embassy, London; by 1<sup>st</sup> of May Group
- 1968 May – Paris Uprisings
- 1969 February – anarchists bomb explodes at Bank of Spain, Liverpool.  
March – bomb explodes at Bank of Bilbao, London; anarchist International 1<sup>st</sup> of May Group claims responsibility, two men arrested.
- 1969 Anson defects from GLC to the Covent Garden Residents Association
- 1970 4 May – US Embassy, London; firebombed, by The Angry Brigade  
10 May – unexploded bomb found at Heathrow, by The Angry Brigade  
22 May – unexploded bomb found at Paddington Green Police Station, by The Angry Brigade  
June – General Election – unexpected Tory victory, Edward Heath PM  
18 August – Bomb explodes at Iberia Airlines office in Regent’s Street, London; planted by The Angry Brigade.  
30 August – Home of Sir John Waldron, Metropolitan Police commissioner, damaged by bomb planted by The Angry Brigade.  
October – Attorney General, Peter Rawlinson, home bombed, by The Angry Brigade.  
November – BBC van destroyed by a bomb outside Albert Hall after covering Miss World contest, bomb planted by The Angry Brigade.  
December – Bomb at Department of Employment and Productivity, planted by The Angry Brigade
- 1971 Anson starts working at the AA
- 1971 Construction begins on New Covent Garden Market, Battersea.
- 1971 January – Home of government minister Robert Carr bombed by The Angry Brigade.  
February – Police twice raid 14 Cannock Street, Moss Side, Manchester; searching for explosives linked to The Angry Brigade, they find nothing.  
April – The Times receives letter bomb and message from The Angry Brigade  
1 May – Biba boutique in Kensington bombed by The Angry Brigade  
27 May – Angry Brigade members Ian Purdie and Jake Prescott committed for trial at the Old Bailey.  
June – The Times receives letter from Angry Brigade threatening prime minister Ted Heath with a bullet enclosed.  
August – Internment begins in north of Ireland.  
August – Intensive police raids on activists’ houses; explosion at army recruiting centre in north London from bomb planted by The Angry Brigade  
20 August – Police raid at Amhurst Road, Hackney, London; four arrested, John Barker, Hilary Creek, Jim Greenfield and Anna Mendelson; four more (later acquitted) are arrested throughout day.  
23 August – The Angry Brigade “Stoke Newington Eight” charged.  
October – Post Office Tower bombed by IRA.
- 1971-72 RIBA Crisis

- 1972 ARC founded in Yugoslavia  
 January – The Bloody Sunday Massacre  
 January-February – The Miners strikes  
 22 February – The Parachute Regiment HQ, Aldershot is bombed by IRA.  
 30 May – Trial of The Angry Brigade members begins.  
 6 December – The Angry Brigade members sentenced for conspiracy to cause bombings.
- 1973 UK joins EEC  
 OPEC Oil Crisis  
 New Covent Garden Market opens in Nine Elms, Battersea.  
 Anson delivers ‘Architect as Revolutionary’ speech at AA  
 August – Harrods firebombed and Old Bailey & London Stock Exchange bombed by IRA
- 1973-4 Three Day Week  
 1973-4 Miners and Railway Strikes
- 1974 May – General Election – Labour minority party, Harold Wilson PM  
 Covent Garden Campaign ends  
 ARC founding press conference held at the AA  
 Local Government reorganisation  
 7 October – IRA carry out the Guildford pub bombing  
 10 October – General Election – Labour victory, Harold Wilson PM  
 7 November – IRA carry out the Woolwich pub bombing  
 21 November – IRA carry out the Birmingham pub bombing  
 21 December – Harrods bombed again by IRA  
 22 December – Edward Heath’s home bombed by IRA
- 1974-76 Ealing Campaign
- 1975 Wrongful conviction of the Guildford Four and the Birmingham Six  
 George Mills starts studying at AA  
 May – ARC Manifesto published  
 SOLON working in south London (and Hackney)  
 August – gun battle between IRA snipers & British soldiers around Divis  
 August – IRA bombing of Oxford Street, London  
 October – IRA bombing of Green Park Station London  
 12+17 November – IRA bomb two restaurants in London  
 27 November – IRA assassinate commentator Ross McWhirter in Enfield  
 December – Balcombe Street Siege, IRA gang hold police at bay.
- 1976 April – Jim Callaghan replaces Wilson as PM.
- 1976 Blanket Protests by Republican prisoners at Long Kesh
- 1976-78 The Grunwick Strikes, Firefighters Strike,
- 1977 The Housing (Homeless Persons) Act
- 1977-78 The Winter of Discontent
- 1977 Silver Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II
- 1977-79 Colne Valley Project
- 1977-80 Bridgtown Campaign
- 1978-81 Dirty Protest and Hunger Strikes by Republican prisoners at Long Kesh
- 1978 December – IRA bomb Bristol, Coventry, Liverpool, Manchester, & Southampton
- 1979 May – General Election – Tory victory, Margaret Thatcher PM
- 1979 August – IRA assassinate of Lord Mountbatten, 3 others killed as well.
- 1980-86 Divis Campaign

Appendix

This appendix lists the documents, posters, photographs, issues of the Colne Valley News. These are coded by the indexing used in the author's personal collection, and therefore not accessible publicly. This list is provided for the convenience of the reader.

I am also in possession of transcripts and recordings of two conversations each with Peter Moloney and George Mills which took place as follows:

1. George Mills, at 11a Rathen Road, Withington, Manchester, 2012.
2. Peter Moloney, at The British Museum, Bloomsbury, London, 2013.
3. Peter Moloney, at 4a Norman Road, Greenwich, London, 2013.
4. George Mills, at 11a Rathen Road, Withington, Manchester, 2014.

#### Photographs

1. Photographic contact sheet of The Architect's Revolutionary Council founding press conference at the Architectural Association, Bedford Square, London, 1974. photographer: unknown.
2. Photograph of the former Odham's Printing press site, Covent Garden taken c.1965, photographer: unknown.

#### Posters

1. "If crime doesn't pay where do architects get all their money?" ARC poster. c.1974.
2. "RIBA dog and His Masters Voice (HMV)", ARC poster. c.1974.
3. "Repressive, Insensitive, Brutal, Arrogant. RIBA", ARC poster. c.1974.

#### Documents

1. A pamphlet authored by Adam Purser and Architects' Revolutionary Council, titled: *A Short History of the Architectural Profession*, produced by New Architecture Movement dated 1976.
2. George Mills, A timeline titled "The Future for the ARC."
3. A photocopy of the *RED HOUSE* journal, Issue 1, October 1976.
4. Position paper titled "What is a Peoples Architecture?" as created by George Mills as part of the ARCs Colne Valley Project.
5. TCPAs Draft Policy Statement: Divis Flats, Belfast, October 1985.
6. The catalogue which accompanied TCPA exhibition, 'The Dreadful Enclosure', November 1985.

7. Meeting notes written by Brain Anson.
8. Letter from Brian Anson to George Mills, titled "From Sunny Surbiton," 1976.
9. Rob Thompson's undated and untitled paper, c.1976/7.
10. Brian Anson's undated response to Rob Thompson's undated and untitled paper, c.1976/7.
11. Brian Anson, minutes of meeting titled "ARC/NAM Meeting. Thursday, 29th July 1976"
12. Brian Anson, minutes of meeting titled "NOTE OF ARC MEETING. 2nd. Sept. 1976. Percy Street. London W1."
13. Architectural Association's 1976/77 prospectus.

#### Colne Valley News

1. Colne Valley News, issue 1, October 1976.
2. Colne Valley News, issue 10, September 1977
3. Colne Valley News, issue 12, November 1977
4. Colne Valley News, issue 13, December 1977
5. Colne Valley News, issue 15, February 1978
6. Colne Valley News, issue 16, March 1978
7. Colne Valley News, issue 17, April 1978