

Neo-Tudor and its Enemies

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Has any architecture — even the concrete ‘shoe boxes’ of the 1960s — received such consistent abuse as the neo-Tudor of the first half of the twentieth century — especially in its middle-class, suburban manifestations (Fig. 1)? ‘The abominable Tudoristic villa of the By-pass road’, ‘The worst bogus Tudor housing estates’, and ‘Those repellent, jerry-built, sham-Tudor houses that disfigure England’ are some contemporary judgements.¹ And as far as that enthusiast for the modern, Anthony Bertram, in his 1935 book, *The House: A Machine for Living In*, was concerned:

The man who builds a bogus Tudoresque villa or castellates his suburban home is committing a crime against truth and tradition: he is denying the history of progress, denying his own age and insulting the very thing he pretends to imitate by misusing it.²

Some styles, like neo-Norman, remain resolutely unfashionable, as their expressions are usually so intractable and ungainly; but with neo-Tudor — ‘Mock-Tudor’ as the architecturally and historically illiterate tend to call it — we are dealing not so much with aesthetics as with snobbery. Neo-Tudor architecture — ‘Stockbroker’s Tudor’ —



Fig. 1. A development of neo-Tudor detached houses photographed by Herbert Felton in the 1930s; that its suburban location was and remains unidentified perhaps reflects the disdain with which such architecture is often still regarded (National Monuments Record).

has been despised precisely because it is popular even when it is not clearly middle-class and suburban. This is even true of the original, for while the Bright Young Things of the inter-war years learned to love and lust after aristocratic Georgian seats like Stowe, Compton Wynyates and Ightham Mote, Knole and Ockwells continued to be visited and revered by the day-tripper and the motorist. Evelyn Waugh caught this prejudice in *Decline and Fall*, when Margot Beste-Chetwynde, before she demolished old King's Thursday — 'the finest piece of domestic Tudor in England' — to replace it by the modernist masterpiece of Professor Otto Silenus, remarked that 'I can't think of anything more bourgeois and awful than timbered Tudor architecture'.³

A much more effective weapon than abuse is, as always, ridicule. Suburbs — particularly those of the inter-war years — have long been despised, particularly by those who have risen out of them. As one early study of the phenomenon — published in 1947 — observed, 'It's easy to be funny about the suburbs. Like Wigan or marriage, it's always good for a laugh'.⁴ Sometimes the humour is tinged with sympathy, as with Osbert Lancaster, the essential taxonomist of neo-Tudor, whose witty terms for its different manifestations — not only the archetypal 'Stockbroker's Tudor' but also 'Wimbledon Transitional', 'Aldwych Farcical' and 'By-Pass Variegated' — are now indispensable for the architectural historian. 'Stockbrokers Tudor', indeed, has now achieved wider and more general currency (Fig. 2).

In *Pillar to Post*, Lancaster explained how this half-timbered style had gone down-market and been adopted by the builders of new suburbs, so that,

when the passer-by is a little unnerved at being suddenly confronted with a hundred and fifty accurate reproductions of Anne Hathaway's cottage, each complete with central-heating and garage, he should pause to reflect on the extraordinary fact that all over the country the latest and most scientific methods of mass-production are being utilized to turn out a stream of old oak beams, leaded window-panes and small discs of bottle-glass, all structural devices which our ancestors lost no time in abandoning as soon as an increase in wealth and knowledge enabled them to do so.⁵

That was written in 1938; two-thirds of a century on, has anything really changed? More to the point, so what if it has not?

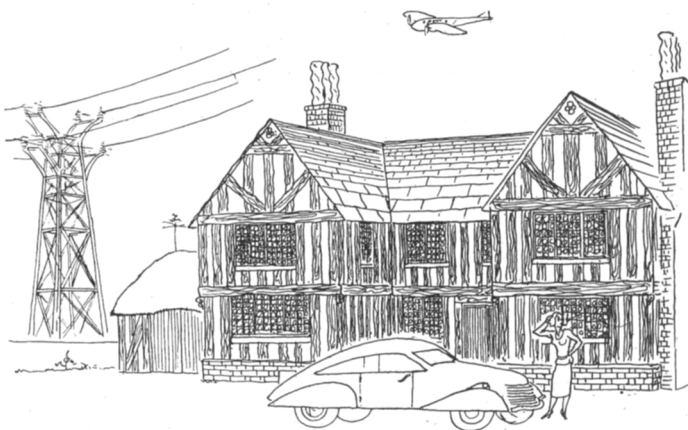


Fig. 2. 'Stockbroker's Tudor' drawn by Osbert Lancaster, from *Pillar to Post* (1938)

Tudor remains popular today and I want to suggest that its modern revival and its suburban expressions deserve to be taken far more seriously than they usually have been. It is the task of the historian to cut through élitist and snobbish prejudices and regard buildings — any buildings — as a significant cultural manifestation, however laughable or mediocre they may be. And sometimes, I would argue, neo-Tudor was handled with quite as much wit and invention as other styles, such as Modern or Georgian, which tend to be regarded with a greater seriousness verging upon uncritical reverence. The reasons for the enduring popularity of what can loosely be termed neo-Tudor right through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in England are very much to do with nostalgia, but then a great deal of architecture is associational and has to be explained by cultural resonances and fashion. For particular cultural reasons, Tudor has been consistently popular for over two centuries, despite being dismissed or ignored by avant-garde architects and prejudiced historians. Indeed, it can be argued that it is *the* English national style, and an expression of nationalism in architecture — our own national Romanticism — that precedes any equivalents in continental Europe.

Nostalgia began early in England: a consciousness of the 'Olden Time' seems to have begun immediately after the Reformation, never to go away, and was sustained by antiquarians. But a later, parallel development which started in the eighteenth century was an interest in the age of Shakespeare, in the reigns of Henry VIII and Elizabeth, when England grew powerful as an independent seafaring nation and, crucially, a *Protestant* one. The significant event here was the Shakespeare Festival in Stratford-upon-Avon, organized by David Garrick in 1769. This nostalgia soon had an architectural manifestation as, encouraged by the cult of the Picturesque, *cottages ornées* and lodges began to be designed and built in a rustic style which, when not Gothick, we might best describe as Tudor. Examples by James Malton (Fig. 3), Humphrey and George Repton, and John Nash might be mentioned. The supreme example is, of course, Blaise Hamlet, where, by designing asymmetrical cottages with thatched roofs, weatherboarding, half-timbering and prominent brick chimneys, Nash brilliantly anticipated the vernacular revivals of the Victorians. As George Repton reported to the client, he had observed that:

these kind of chimney stacks are frequently seen in old cottages and generally in old Manor Houses and buildings of the reign of Queen Elizabeth and invariably produce a picturesque effect — their character requires they should be very high.⁶

Queen Marie-Antoinette had, of course, earlier played with the rustic at Versailles (and I must acknowledge the more recent half-timbered French *style Normande*), but the excesses of the French Revolution encouraged the idea that this vernacular or Tudor manner was national and rooted in England's less hysterical history. As T. F. Hunt — who would later publish his *Exemplars of Tudor Architecture, adapted to modern habitations* — insisted in his *Half a dozen Hints on Picturesque Domestic Architecture* in 1825:

In these designs the Old English Domestic Style has been preferred to every other as admitting of greater variety of form and outline, and as being better suited to the scenery of this Country, than a Greek Temple or Italian Villa.⁷

And in presenting his 'Beau Idéal of an English Villa' a decade later in 1835, J. C. Loudon insisted on 'many reasons which lead me to give a preference to the mixed style

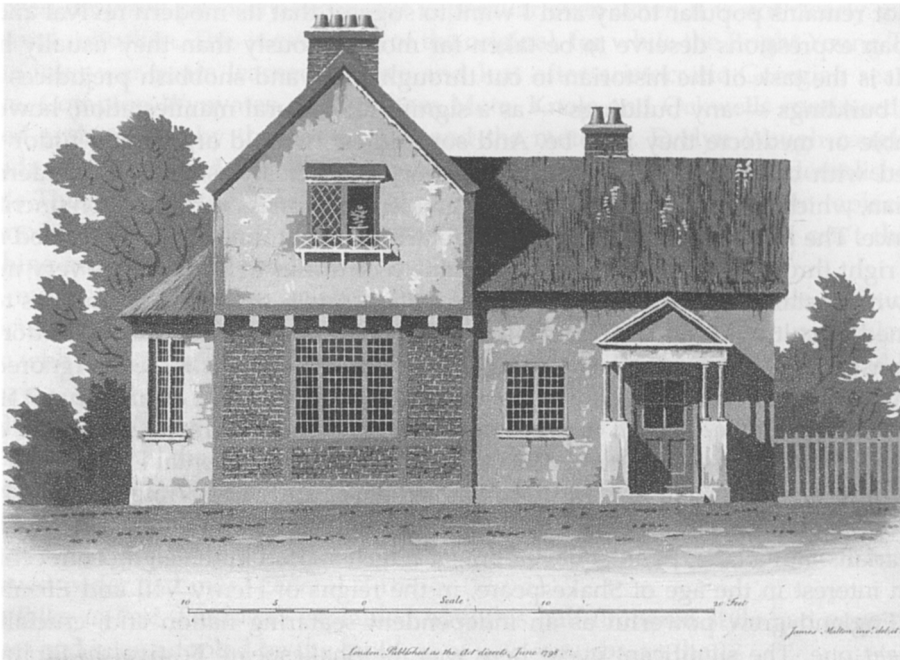


Fig. 3. Design for a cottage by James Malton, from *An Essay on British Cottage Architecture* (1798)



Fig. 4. Ockwells, Berkshire, from Joseph Nash, *The Mansions of England in the Olden Time* (1849)

of Architecture, called the old English style, for a gentleman's residence in the country'.⁸

During the following decade, Joseph Nash published his very popular lithographs of *The Mansions of England in the Olden Time*. Many were grand Elizabethan or Jacobean palaces, like Wollaton and Burleigh, but some were more homely half-timbered mansions, like Ockwells (Fig. 4), Little Moreton Hall and Speke. Interestingly, even when pre-Reformation, Gothic houses like Penshurst and Ightham were illustrated, they were inhabited not by figures in medieval dress but, significantly, by people in Elizabethan or seventeenth-century costume.⁹ The Olden Time being celebrated was the age of Shakespeare, and was *not* Catholic. In the 1820s, costume of that period influenced modern fashion and in 1831 the long-neglected play *Henry VIII* was revived, with the young Welby Pugin designing the scenery. No wonder that, soon after, in 1847, the Bard's birthplace in Stratford was bought for the nation, and then ruthlessly restored and isolated as a half-timbered fantasy. All this was a response to that long-lasting popular affection for the Olden Time which Peter Mandler has chronicled and analyzed.¹⁰

The influence of Nash's *Mansions* is evident in the work of Salvin and Devey, and certainly had an effect on the great flowering of English domestic architecture which took place in the later Victorian decades and which was celebrated by Hermann Muthesius in his *Das Englische Haus*. The story of Norman Shaw and Eden Nesfield moving from the Gothic to a revival of the country vernacular — which they called 'old English' — is very well known and needs no rehearsal here. And Shaw, like Ernest George and, in the North-West, Grayson and Ould, often used half-timbering, sometimes on an extensive scale as at Pierrepoint in Surrey. At the same time, progressive architects of the Arts and Crafts movement, like Philip Webb and, later, Charles Voysey, inspired by Ruskin and Morris, and fuelled by illustrated books on old cottage architecture (like Ralph Nevill's on south-west Surrey) recovered, as Muthesius put it, 'the traditions of the old master-mason, abandoning any suggestion of fine architecture and beginning to build simply and rationally like the old guild masons'.¹¹ The much-illustrated houses all these men designed continued to resonate well into the twentieth century, as we shall see.

This development of what might well be called Victorian neo-Tudor culminated in the work of Lutyens, who reinterpreted these rustic vernacular sixteenth- and seventeenth-century precedents with peculiar sophistication and wit. But after 1900 a change took place as the Arts and Crafts architects realized that the classical vernacular of the period of Wren, and even the elegant, straightforward Georgian rectories of the eighteenth century, also constituted a genuine national style, worthy of emulation. Even so, a majority of the upper-middle-class houses illustrated in the *Architectural Review* or *The Studio* up to 1914 remained in this vernacular Tudor tradition, characterized by half-timbering, gabled elevations, leaded-light windows and tall brick chimneys. Such was English domestic architecture and it was admired at home and abroad. Two decades later, however, similar buildings were regarded as old-fashioned and reactionary by the avant-garde, and a regrettable aspect of an insular and conservative society.

But what, if anything, had changed? Large neo-Tudor houses continued to be built, and illustrated in the many, many books on domestic architecture that were published during the inter-war decades, even if they were now sometimes outnumbered by neo-



Fig. 5. *Church Rate Corner, Cambridge, by M. H. Baillie Scott, 1924; photo 2004*

Georgian examples. Yet it was not classicism but the advent of modernism that changed attitudes towards the long-established Tudor tradition. Many architects had carried on regardless after the Great War, but some, who were once considered advanced and celebrated by Muthesius, now found themselves disparaged or ignored. Such was the fate of Baillie Scott (Fig. 5), who Morton Shand, Pevsner and others saw as a pioneer of modernism but who, by the 1930s, had rejected that style and merely continued to build stylish, romantic neo-Tudor houses as before. 'Instead of that uninspiring and rather tiresome slogan, "Fitness for purpose", which any pigsty can fulfil', he (or his new partner, Beresford) announced in the second, 1933, edition of *Houses and Gardens*:

let [the modern architect] rather inscribe, on his banners, 'England, Home and Beauty.' Instead of turning his back on the splendid work of his fathers, let him find inspiration in the buildings which have given us the precious heritage of rural England. He need not go to Sweden.¹²

As is, I think — I hope — now obvious, there is great danger in interpreting the architecture of the inter-war decades in the terms set by the influential architects and critics committed to the New Architecture. The plain fact is that the glamour of the age of Shakespeare and its Tudor architecture retained its hold over the popular imagination. Indeed, as I have suggested, perhaps that was why it was so much despised. Affection for half-timbering — new or old — was bound up with the continuing influence of the Arts and Crafts movement. The recent exhibition about

International Arts and Crafts at the Victoria and Albert Museum attempted to maintain that the movement ceased to be significant after 1914 (except, absurdly, in Japan), but this is surely untenable. What in fact happened is that the ideals which had been fostered by an educated élite had now filtered down to a much wider audience. Just how ubiquitous and influential this broader Arts and Crafts movement became can be appreciated from Evelyn Waugh's posturing rant against it, delivered in 1930:

The detestation of 'quaintness' and 'picturesque bits' which is felt by every decently constituted Englishman is, after all, a very insular prejudice. It has developed naturally in self-defence against arts and crafts, and the preservation of rural England, and the preservation of ancient monuments, and the transplantation of Tudor cottages, and the collection of pewter and old oak, and the reformed public houses, and Ye Olde Inne and the Kynde Dragone and Ye Cheshire Cheese, Broadway, Stratford-on-Avon, folk-dancing, the Lyric, Hammersmith, Belloc, Ditchling, Wessex-worship, village signs, local customs, heraldry, madrigals, wassail, regional cookery, Devonshire teas, letters to *The Times* about saving timbered alms-houses from destruction, the preservation of the Welsh language, etc. It is inevitable that English taste, confronted with all these frightful menaces to its integrity, should have adopted an uncompromising attitude to anything the least tainted with ye oldeness.¹³

Notice the reference to 'Stratford-on-Avon', and also to Tudor cottages and the preservation of rural England, for widespread concern about the destruction of the modest, homely vernacular buildings that once inspired Arts and Crafts architects reflected the taste for Tudor architecture. In 1928, no less than the Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin (who had impeccable Arts and Crafts connexions), chaired a conference at the Royal Society of Arts to launch an appeal for a Fund for The Preservation of Ancient Cottages, and this eventually resulted in the acquisition of the *village of West Wycombe by the National Trust*. *All too often, however, such old cottages were swept away only to be replaced by neo-Tudor bungalows, so no wonder that Clough Williams-Ellis's England and the Octopus (1928) and other publications delighted to contrast authentic, old Tudor buildings with modern developer's neo-Tudor (Fig. 6).*

What lies behind all this is the perennial myth of Elizabethan 'Merrie England', a nostalgia for a pre-industrial society that was not (as was the dream of Pugin and F. L. Griggs) Catholic. This was partly a response to a growing concern that, despite the extent of the Empire, Great Britain was being overtaken as the pre-eminent industrial power and this anxiety was further encouraged by the trauma of the Great War. At the very beginning of the century, at the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1900, Britain chose to be represented — amongst all that *art nouveau*, national Romanticism and frothy classicism — by Jacobean architecture in the form of a virtual replica of Kingston House at Bradford-on-Avon. Its designer was Lutyens, who was also responsible for the various replicas of half-timbered old buildings — including the Globe Theatre — erected for the fund-raising 'Shakespeare's England' exhibition held at Earl's Court in 1912.

In view of all this, it seems almost miraculous that, after the nineteenth-century Shakespeare Memorial Theatre at Stratford burned down in 1926, the replacement building was not only designed by a woman — Elisabeth Scott — but was a conspicuously modern creation, influenced by Dutch and German modernism. But it

THE FACE OF THE LAND



[Photo. Arch. Review

Illustrating a genuine old half-timbered English house. The timber frame work took the place of modern steel and the panels were filled in with brick or plaster.



Illustrating the silly sham which a cult of "old-world" atmosphere has given us. Creosoted planks are usually nailed on the face of ordinary brick construction.

Fig. 6. *Old and new half-timber contrasted*, in H.H.P. and N.L.C. (eds), *The Face of the Land. The Year Book of The Design & Industries Association 1929-1930* (1930)

may not have been what Stratford or England really wanted. Maxwell Fry described how, at the opening in 1932:

The vast crowd moved through the streets, gay with paper flowers, maypoles and English Morris-dancing and a vision sustained it [...]. The air was heavy with associations, Shakespeare, England, merry springtime, daffydowndilly. Oh how sweet! What release! Life should all be so sweet, simple, nature instructed. Close to the heart of England! Trailing such clouds of national glory moved the crowd, making for the new theatre by the river. And as it came into sight the vision paled and faltered, for there against a background which photography has firmly implanted in the English mind as for ever to be associated with Elizabethan England stood a great building that was foreign. [...] No doubt timber-framing was expected, and the new brick was very red.¹⁴

As for Sir Edward Elgar, he refused to go inside as he found it 'so unspeakably ugly and wrong'.¹⁵ But that vision endured, focused on the project to rebuild the Globe (of which more later).

It is scarcely surprising, therefore, that neo-Tudor architecture flourished between the wars, and the more respectable and sophisticated examples were happily acknowledged. Naturally it was considered appropriate in the two ancient English universities, where so many colleges were Tudor foundations. Giles Scott built elegantly simplified Tudor at Magdalene College, Oxford, and, in the single wing of Benson Court that was built at the eponymous college in Cambridge, Lutyens showed that, for all his involvement with the High Game, he had not lost his ability to reinterpret an English vernacular with sophistication and wit, especially in the timber staircases where a different treatment in each, according to legend, allows inebriated undergraduates to feel their way back to their rooms at night. Less impressive is the neo-Tudor Fisher Building at Queens' in the same city, memorably described by Pevsner as 'looking exactly like a friendly block of flats at, say, Pinner'.¹⁶

Almost any building could be Tudor. There are, of course, countless examples of half-timbered *neo-Tudor shops, shopping parades and pubs all over England*. There were even occasional examples of Tudor cinemas, like the New Kinema at New Oxted or the special case of the modernistic Tudor auditorium designed by W. E. Trent for the Gaumont in Salisbury, where the style was chosen because the surviving fifteenth-century hall of John Halle, which had been restored and given a half-timbered façade by Welby Pugin in 1834, was adapted as the foyer. For golf clubs, Tudor was virtually compulsory, and the style was even used, with considerable originality and resourcefulness, for a new church at Greenford in Middlesex where the medieval church had become too small once the village had been overwhelmed by the suburbs of London. Albert Richardson then designed a large new building in 1939 to sit alongside; with its low brick walls, massive roof and continuous clerestory of leaded-light windows, this is like a big streamlined barn, and inside the space is like an old moot hall, with the roof supported on a massive structure of lengths of Oregon pine bolted together.

Above all, of course, the Tudor manner remained popular for houses, both expensive and modest. In the third volume of *Small Country Houses of Today* compiled for *Country Life* by Randal Phillips in 1925, almost half of the examples illustrated can be described as neo-vernacular, several of them being enlargements of old cottages or utilizing old

half-timbered structures. Representative examples might include houses by Imrie and Angell, Maurice Webb, Eustace Salisbury and Oliver Hill, amongst many others. Even in the collection of *Recent English Domestic Architecture* put together in 1929 by H. de C. Hastings, the progressive editor of the *Architectural Review* — a collection which included Behrens's 'New Ways' at Northampton and other flat-roofed houses — over a fifth of the examples were gabled and traditional. And in *The Book of the Modern House*, the 'panoramic survey of contemporary domestic design' edited by Patrick Abercrombie in 1939, neo-Tudor in various simplified manifestations was still well represented.

Not all this neo-Tudor was polite and Picturesque, designed to appeal to the readers of *Country Life*. The expressive possibilities of half-timbered architecture were energetically pursued by Ernest George Trobridge, the eccentric Swedenborgian advocate for compressed green wood construction. Campaigning not as 'an antiquarian enthusiast but as a practical architect', Trobridge recommended using structural green elm as an economical, practical and hygienic solution to the post-war housing crisis.¹⁷ The results are concentrated in the new north-western suburb of Kingsbury where, in the 1920s, he built a number of small houses with visible frames of knobby timber or faced in rough elm weatherboarding (Fig. 7). Several are roofed in thatch: a material he advocated as it was light and cheap. But there was a wildness about Trobridge's creations not to be explained by practicality: leaded-light windows are oddly shaped and positioned; the thatch undulates as if the roof is alive. Trobridge's highly romantic, roughly textured architecture must be compared, if anything, with that of Rudolf Steiner or the weirder examples of contemporary Dutch Expressionism. If the historian seeks originality, in whatever language, then Ernest Trobridge is the unsung genius of twentieth-century neo-Tudor.

Tudor may have had rural associations, but it was also used for that quintessentially urban domestic building type, the block of flats. Trobridge had a go at this, and in Kingsbury there are strangely shaped blocks with external staircases and seemingly arbitrary outburst of half-timber with red-brick infill, as well as extraordinary assemblages of flats shaped like miniature castles (Fig. 8). Ian Nairn long ago saw the point of these, remarking on the:

much wilder details that would not be out of place in Gaudí's Barcelona. Like most true follies, more than a joke and more than a whim: a real expression of the dreams of individuality which sent people flocking here in the 1920s along with the Underground.¹⁸

A much more pedestrian example of urban Tudor are the three prominent blocks at the corner of Finchley Road and Hendon Way in north-west London, where the top storeys and projecting gabled bays are given the half-timbered treatment in contrast to red brick walls below; a blue plaque on Vernon Court announces that this was for a time the home of Amy Johnson, the celebrated aviatrix: no doubt it was convenient for Hendon Aerodrome (Fig. 9). I mention this as it confirms that there was no necessary connexion between an enthusiasm for new, fast machines and a taste for Functionalist architecture.

Rather better — in fact, magnificent — are the flats on the Hanger Hill Garden Estate, built in 1928–36 on the site of Acton Aerodrome. Of three storeys, arranged around grassed courts, they are superbly detailed and controlled compositions of brick, tile and



Fig. 7. Nos 3 and 5 Buck Lane, Kingsbury, by Ernest Trobridge, 1925–26; photo 2005



Fig. 8. Mountaire Court, Highfield Avenue, Kingsbury, by Ernest Trobridge, 1935–38; photo 2005



Fig. 9. *Oxford Court, Hanger Hill Garden Estate, by Douglas Smith & Barley, 1928–36; photo 2005*

timber with the elements used in such a way as not to pretend that they are ancient manor houses, while the end pavilions are witty and scholarly essays in traditional half-timbering. The architects were Douglas Smith & Barley. The whole Hanger Hill Garden Estate deserves to be better known; that it is not is no doubt due to the prejudice against any Tudor architecture built after 1914, but it is cheering to find the development is both praised and illustrated in Bridget Cherry's revised 'Pevsner' for *London North West*.

The Hanger Hill Garden Estate demonstrates the continuity of the 'old English' tradition. But there was, in fact, something new — and rather disturbing — about much neo-Tudor architecture after the Great War. This was the use of old timbers, even of entire old wooden structures, combined with second-hand building materials to create an effect of instant age. Not to put too fine a point on it, it was essentially a form of fakery — and very popular. This was something that began before the war, and even Lutyens had been guilty of it when he used re-erected structures at both Great Dixter and Ashby St Ledgers. An interesting example is a house at Sandwich in Kent built by C. H. Biddulph-Pinchard in 1914 out of old bricks from two demolished houses in Dover. In the mid-1920s, it was rented by the Prince of Wales (as it was conveniently close to the holiday home of his current friend, Freda Dudley Ward) and a photograph of it was published in the *Architectural Review*. This horrified the young Steen Eiler Rasmussen on his first visit to England in 1927, and he complained (in a German periodical) that:

New materials have been sedulously avoided: the beams come from broken-up old ships, the stonework from even older ruins. High-quality craftsmen have taken pains to build the walls out of plumb, as if they had been put up by primitive people without any

technical skills. In a house like this, it goes without saying, the usual, clear window-panes cannot be used: they have to be old, scratched, greenish in colour and hard to see through. [...] A building like this tells us nothing about England's proverbial conservatism. The Prince's summer retreat has no more to do with tradition than an American film.¹⁹

It was not only foreigners and modernists who were shocked by this sort of thing. Crusty old Sir Reginald Blomfield, in his *Modernismus*, also complained about:

the craze for old buildings, which insisted that all new buildings must reproduce buildings of the past as closely and literally as photographs allowed, with the result of a steady and successful practice of fakes culminating in the wholesale removal of genuine buildings in England and their re-erection on the other side of the Atlantic.²⁰

But there was no stopping it, and if professional architects declined to build tangible dreams of the Olden Time, there were plenty of amateurs who would. One was Amyas Phillips, who preferred to call himself an 'antiquarian' and who created what Clive Aslet has described as 'the most extreme — and most successful — of all Tudor taste country houses', Bailiffscourt in Sussex. Erected around 1930 for Lady Moyne, Bailiffscourt incorporated a real, ancient chapel but was otherwise new, built of old stones from a demolished farmhouse with details from medieval buildings. The result was as much Gothic as Tudor in style and seems almost like a realization of an elegiac etching by F. L. Griggs. The result was at once real and fake, serious and absurd; in its essential escapism it was certainly a typical product of its time. As Aslet wrote:

if the houses of the Modern Movement were built for occupants living their 'little time of sunshine' between two wars, Bailiffscourt and other Tudor taste country houses are equally products of a generation that was too impatient to allow time to take its course. Even age had to be instant.²¹

The doyen of such amateurs was the well-connected George Abraham Crawley, who, despite a complete lack of professional training, had managed to establish himself as an architect and decorator in New York before the war, while also restoring Crowhurst Place near Lingfield. Crawley worked by refining and correcting drawings made for him by others and, in a posthumous privately-printed memoir, his friend Sir Cuthbert Headlam, Bt, noted that, 'It was only natural in view of his total lack of technical training, that George was less efficient on the practical as opposed to the creative side of his work as an architect'.²² After the war, Crawley reconstructed and enlarged two old houses in Surrey — Crowhurst Place and Old Surrey Hall — using old materials; these 'crazy fairy-tale restorations' found unlikely admirers in Pevsner and Nairn who, in compiling the *Buildings of England* volume on Surrey, included them as 'living proof that any style, if taken far enough and sincerely enough, will produce worth-while architecture'. Nairn was able to take these romantic fakes seriously and found at Old Surrey Hall: 'The result is indescribable, imitation carried to the point of genius', adding, perceptively, that 'The total effect is rather like a rhapsody on Ightam Mote (and in fact oddly like the rhapsodies of early C20 British composers on Tudor and folksong themes).'²³

Such buildings were celebrated in a most revealing book of the period: P. A. Barron's *The House Desirable: A handbook for those who wish to acquire homes that charm*, published

in 1929. I wish I knew something about the author. He — or very possibly she — was not an architect but an amateur, who drove enthusiastically around the Home Counties in search of houses which 'have features which render them of interest to the many Englishmen and Englishwomen who desire homes which are not merely convenient but pleasing to the eye'. And what he, or she, found pleasing was immediately evident from the frontispiece, a photograph of Ellens at Rudgewick in Sussex designed in neo-Tudor by Maurice Webb: 'a fine example of a modern house built in such a manner that it has the appearance of age. The roof is of mossy Horsham stone obtained from old houses and barns which had been demolished'²⁴ (Fig. 10). And the key chapter is entitled: 'New "Old" Houses. The art of building with antique oak, bricks and mossy tiles. Modern homes which look centuries old.'

Although a few houses by Baillie Scott and by Lutyens are illustrated, the hero of *The House Desirable* (and a favourite of the late Roderick Gradidge) was Blunden Shadbolt, an architect who specialized in 'New "Old" Houses' of extreme irregularity, even laying roof tiles on wobbly chicken wire to create an effect of dilapidated age. His masterpiece was 'Smugglers' Way' in the New Forest (Fig. 11), begun in 1925, a wildly irregular gabled composition of timber and brick, roofed with both tile and thatch. Such effects were not easy to achieve, as Barron explained:

Workmen have to be trained to forget all their conventional ideas. At first it seems to them that they are asked to do everything as badly as possible. Instead of laying perfectly even courses of brick of uniform colour, they have to use bricks which do not match, and to lay them crookedly, 'any which way', as I have heard them say. [...] Timbers which are crooked, and so weatherworn that they look unsound, are chosen especially for prominent positions, and nice, clean wood, smooth and straight, is only used in places where it cannot be seen. [...] By malice aforethought, the floors have been made uneven.²⁵

Perhaps the high point of Shadbolt's career was when he created a house at the 1924 *Daily Mail* Ideal Home exhibition which was built of salvaged timbers and bricks and roofed in tiles which, naturally, still had moss growing on them. After a hundred thousand visitors had passed through it — including King George V — it was re-erected in 1926 in, yes, Pinner as 'Monk's Rest'; a plaque, in Gothic lettering, on the front wall insists that it is, in fact, 'Ye Olde Friars House' at Horley, merely reconstructed.

Another of Barron's favourites was 'Tudor Close' at Rottingdean near Brighton (Fig. 12), a three-sided court of seven houses created by The South Coast Land and Resort Co., that is, by C. W. Neville, the ruthless developer of Peacehaven. Designed by yet another amateur enthusiast and restorer, A. Caplin, it was built in 1924–28 out of old oak timbers from broken-up ships and old barns, recycled bricks and flint and, of course, 'mossy tiles' which, combined with fanciful and inventive new oak carvings, resulted in a wildly picturesque composition or, rather, as a contemporary put it, 'perfect representations of the wonderfully artistic and fascinatingly romantic houses of the Tudor period'. As far as Barron was concerned, 'you will find it very hard to believe that the buildings were not erected in the distant days of Henry VIII, or Queen Elizabeth'.²⁶ Such Olde Worlde fakery evidently appealed to Hollywood; soon converted into an hotel, Tudor Close became a favourite with the likes of Bette Davis and Cary Grant.

It was the availability of old, seasoned timbers — particularly from old ships — which partly accounts for the creation of the most prominent manifestation of the craze

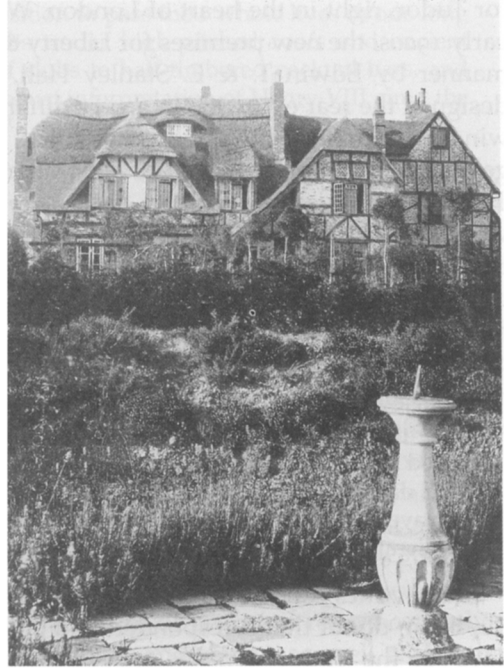


Fig. 10. 'Ellens', Rudgewick, Sussex, by Maurice E. Webb, the frontispiece of P. A. Barron, *The House Desirable* (1929)

Fig. 11. 'Smugglers' Way', Hampshire, by Blunden Shadbolt, from *The House Desirable*



Fig. 12. *Tudor Close*, Rottingdean, by G. K. Green, 1929, from *The House Desirable*

for Tudor, right in the heart of London. When Nash's Regent Street was rebuilt in the early 1920s, the new premises for Liberty & Co. were designed in the required classical manner by Edwin T. & E. Stanley Hall, but at the same time the same architects designed the rear extension in a very different style. Instead of a giant Ionic order, oriel windows and half-timbered gables line Great Marlborough Street. With an open, galleried interior constructed of old teak and oak taken from two old naval warships, Tudor House — as it was called — had external walls of blocks of Portland stone 'chisel-worked right from the quarry face' and hand-made roof tiles. At the opening in 1924, the company explained that, in the old store, Arthur Lasenby Liberty 'always strove to introduce a Tudor feeling' so that the new building was in 'the style of the days of Henry VIII and Queen Elizabeth'. 'The Tudor period is the most genuinely English period of domestic architecture', insisted Ivor Stewart-Liberty:

There is a glamour about the lavish and stirring days of Henry VIII and Queen Elizabeth; while the sight of red tiled gables and carved bargeboards, of hanging balconies and leaded casements, is essentially English, and brings to the mind a picture of those by-gone days when the ancient guilds of the craftsmen and the merchant adventurers displayed, in the beautiful gabled buildings of old London, the productions of their handicrafts and the treasures for which they sailed so far and endured so much.²⁷

Many critics considered that Liberty's Tudor House was mere fancy dress, but there can be no doubt that it responded to a powerful vein of popular taste. 'The 'good old days' of the Tudor dynasty appear to linger in the minds of all as an inviolable conception of ease, comfort, and peace', complained the cinema architect Julian Leathart:

This fantastic illusion of a period of social history notorious for its tyranny, oppression, disease, and filth is well-nigh irradicable from the minds of the Englishman and his wife. It becomes articulate with his demand for the bijou-baronial-mansion type villa as a befitting place of residence.²⁸

It was this illusion which accounted for the huge success of Alexander Korda's film, *The Private Life of Henry VIII*. Starring Charles Laughton and Merle Oberon, what was 'probably the most important film produced in Britain before the Second World War'²⁹ (and the first to achieve success in the United States) was released in 1933 and had considerable impact: even on some architects, as Ernő Goldfinger discovered when he once visited that intriguing figure, Oliver Hill, at home at Valewood Farm. 'I didn't think much of Hill's architecture, but he was a really nice chap', he later recalled.

He lived rather grandly in the country, in Sussex. [...] You came into a great Tudor hall, with a dining table on a dais across the room. One was served like Henry VIII and he flung bones to the dogs. I was not so impressed by this, and soon realized that the Korda film was then showing and Oliver was modelling himself on it. He was playing a role.³⁰

The influence of this film can be charted. For example, in 1934, soon after it was released, a pub in south-east London, the Nun's Head in Nunhead was rebuilt as an improbable black oak and red brick tall-chimneyed mansion amidst shabby London stock-brick terraces; Gothic letters on the exterior make the proud if dubious claim that it was 'Licensed in the Reign of King Henry VIII'. All this perhaps confirms the truth of Osbert Lancaster's description of the Stockbrokers' Tudor style, in which he observed how:

certain classes of the community were in a position to pass their whole lives in one long Elizabethan day-dream; spending their nights under high-pitched roofs and ancient eaves, their days in trekking from Tudor golf clubs to half-timbered cocktail bars, and their evenings in contemplating Laughton's robust interpretation of Henry VIII amid the Jacobean plasterwork of the Gloriana Palace.³¹

In Brighton, of all places, the Ship Inn was rebuilt in, again, 1933–34 in gabled Tudor, complete with a double-height galleried timber hall. Nearby, in the Steyne, a few years earlier the King & Queen Hotel was rebuilt in a similar extravagant style (Figs 13 and 14). Originally the eponymous monarchs had been George III and Queen Charlotte but in the transformation, needless to say, they became Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn, whose images enliven the red brick, stone and half-timbered façade.³² Half-timbered bars were ubiquitous and neo-Tudor roadhouses abounded in new suburbs and along the new arterial roads, encouraged by the growth of motor traffic. Often half-timbered but sometimes of stone, these were self-consciously inns rather than pubs, reminiscent of famous old coaching establishments like the Angel at Grantham. The development of such buildings can be traced back to Norman Shaw's Tabard Inn at Bedford Park. The style was a response by the brewers to the powerful temperance movement and the threat of prohibition; it conjured up the fellowship of the Olden Time and the good old days rather than the perceived drunkenness and degradation of the Victorian gin palace. Such associations, of country rather than town, of beer and roast beef rather than spirits, was encouraged by the Arts and Crafts movement as well as by the polemics of G. K. Chesterton.

Not all roadhouses were Tudor, of course; many were modernistic or neo-Georgian. But Tudor was the most popular style. Particularly fine examples of such reformed public houses can be found in the suburbs of Birmingham, notably the huge Black Horse at Northfield designed in 1929 by Bateman & Bateman to look like a large sixteenth-century country house, of Cotswold stone and half-timber. 'We trundled along at no great pace down pleasant roads, decorated here and there by the presence of huge new gaudy pubs', recorded J. B. Priestley as he approached Birmingham by bus in 1933:

These pubs are a marked feature of this Midlands landscape. Some of them have been admirably designed and built; others have been inspired by the idea of Merrie England, popular in the neighbourhood of Los Angeles.³³

As far as Anthony Bertram was concerned:

the Tudor pub is the supreme form of escape. But what fantastic situations it leads to. We dash out from the city in our sports models and are helped to park them by a gentleman in mediaeval costume. We go into a low-beamed bar where an electric fire winks merrily in the old inglenook and where we drink our cocktails surrounded by a display of Tudor tankards — not for use. We bump our heads going into our centrally-heated bedrooms and bath in a converted granary. When we go home on Monday we feel that we have escaped from the twentieth century for the week-end. But is there anything more completely twentieth-century than this odd performance?³⁴

What with Tudor Close at Rottingdean and half-timbered inns erupting amidst the Regency stucco of Brighton, let alone the bungalows of Peacehaven, it is clear that neo-Tudor was strong in the Home Counties and particularly popular along the south coast;



Fig. 13. *The King & Queen Hotel, Brighton, in c. 1930 (Brighton History Centre)*



Fig. 14. *The King & Queen Hotel, as rebuilt by Clayton & Black, 1931-32; photo 2005*

it was encouraged by the vogue for motoring, as *The House Desirable* confirms for a whole chapter was devoted to 'The Garage Desirable'. Harmony with real old buildings was what mattered, particularly, it would seem, to motorists. At New Oxted, Barron was sure that:

if you passed through in a car, and were not informed that the half-timbered shops and business buildings had been erected during the last few years, you would never guess the truth. You would carry away the impression of quaint gables, weather-worn oak, lattice windows, and doorways enriched by carvings. You would remember it only as one of the most charming of England's old-world villages.³⁵

The association between the motor car and half-timber is curious, but certain. It is suggested by one verse of John Betjeman's diatribe against Slough:

It's not their fault they do not know
The birdsong from the radio,
It's not their fault they often go
To Maidenhead
And talk of sport and makes of cars
In various bogus-Tudor bars
And daren't look up and see the stars
But belch instead.³⁶

The connexion perhaps deserves a deeper sociological analysis than I can give it here, but the J. Bonnington Jagworths of this world invariably live in neo-Tudor houses in plush suburbs, and so many advertisements placed desirable automobiles against a half-timbered background — and still do. This was certainly not a phenomenon peculiar to the inter-war decades and one of the strangest developments in this context belongs to the years after the Second World War when half-timber was applied to the Morris Minor motor car in 1953 to make the neo-vernacular Morris Traveller. And then there was that most ludicrous mobile response to this popular taste, the Tavern Car introduced by the Southern Region of British Railways in 1949. These carriages, 'which combines the most modern features of both restaurant and buffet cars with the traditional style of an Old English Tavern', had half-timbered interiors and even had beams and brickwork painted on the exterior.³⁷ But I digress ...

Transport was certainly responsible for the largest manifestation of the taste for Tudor between the wars: the development of new suburbs. New underground lines, the electrification of existing railways, the expansion of motor bus routes and the growth in private car ownership combined with the availability of cheap mortgages encouraged a housing boom which surrounded London and other English cities with low-density housing, mostly semi-detached or detached. Four million new houses were built in the 1920s and 1930s, comprising over a third of the total housing stock by 1939. And three-quarters of these were built by private enterprise, mostly by small builders (who — as in the Georgian period — often failed) and (again as in the eighteenth century) usually without benefit of an architect. And, it is safe to say, almost all of these houses built by speculative builders conformed to models which can be described as being in the Tudor style. Perhaps, for the first time since the eighteenth century, there was a general consensus about the style appropriate for domestic architecture.

Few with access to the printed page had a good word to say for these buildings. One who did was Priestley who, in 1927, wrote that 'A few more of these houses and this place will no longer charm the eye; a great many more of them and it will be hideous'. On the other hand, 'We should be content to make the whole country hideous if we know for certain that by doing so we could also make the people in it moderately happy'.³⁸ At least Julian Leathart understood why such houses became ubiquitous. 'It is fashionable to hurl abuse at the speculative house builder', he wrote at the end of the 1930s,

and it is, without dispute, to his appalling vulgarity and ignorance that the despoliation of town and countryside during the last twenty years is attributable. But the jerry builder has fulfilled a public demand, and, in the sacred name of private enterprise, his depredations have been allowed to go unchecked by either Government or local authority. He has built a degraded version of a recognized English style of architecture, and his best-sellers have been those houses which conform to the half-timbered Tudor style.³⁹

It is interesting to examine the sources of this suburban neo-Tudor style. The origin of the half-timbering which was often applied to gables, large and small, is obvious enough. Other features, like tile-hanging and extravagant brick chimneys, can be traced back to the work of Lutyens and Norman Shaw. Sometimes there is a small projecting oriel window which has *art nouveau* overtones while Voysey was responsible for that characteristic motif of a triangular gable floating over a double-height curved bay-window. When Maxwell Fry complained in 1934 that 'We adorn our fine, tree-planted arterial roads with small but pretentious, ignorant and vacant villas, copies at fifth hand of houses designed by architects twenty-five years ago', he was quite correct in his analysis.⁴⁰ As for so many houses being semi-detached, this model was long established in London and can be traced back to the Regency and beyond. It cut building costs while — unlike the terrace — allowed an external connexion between front and back gardens and perhaps room for a garage at the side.

There were, however, novel features about the typical inter-war Tudor semi. The traditional Victorian or Edwardian terraced or semi-detached house had a back extension containing the kitchen and other facilities, but the houses now being built usually had a much more compact and practical plan, all contained within a rectangle and with the kitchen placed next to a dining room (Fig. 15). Such plans were probably taken by the house builders from pre-war Arts and Crafts cottages by Parker & Unwin in the garden suburbs.⁴¹ The composition of many of these new suburban houses was also novel, and clever, for the big hipped roofs and the prominence given to the bay windows emphasized the separateness of each pair of semis from its neighbours, while the elevation of each half, with the front door placed at the side, asserted its individuality as a house. And a degree of interest was introduced into seemingly uniform estates by varying the slightly different standard designs. But what really mattered was the Tudor association, sometimes achieved by name as well as by style. It is noticeable how often the word 'Tudor' was used. One builder's advertisement cited 'Tudor Style Houses of distinction' erected by the Tudor Building Co., of Tudor Avenue, Worcester Park, Surrey, on the Tudor Estate (Fig. 16): 'An unique high-class estate in a splendid situation, every house devoted to the true Tudor Style, constructed by experts', where a freehold semi-detached house cost £895 and a detached £1,200.⁴² Even

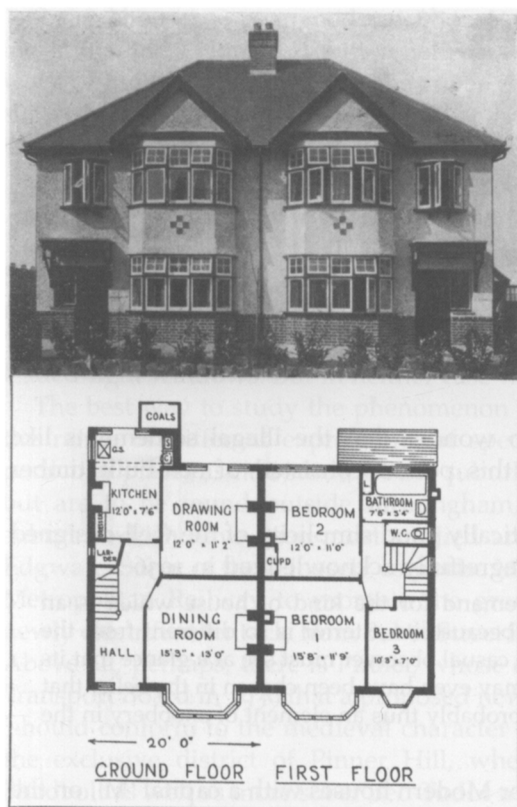


Fig. 15. Type 'L' house built by Comben & Wakeling Ltd on the Sudbury Court and St Augustine's Estates, North Wembley; from the firm's brochure, c. 1930

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You should inspect the
Tudor Style Houses of Distinction

Detached and Semi-detached. Every elevation varied and pleasing on the
TUDOR ESTATE, (off London-Worthing Road)
Worcester Park, SURREY.

An unique high-class estate in a splendid situation, every house devoted to the true Tudor Style, constructed by experts. All doors, mouldings and staircase of Oregon Pine, boarded Roofs, and Slate Damp Course.



PRICES :

Semi-detached **£895** FREEHOLD

Detached as illustrated **£1,200** FREEHOLD

Every house has an air of refinement and taste. Large, light and airy rooms fitted with every modern and up-to-date convenience.
Two Reception, Three Bedrooms, Entrance Hall,
Tiled Bathroom and Marble Panel, separate W.C.

THE TUDOR BUILDING Co.,
Tudor Avenue,
WORCESTER PARK - - SURREY
Phone: Malden 1920

Fig. 16. Advertisement for 'Tudor Style Houses of Distinction' in Frank Green and Dr Sidney Wolff, London and Suburbs, Old & New (c. 1933)

today, in the *London A-Z*, no less than seventy-seven separate addresses are listed with the word 'Tudor': Tudor Avenue, Tudor Close, Tudor Court, Tudor Drive, Tudor Gardens and so on.

Individuality was the thing. The style of such houses appealed to romantic aspirations, and to that sense — so easily mocked — of the Englishman's home being his castle. They represented something quite different from the uniform, tight terraces of the inner city from which so many of the first purchasers had escaped after the Great War. It was this assertive, deliberate individuality, achieved with gables and half-timber, chimneys and funny-shaped front doors, which was the despair of architects and critics. For them, something less assertive, less vulgar, more uniform, reticent and tasteful was recommended — something more like the sober architect-designed housing to be found in Hampstead Garden Suburb or Welwyn Garden City where the inspiration was more Georgian than Tudor. And this, of course, is precisely what the house-purchaser did not want, for such 'good' design was inextricably associated with



Fig. 17. 'A Lovell-built House', drawn by Raymond Myerscough-Walker, from Ernest Betham (ed.), *House Building* (1934–36)

public housing, with council housing. No wonder that the illegal settlements like Jaywick Sands which sprung up during this period consisted of self-built timber structures vaguely Tudor in style.

'There has been a revolt against the artistically good simplicity of the well-designed Council house', one learned commentator regretfully acknowledged in 1936:

This re-action has manifested itself in a demand for the kind of house which is an abomination; a house which is bought just because its exterior is so different from the decent exterior of the Council house that the casual observer must see at a glance that its owner is *not* living in a Council house — it may even have been chosen in the belief that people will think it has cost more. There is probably thus an element of snobbery in the mental attitude.⁴³

Of course there was: when isn't there? As for Modern houses with a capital 'M', on the whole they simply did not sell, so the speculative builders naturally did not build them. When it came to private houses, the Modern Movement only really flourished in what might be described as fringe conditions: at the seaside, or in rarefied places like Hampstead. Some builders did, however, offer more modernistic models, like the more streamlined semis with horizontal bay windows with rounded corners to be found on the Hanger Hill Estate.

On the whole, however, architects — or, at least, named architects — were not involved in the housing boom, and it was (as today) the profession's loss. Presumably architects, at some stage, must have been involved in preparing the standard designs offered by many builders, but the whole question of the design and building of the neo-Tudor suburbs needs much more research. After all, there must be many contemporary development plans and designs for house types surviving in the archives of local authorities which could reveal the names of designers. More easily found are the brochures and advertisements issued by builders and developers, but these very seldom name architects. In the informative and revealing publication by the National Federation of Building Trades Employers entitled *House Building 1934–1936* (Fig. 17), one builder, J. Laing, insisted that 'We are most desirous of encouraging the co-operation of architects in the building of houses for sale. For this purpose we have set aside one of our estates, and architects are in competition in regard to house plans', which suggests that this was unusual.⁴⁴

Special houses — even modernist houses — designed by architects were exhibited at the annual Ideal Home Exhibition held at Olympia, but most houses exhibited were the work of builders. For instance, the cover of *The Daily Mail Ideal Houses* book for 1927 showed the ‘Tibbenham Tudor House’ at the 1926 exhibition. ‘Tibbenham Houses have combined old-time charm with modern utility’, ran the advertisement.

They are constructed with a solid oak framing like the old Sussex farmhouses which today stand foursquare to the winds with a sturdiness that is a tribute to the method and a beauty which redounds to the credit of our forefathers.⁴⁵

But no designer was acknowledged. Other representative advertisements include one for the half-timbered ‘Maple’s House’ erected at the exhibition and the butterfly-plan ‘Suntrap House’ erected by the Potters Bar Estate — again a half-timbered design with leaded-light windows. But in neither case was the name of an architect given.

The best way to study the phenomenon of the inter-war suburb, and to appreciate the range of different expressions of spec builders’ Tudor, is perhaps to examine particular places as case studies. Such suburbs, of course, are not only all round London but are to be found outside Birmingham, Manchester, Bristol and elsewhere. The suburbs which have been most studied are those in the north-west of London, like Edgware. Some of these loosely comprise Metro-land — the clever name coined by the Metropolitan Railway to promote the growth of commuter suburbs along its long newly electrified tentacle from Baker Street into rural Middlesex and Buckinghamshire. Above all, perhaps, there is Pinner, whose denizens petitioned the London Passenger Transport Board in 1939 that a proposed new station building on the Metropolitan Line ‘should conform to the medieval character of the village’.⁴⁶ I have already mentioned the exclusive district of Pinner Hill, where there are shaggy houses by Blunden Shadbolt as well as more sober neo-Tudor mansions by J. Eustace Salisbury. Elsewhere, there are two interesting estates. To the north, there is the Pinnerwood Park Estate, built up by the Artizans and General Dwellings Company between 1931 and 1939. To the south, focused on Rayners Lane station, is Harrow Garden Village, planned by the Metropolitan Railway in 1926 and built up by E. S. Reid amongst others.

Diametrically across London from Pinner we find Petts Wood, whose exuberant Tudor character is evident immediately on leaving the train. Station Square is lined by half-timbered and red brick gabled shopping parades, while in the centre is the extravagantly Tudor Daylight Inn (William Willett had lived nearby). The development of Petts Wood is now well documented thanks to Peter Waymark.⁴⁷ It was largely the creation of Basil Scruby, who offered land and money to persuade the Southern Railway to build a station on its existing main line to Sevenoaks and Tonbridge; this opened in 1928. By 1930, there were forty-five builders active in Petts Wood, but Scruby was firmly in control of planning and employed a proper architect, Leonard Culliford, to vet house designs and impose certain design guidelines. The result was a consistent neo-Tudor suburb, with some imaginative variations which, again, demonstrate that the style, like any other, was capable of imaginative and sometimes eccentric reinterpretation (Fig. 18).

Not far from Petts Wood is Hayes, which provides another good and representative example. The old Kentish village had been connected with Charing Cross by a branch line opened in 1882, whose electrification in 1926 seems to have been the catalyst for a decade of intensive development. Hayes Place, the seat of the major local landowner,



Fig. 18. A house in Birchwood Road, Petts Wood; photo 2005



Fig. 19. Houses in Westland Drive, Hayes, Kent; photo 1998

was demolished in 1933 despite its association with two great Prime Ministers — William Pitt the Elder had died there and Pitt the Younger was born there — and by 1938 the Hayes Place Garden Estate, laid out and built by Henry Boot & Sons Ltd, was nearing completion. The Southern Railway rebuilt the station in 1933–35 on a new Station Approach, at one end of which was the Rex cinema, opened in 1936, and at the other, the New Inn, rebuilt in 1935 in grand half-timbered and Cotswold stone Tudor by

the same architects for the same Birmingham brewers who built the Black Horse at Northfield. In between, new ranges of shopping parade were erected: some neo-Georgian, one in a curious modernistic style, but most in half-timbered neo-Tudor. And right opposite the new modernistic station entrance, a richly carved group of Tudor shops housed the local estate agent.

From here — to the north, east and west — stretched new residential streets (Fig. 19). Some were formed entirely of detached houses; others all of semi-detached pairs. Architectural writers may have sneered at such houses, but as designs — even if the name of the dim architect is unknown — they are worth taking seriously. H. Chalton Bradshaw, the Secretary of the Royal Fine Art Commission may have thought they lacked the 'beauty which the monotonous planning of the speculative builder, in spite of his efforts to create variety by such means as false gables, sham half-timbering, pebble-dash walls and assorted shapes in bay windows, cannot hope to achieve', but such streets are no less and no more monotonous than those planned by the heirs of the Arts and Crafts movement in garden suburbs or, indeed, than the Georgian terraces themselves which the Victorians found so intolerably boring.⁴⁸ Variety was introduced by alternating several different designs or by reversing the plans.

Now I have chosen to illustrate Hayes for two reasons. One, as perhaps some may have guessed, is because I grew up there, and there is a peculiar fascination in revisiting a place with, as it were, new eyes after an interval of forty years. The other is because just to the west of Hayes is the slightly down-market contemporary development of Coney Hall, where, in 1934, Mr and Mrs Borders bought a semi-detached house which would generate extraordinary controversy. The Coney Hall Estate had been begun in 1931 by Morrell (Builders) Ltd (Fig. 20), who had also developed part of Petts Wood (on the less smart side of the railway tracks); here they were pleased to advertise that the amenities of this future 'dream town' included the proximity of Wickham Court, 'preserved in all its antique beauty, and is most interesting, for here Henry VIII courted the ill-fated Anne Boleyn'.⁴⁹ Most of the 1,200 houses were semi-detached and were variations on a uniform type; no architect is recorded, although the one modernistic, flat-roofed 'Suntrap' house in Addington Road (a design exhibited at the 1934 Ideal Home exhibition) was designed by Kemp & Tasker, who had worked for Morrell's elsewhere.⁵⁰

Jim Borders, a London taxi driver, and his wife Elsy had bought No. 81 Kingsway for £690 (Fig. 21); this was a standard semi-detached house which shared a half-timbered gable with its neighbour and had a curious porch defined by a brick half-arch. In 1937, Mrs Borders stopped paying their mortgage with the Bradford Third Equitable Building Society in protest at the quality of their 'jerry-built' house and the failure of the builders (who had gone into liquidation the previous year) to complete it to their satisfaction. When the building society sued for repossession of the house — which she named 'Insanity' — Mrs Borders counter-claimed for damages and the case went to the High Court in 1938. Soon she was known as the 'Tenants' King's Counsel' and was leader of a mortgage strike which, at its height in 1939, was joined by 2,500 households. This heroic, indomitable woman attracted further publicity when she conducted her own defence and stood up to Norman Birkett, K.C., when her husband sued the builders for libel for calling him a 'bad egg'.⁵¹ It is sad to relate that, in the end, Mrs



Fig. 20. Kingsway, Coney Hall, Kent, in 1939, from *Picture Post*, 25 March 1939



Fig. 21. Jim and Elsy Borders and their daughter in the porch of 'Insanity', 81 Kingsway, Coney Hall, from *The Architects' Journal* (1939)

Borders lost her case — and her house — in the House of Lords in 1941, but her campaign had exposed the secret cosy arrangements commonly existing between the building societies and the house builders, and inspired the Building Societies Act of 1939 which helped protect borrowers.

Now what is interesting about the Borders' case is how it was taken up by the architectural profession. Not only were two double-page spreads in *Picture Post* given over to Elsy's campaign, but it was also discussed in the *Architects' Journal* and she was invited to contribute an article to *Focus*, the radical journal published by students at the Architectural Association.⁵² This was because it was almost an article of faith among architects and critics that all such neo-Tudor suburban houses — those not designed by architects — were jerry built. In 1937, John Betjeman claimed to have heard 'of the bay window of a modern Tudor house lifted by a storm from its setting and flung over the opposite house-tops while the family in the parlour was at Sunday dinner'; and he insisted that 'the luckless occupants' of such houses 'will find themselves in a few years' time saddled with a slum'.⁵³ The following year, Osbert Lancaster lamented 'that so much ingenuity should have been wasted on streets and estates which will inevitably become the slums of the future'.⁵⁴

Yet, seventy years on, 'Insanity' is *still there*; indeed, far from being a slum, both it and its semi-detached neighbour have since been enlarged, destroying those curious porches (which, however, survive on the neighbouring pair: 83–85 Kingsway). Furthermore, although they may well not have been as sturdily built as Edwardian houses, the inter-war semis were surely no more shoddy than the usual Georgian spec-built terraces and have lasted better than so many contemporary Modern Movement houses with their leaking flat roofs, disintegrating thin reinforced concrete walls and corroding metal windows. They certainly stood up well during the Second World War when bombs, flying bombs and rockets rained down on south-east London. Indeed, the low densities of the new suburbs proved to be an advantage during aerial bombardment, as damage was diffuse and casualties proportionally smaller. And the experience of war seems to have made some commentators look more favourably on the suburbs, and on their peculiar Englishness, even though the Town and Country Planning Acts passed at the time together with the creation of the 'Green Belt' ensured that places like Hayes and Coney Hall could never happen again.

In 1947, Barbara Jones published an article on 'The Pattern of Suburbia' illustrated with her own drawings, arguing that the first houses that began to cover the empty hills around smoky towns 'were the beginnings of a new architecture — and of one not merely new but revolutionary'. Some of the old snobbish prejudices remained, however, for she could still write how 'After 1920 came the great pink brick flood and most of it was bad'; nevertheless:

The older mellowed suburbs or those of the well-to-do 1930s are often lovely; they can offer as much pleasure to the visitor as anything that can be found, and they are full of material for the painter and writer, and so make their contribution to the arts.

And Jones also noted that 'For some reason, the most joyfully derided feature of suburban architecture is the Tudor beam. What is usually wrong with this is not that it is sham but that it is shoddy'.⁵⁵

More significant is the book published the year before by J. M. Richards, who had changed his mind about the suburbs — his vision widened by being far away from home, in Egypt, during the war. *The Castles on the Ground*, evocatively illustrated by John Piper, was a sympathetic investigation of, and celebration of, the romance and virtues of the English suburb as it had developed since the early nineteenth century:

We well know the epithets used to revile the modern suburb — ‘Jerrybethan’, and the rest — and the scornful finger that gets pointed at spec-builder’s Tudor with its half-inch boards nailed flat to the wall in imitation of oak timbering, though perhaps we should not criticize so fiercely the architectural idiom the suburb has adopted as its own if we understood the instincts and ideals it aims to satisfy, and how well, judged by its own standards, it often succeeds in doing so. [...] If democracy means anything, it means deciding — for a change — to pay some attention to the expressed preference of the majority, to what people themselves want, not what we think they ought to want.⁵⁶

Much good did this do him. Sir James Richards later recalled how, ‘The book was scorned by my contemporaries, as either an irrelevant eccentricity or a betrayal of the forward-looking ideas of the Modern Movement, to which the suburbs were supposed to be the absolute antithesis’.⁵⁷ The subject was soon dropped.

For the established architectural profession, suburbs, together with neo-Tudor architecture, remained anathema. This prejudice was typically encountered by Ian Davis who later recalled his first day at architectural school in 1953, when:

I handed my tutor the usual form indicating name, age and home address: Hillside Drive, Edgware, Middlesex. He read my form and gave me a probing stare, followed by: ‘I take it you live in one of Edgware’s semi-detached houses?’ My affirmative prompted the observation that I should make early plans to move to a more civilized address, such as Camden Town. Later the same morning [...] We were strongly recommended to find out about a Swiss architect called Le Corbusier, ‘the greatest living architect in the world’.⁵⁸

But the suburbs carried on quietly regardless, right through the 1950s and 1960s, with all those despised Tudor houses providing a happy ideal of normality and home for a large proportion of the population, built along roads that sometimes ended abruptly in fields where work had stopped in 1939.

What the inter-war suburbs lacked, perhaps, was the novelist to celebrate or dissect their social character, but they did have their poet. Betjeman had now transcended his earlier conventional prejudices against the half-timbered villa and could write a poem like ‘Middlesex’:

Gaily into Ruislip Gardens
Runs the red electric train,
With a thousand Ta’s and Pardon’s
Daintily alights Elaine⁵⁹

Later he made the celebrated television film about ‘Metro-land’ for the BBC in which he explored the outer north-western semi-detached suburbs as well as an older and grander eruption of half-timbering in the shape of Norman Shaw’s Grim’s Dyke. ‘Metro-land’ was first broadcast in 1973, and in that same year appeared the pioneering study by Alan A. Jackson of *Semi-Detached London*. Urban and transport historians were now turning their attention to the outer suburbs, but while they were interested in how transport systems, financial mechanisms and government policies (or lack of them)

stimulated the building industry, they paid less attention to the actual form of the dwellings the house builders erected. But where were the architectural historians?

In 1979 a major exhibition called 'Thirties: British Art and Design Before the War' was mounted at the Hayward Gallery, but this scarcely presented a balanced or comprehensive view of that period. Those millions of spec-built houses that had so conspicuously transformed so many acres of rural England into a sea of red brick and pebble-dash were represented by but a few photographs, and even these depicted the more modernistic type of semi built by Welch, Cachmaille-Day & Lander in Edgware which were not really typical. But it was not just the Tudor that was excluded for the 'Thirties' show, for most contemporary British architecture that did not have a flat roof was marginalized. Perhaps the balance was partly redressed by the foundation of the Thirties Society — now the Twentieth Century Society — that same year, for we were dedicated to campaigning for the best examples of inter-war British architecture in any and every style: Modern, classical, art deco, pseudish and even Tudor (and in 1983 the Society's Journal carried an article on the work of Blunden Shadbolt).⁶⁰

The first really serious study of the inter-war neo-Tudor spec-built house was only published in 1981. This was the book by Paul Oliver, Ian Davis and Ian Bentley called *Dunroamin: The Suburban Semi and its Enemies* (which, of course, explains the title of this lecture). I have great admiration for this truly pioneering work, which questioned the values and hegemony of the Modern Movement and the importance of the vaunted professional architect while suggesting that the inter-war housing boom might have some lessons for the present. It was a post-Modern celebration of pre-Modern domestic architecture: Judi Loach tells me that it was a product of a particular culture at the then Oxford Polytechnic which was interested in the anonymous vernacular rather than the notion of the vaunted named designer.

'Dunroamin' was the generic name given to the inter-war, privately-owned, non-architect-designed suburban house and the book was 'dedicated to the 76,112 builders who created the four million houses of pre-War Dunroamin'. The book's value is that the authors understood that free individuals bought houses with fake half-timber and tile-hung gables because they represented home and security. For the suburb was a product of:

'dream-builders' [...] This recognition, that there were deeper issues in the aspiration of families for their homes than strict physical criteria, was totally lost on most architects and writers. Few were able to grasp the significance of the dreams, associational imagery [...] or the symbols of the suburb. These mysteries were the secret province of estate agents, builders and purchasers.⁶¹

It is not necessary to accept the argument that, what with the 'swelling bosom of the bay windows combined to communicate maternal warmth' and the more mannered front door recesses resembling genital orifices, so that 'the home was a woman', to agree about the importance of architectural imagery.

What the new Dunroaminer sought was an imagery that spoke of home, of family and of individualism. Modernists were prepared to clad their brickwork in render that appeared to be concrete for the sake of the new architecture projected; the Dunroaminer saw no incongruity in having his home clad in the symbols of domesticity. The two positions were on opposite sides of the same coin, but could never share the same face. The

printing presses were on the side of the Modernists, when the invective was let loose, but the symbols through which Dunroamin could communicate its values were expressed in the building itself.⁶²

The book ended by noticing how the 'Thirties' exhibition had given so little space to speculative housing and how 'Dunroamin was represented by a single photograph entitled *The Promise of Suburban Bliss*'. This was of our friends Mr and Mrs Borders in the porch of 'Insanity' and its caption read: 'Victims of the Thirties building boom'. As Paul Oliver concluded, 'Fifty years after, the Establishment of architects and critics clings tenaciously to its clichés'.⁶³ Twenty-five years further on, perhaps it does still, for serious studies of neo-Tudor architecture in general and the inter-war suburban house in particular remain few and far between. There is, however, that excellent little book called *Little Palaces* published by the then Middlesex Polytechnic in 1987; a new edition was published two years ago with a foreword by Christopher Frayling, who remarks that 'This little book has a big purpose: to save the suburban house, and its inhabitants, from the enormous condescension of history'.⁶⁴ Then there is the Shire Books publication on *The 1930s Home* which appeared in 2000. I must also note that the Victoria County History is now charting the development of suburbs in its survey of Middlesex, and that Bridget Cherry, in her recent London volumes of *The Buildings of England*, is very properly taking this sort of architecture seriously, as does Andy Foster in the new volume on *Birmingham* by including Hall Green. And I should also mention Roderick Gradidge's book on his favourite *Surrey Style*.

Even so, the field is wide open for us architectural historians. Certain subjects are, I know, irresistibly fashionable while others suffer from neglect, but I would have thought that neo-Tudor would be a hugely rewarding study as its expressions can be at once interesting and absurd — and I am well aware that, this evening, I have exploited its more risible aspects, though that is no reason not to take it seriously. I am glad to know that Andrew Ballantyne is embarking on a study of neo-Tudor but the scope is vast. And then there is the whole subject of suburban architecture ready to be explored: one which could surely reinvigorate the often beleaguered discipline of architectural history as it involves economics, transport and sociology as well as style and design. Perhaps the best way to proceed is through local studies, applying the suburban developments the sort of detailed investigation into builders and building processes that eighteenth-century London has enjoyed. After all — dare I say? — an estate of Tudor semis is no more repetitive and boring than many plain brick Georgian terraces, perhaps less so. So instead of yet another dissertation on Wells Coates and the rise of modernism in England, let us have some studies of, say, Pinner and Cockfosters, Hanwell and Hanger Hill or — outside London — Wythenshawe and Northfield, Allerton and Keynsham. This sort of history is popular; I note that Peter Waymark's *History of Petts Wood* was first published in 1979 and there have been three revised and expanded editions since.

But to conclude, I must bring the story up to date, for Tudor remains popular and is still being built. The style clearly has desirable, romantic associations for house purchasers both rich and not so rich, to judge both by advertisements in *Country Life* and the token application of half-timbering on new housing estates and blocks of flats. We may wish the style was handled as well as it used to be, but the significant fact is

that it is used at all (although, as in the 1930s, you would never know this from looking at the architectural journals). Then there has been that conspicuous, if dubious, project to complete Crosby Hall on the Chelsea Embankment, by Carden & Godfrey. And, finally, there is the continuing potency of the cult of our national poet, William Shakespeare, with which I began, and the dream of rebuilding the Globe: that long-lost round theatre which had already been recreated in the huge model of Elizabethan London and in the stage-sets made for Laurence Olivier's wonderful wartime film of Shakespeare's *Henry V*. Now it has at long last been realized on Bankside thanks to Sam Wanamaker and Theo Crosby; built of real oak timbers and roofed in real thatch, it opened nine years ago, in 1997.

The Globe may be a special case, but its existence surely still confirms that not only is Tudor the only real national style, capturing the imagination of a wide cross-section of the English population over several centuries, but also that — in England at any rate — it was *the* principal, representative style of the twentieth century.

A fuller discussion of Neo-Tudor will be given in the chapter on 'Merrie England' in the author's forthcoming book on British Architecture Between the Wars.

ILLUSTRATIONS

Unless otherwise stated, all photographs were taken by the author.

NOTES

- 1 Anthony Bertram, *Design* (Harmondsworth, 1938), p. 61; J. M. Richards, *An Introduction to Modern Architecture* (Harmondsworth, 1940), p. 87; John Gloag, 'The Suburban Scene', in *Britain and the Beast*, ed. Clough Williams-Ellis (London, 1938), p. 199.
- 2 Anthony Bertram, *The House: A Machine for Living In* (London, 1935), p. 21.
- 3 Evelyn Waugh, *Decline and Fall* (1928) (London, 1983), pp. 149–53.
- 4 Introduction to Barbara Jones, 'The Pattern of Suburbia', in *The Changing Nation*, ed. A. G. Weidenfeld (London, 1947), pp. 9–14 (p. 9).
- 5 Osbert Lancaster, *Pillar to Post* (London, 1939), p. 70.
- 6 G. S. Repton to J. S. Harford, 18 August 1810, quoted in Nigel Temple, *John Nash & The Village Picturesque* (Gloucester, 1979), p. 135.
- 7 T. F. Hunt, *Half a Dozen Hints on Picturesque Domestic Architecture*, 2nd edn (London, 1826), quoted in Tim Mowl and Brian Earnshaw, *Trumpet at a Distant Gate: The Lodge as Prelude to the Country House* (London, 1985), p. 75.
- 8 J. C. Loudon, *An Encyclopædia of Cottage, Farm and Villa Architecture*, new edn (London, 1835), p. 792. Frank Kelsall points out to me John Betjeman's description in a 1946 letter of Sir Ninian Comper's house, The Priory in Beulah Hill, which apparently dated from 1836: 'Such a funny house, my dears, all sort of Tudor but not the *real* thing, you know, like they build nowadays, but in *plaster*, did you ever?' (*John Betjeman Letters*, ed. Candida Lycett Green, 1 [London, 1994], p. 381).
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- 13 Evelyn Waugh, *Labels. A Mediterranean Journal* (London, 1930), pp. 55–56.

- 14 E. Maxwell Fry, 'Shakespeare's Stratford — and Ours', in the *Architectural Review*, 71 (June 1932), p. 219, partly quoted in Douglas Hickman, *A Shell Guide: Warwickshire* (Faber, London 1979), p. 158.
- 15 Sally Beauman, *The Royal Shakespeare Company: a History of Ten Decades* (Oxford, 1982), p. 100.
- 16 Nikolaus Pevsner, *Buildings of England: Cambridgeshire* (Harmondsworth, 1954), p. 116.
- 17 Quoted in Anon. [Graham Paul Smith], *Ernest George Trobridge 1884–1942, Architect Extraordinary* (Oxford, 1982), p. 4.
- 18 Ian Nairn, *Nairn's London* (Harmondsworth, 1966), p. 221.
- 19 *Architectural Review*, 60 (July 1926), p. 24, and it was also illustrated in 62 (December 1928), p. 238; Steen Eiler Rasmussen, 'First Impressions of London: or, Sir Edwin in Wonderland', *AA Files*, 20 (Autumn 1990), p. 16, ed. and trans. Andrew Saint, from *Wasmuths Monatshefte für Baukunst*, 12 (1928), pp. 304–13.
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- 21 Clive Aslet, *The Last Country Houses* (New Haven and London, 1982), p. 181.
- 22 Cuthbert Headlam, *George Abraham Crawley: A Short Memoir* (London, 1929), p. 50.
- 23 Ian Nairn and Nikolaus Pevsner, *Buildings of England: Surrey* (Harmondsworth, 1962), pp. 68 and 334.
- 24 P. A. Barron, *The House Desirable. A Handbook for those who wish to acquire homes that charm* (London, 1929), pp. iv and ix.
- 25 Barron, *The House Desirable*, p. 176. For Shadbolt, see Donald Campbell, 'Blunden Shadbolt 1879–1949, Architect of the House Desirable', *Thirties Society Journal*, 3 (1983), pp. 17–24.
- 26 *The Downland Post*, 1 June 1925; Barron, *The House Desirable*, p. 182. I am grateful to Douglas d'Enno and David Deevers for information on Tudor Close.
- 27 Ivor Stewart-Liberty, *Liberty's Tudor Shop, Great Marlborough Street, Regent Street, London* (London and Paris, n.d. [1924]), p. 7.
- 28 Julian Leathart, *Style in Architecture* (London, 1940), pp. 123–24.
- 29 Greg Walker, *The Private Life of Henry VIII* (London and New York, 2003), p. ix.
- 30 Gavin Stamp, 'Conversation with Ernö Goldfinger', *Thirties Society Journal*, 2, n.d. (1982), p. 19.
- 31 Osbert Lancaster, *Homes Sweet Homes* (London, 1939), p. 70.
- 32 The New Ship Inn was rebuilt by Ernest R. Barrow, the King & Queen Hotel in 1931–32 by Clayton & Black; I am grateful to David Beevers for telling me after which monarchs this latter inn was originally named.
- 33 J. B. Priestley, *An English Journey* (London, 1934), p. 77.
- 34 Bertram, *Design*, pp. 58–59.
- 35 Barron, *The House Desirable*, p. 186.
- 36 John Betjeman, 'Slough', from *Continual Dew* (London, 1937), p. 5.
- 37 Caption to photograph of the bar counter in 'At the Sign of the White Horse' in a Tavern car, 1949, quoted in Mike King, *An Illustrated History of Southern Coaches* (London, 2003), p. 160. I am grateful to Nicholas Long for this reference.
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- 41 That such plans derived from houses by Unwin in Hampstead Garden Suburb and elsewhere was suggested to me by Andrew Saint.
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- 43 Sir Leslie Scott, K.C. [of the Council for the Preservation of Rural England], 'Preservation of the Countryside', in *House Building 1934–1936*, ed. Ernest Betham (London, n.d.), p. 33.
- 44 Ernest Betham (ed.), *House Building 1934–1936* (London, n.d.), p. 203.
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- 46 Alan A. Jackson, *Semi-Detached London* (London, 1973), p. 244.
- 47 Peter Waymark, *A History of Petts Wood* (Petts Wood, 1979, 1983, 1990, 2000).
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- 49 Morrell (Builders) Ltd, brochure for the Coney Hall Estate (n.d.) (Local Studies Library, Bromley). For the 1930s development of Hayes, Coney Hall and West Wickham, see Peter Way, 'Once it was all fields', *The Sunday Times Magazine*, 11 February 1968, pp. 20–27.

- 50 Kemp & Tasker designed flats for Morrell's in Herne Hill where they also designed two houses in Dorchester Drive in contrasting styles: no. 5, which is modernistic, and 'Tudor Stacks', now demolished; both are illustrated in Gavin Stamp (ed.), 'Britain in the Thirties', *Architectural Design*, 49, nos 10–11 (1979), p. 17.
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- 59 John Betjeman, 'Middlesex', from *A Few Late Chrysanthemums* (London, 1954), p. 26.
- 60 Campbell, 'Blunden Shadbolt'.
- 61 Ian Davis, 'One of the Greatest Evils', p. 33.
- 62 Paul Oliver, 'The Galleon on the Front Door. Imagery of House and Garden', in Oliver, Davis and Bentley, *Dunroamin*, pp. 161 and 157; also see Gavin Stamp, 'Through Eden Park to Arcady', *Event*, 4–10 March 1981, pp. 16–18.
- 63 Paul Oliver, 'Learning from Dunroamin. Values and the Houses We Live in', in Oliver, Davis and Bentley, *Dunroamin*, p. 206.
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