



The Broadlands Housing Estate. The Concept and Fulfilment.

George Hampshire

On return from WW1, the combatants were promised "A country fit for heroes to live in", but in the early years, the reality was a travesty of what was promised. In Newton Abbot, most returned to unemployment, poverty, and dilapidated, unsanitary housing, which meant the Courts in the case of Newton Abbot Urban District. Often with no bathrooms and shared Toilets. Beds were shared with siblings, clothes were stored in paper bags to keep out the rats, and cooking was primitive, with food bought daily because there was no provision for storage. Often, windows looked out on dismal yards or streets; Vicary's Tannery polluted the River Lemon; coal fires filled the air with smoke and soot; and the Courts adjacent to the River Lemon were sometimes subject to flooding.ⁱ

The 1919 Addison Housing and Town Planning Act required local authorities to survey housing needs and develop plans that could attract subsidies. Viscount Addison oversaw the support needed to build the houses on what became Addison Road and the Milber Estate.ⁱⁱ

In September 1922, Sir Alfred Mond, Minister of Health in Lloyd George's Coalition government, through his Director of Housing, Sir Charles Wilson, turned down the request to subsidise the building of a further 32 houses in addition to the 45 already built on the Milber Estate. The reasoning given was that the Government's policy was to channel funds to their IPN (Immediate Pressing List), which did not include Newton Abbot.ⁱⁱⁱ

Following the fall of Lloyd George's coalition in 1922, Neville Chamberlain, the new Tory Minister of Health responsible for housing, introduced the Housing, &c. Act 1923, to stimulate housing to address housing shortages. The Act encouraged private builders and local authorities to apply for subsidies. Still, it was criticised for the fact that houses were, in many cases, built for sale rather than for rented Social Housing and were too expensive for the poorest families, and did not address the acute housing need.^{iv}

With Labour briefly in power from 1923, John Wheatley, the Minister of Health, introduced the Financial Provisions Housing Act in 1924, renewing the subsidies.^v The Act survived the Baldwin government in the 1920s, and 500,000 houses were built.

Mr W. T. Harvey, Chair of the NAUDC Housing Committee, and the proprietor of Harvey's Drapers, at 23/25 Bank Street, from which he retired in 1925, had been searching for a suitable site for new housing in Highweek to provide a balance in the Town to the latest housing at Milber. After a failed negotiation, Mr F. F. Card unexpectedly offered in July 1925 to sell his entire Estate of Broadlands House and thirty-five acres of meadows for £11,150. Councillors said the suggested sale price was £ 3,000 below market value.^{vi}

The Estate had formerly been the home of John Vicary, the chief partner of the local Tannery, who built Broadland House in the late 1870s. He died in 1899, and his wife remarried six months later, renting the House and Estate to at least two tenants, Mr Peacock and Dr J.J. Joplin. By 1908, Mr F.F. Card, a retired steelworks owner from South Wales, purchased the House by private sale.^{vii}

Mr W.T. Harvey, the prime protagonist for better housing in the Town, reported in July 1925 that 116 houses condemned by the Surveyor as unfit for human habitation were still occupied. Scores of homes housed two or more families, and he had a list of 200 applicants for a new housing scheme. He raised a disturbing consequence of the housing shortage, with small tenants subletting rooms at exorbitant prices. One example was a sub-tenant paying 17s 6d for two rooms, whereas the tenant only paid 5s for the whole House. Although these examples were scandalous, Councillors and their friends often owned much of the substandard housing in the Town.^{viii}

In September 1925, the Housing Committee instructed the Surveyor to prepare a specification for submission to the principal Firms involved in Council House building in Acton, Hayes, Rickmansworth, and Welwyn.^{ix}

In January 1926, NAUDC adopted a report to build houses on the vacated Broadlands Estate, in compliance with Section III of the Housing (Finance Provision) Act 1924, as administered by the Ministry of Health. Compliance could attract funding from the Exchequer. Taking advantage of the Wheatley Act, Newton Abbot Urban District Council (NAUDC) approved the construction of 100 concrete houses in 1926 to meet the dire needs of low-wage workers living in cramped, unsanitary conditions. The report proposed that 100 houses be built, subject to the Ministry of Housing sanctioning the raising of £51,200. The Committee reported that two tenders had been considered and recommended that the Universal Housing Company Ltd of Rickmansworth Tender be accepted for £531 11s 6d for each of 26 Parlour Type houses and £488 for each of seventy-four non-Parlour Type houses, for a total sum of £51,200. (A parlour-type house was one with two reception rooms, traditionally, one room for everyday use, and the Parlour for special occasions - entertaining guests, etc. Today, we might use one for sitting, relaxing, and watching TV, and the other as a Dining Room.) The NAUDC accepted a tender of £ 5,240 3s 8d from Messrs James and A.S. Budge for the construction of roads and sewers for the Broadlands Development.^x In January 1926, it was agreed that an Electrical supply would be laid to the Estate. Mr W.T. Harvey hoped this first stage would relieve the housing shortage and allow families to live in more civilised conditions. The Housing Committee now had a growing waiting list of three hundred families; those most deprived would be prioritised for the new homes. The non-Parlour type would have a square footage of 756, have a Bathroom and Lavatory, and be rented at 8s 6d; the Parlour type would be larger and rented at 10s 6d. All would have gardens, and all would be built in pairs. However, a local Labourer's wages could be as low as 27s a week, so whether these rents were affordable is questionable.^{xi}

Although the Ministry of Health approved the scheme, it warned that the project should be built in modules of 50 houses due to the current skills shortage and scarcity of building materials. The Ministry also deemed that tenders for each House were overpriced by £20, and the Exchequer contribution was subject to change.

The shortage of skilled men and materials was a direct result of WW1, with the enormous number of military and civilian casualties further exacerbated by the Spanish Flu, which accounted for an additional 230,000 deaths. The shortage of skilled housebuilders is mainly related to bricklayers and plasterers.^{xii}

Councillors had considerable unease that local builders were not allowed to tender, thus keeping the money and work in the Town. Mr Harvey explained that the Universal Building Company had a proven record of meeting targets for large projects, using mainly unskilled Labour and their patented building method, which used more freely available building materials. There was the additional administrative and cost advantage for the County Surveyor of only having to review a limited number of Quotes, together with the problem of project managing many small Builders.^{xiii}

The NAUDC signed the contract with the Universal Housing Company (UHC) in March 1926; the work would begin in late March, with the first fifty completed by Christmas 1926. The Company explained that the Houses would be built in pairs, each pair only requiring two or three unskilled labourers, supported by one skilled Carpenter. Each pair of houses would be available for habitation within 28 days. (The requirement for electricians and gas fitters is not mentioned in the various project reports, but they were needed.)^{xiv}

By August 1926, the backbiting began, with local builders, Councillors, the public, and the Mid Devon Advertiser criticising the lack of progress, with not a single pair of Houses completed. Mr Harvey appealed to the Contractors to complete at least one pair to stem the criticism. Although no houses were started, foundations had been laid on the majority, and a concrete raft formed as the base for each House on a substantial number. The UHC accepted the brickbats but explained that the General Strike had held up supplies in May, but the project would be completed on time.^{xv}

However, the Ministry of Health was satisfied with the progress, as it approved the NAUDC's request for a second-stage development of 70 houses. Twenty would butt onto the Ashburton and Highweek Road and be of the non-Parlour type.^{xvi}

On October 15, 1926, during a countrywide tour of Council Housing schemes, Neville Chamberlain, the Minister of Health, visited Broadlands and appeared happy with the progress and compliance with the rules.^{xvii}

On October 22, 1926, the Council accepted the Tender from the Universal Housing Company.^{xviii}

By December 17, 1926, the first 50 houses were completed on time and were awaiting tenants. It is unknown how the Tenants were selected, but there was a problem, as the NAUDC had promised that those in most need would be prioritised. However, those in that category could not afford the rent. A tactic later employed was probably used to solve the problem; those who could afford the rent moved to Broadlands, and those less well-off moved into their vacated property, with upgrades where appropriate.^{xix}

By February 1927, 54 houses had been built.^{xx}

By September 1927, the NAUDC was proud to announce that 260 houses had been built, enabling 1388 people (10% of the urban population) who had lived in substandard properties to be rehoused. There are 230 (the numbers do not add up exactly) on the Broadlands Estate and 32 on Addison Road. In addition, 80 were built by private developers on the Milber site.^{xxi}

The fourth phase of the Broadland scheme began in February 1928, with 90 houses approved to be built on allotments contiguous with the leading site at the cost of £39000, including sewers and roads at an individual house cost of £344. Some were to have brick finishes, and others had rough casts for a more pleasing appearance. The brick could be obtained from the local brickworks, putting £ 3,000 into the local economy, and many unskilled workers could be employed. These properties would be non-parlour, with a fine living room, scullery, bathroom, etc. They would all be Brick, plus an 11-inch cavity wall. The size would be the same as already constructed, built in pairs with a 20ft 9in frontage and 20ft depth. Some Councillors stated that the rents needed to be at least 3 to 4s a week cheaper for those in the worst housing. The Rent Collectors report showed that £4586 had been collected on the earlier builds, with only £5 in arrears, suggesting that current rents were affordable.^{xxii}

Councillors hoped that all future housing would be built of Brick, as in Ogwell and Abbotskerswell, with rents of only 7s plus 2s rates. These areas also had more extensive gardens. It was pointed out that land in these two areas was cheaper than in Newton Abbot, and their Exchequer subsidy was larger.^{xxiii}

Mr W T Harvey reported that 320 houses had been built on the Broadland's Estate at a total expenditure of £167,882. £11,349 had been collected in rents, £2,870 in Rates. Arrears for the half year were £9.17s.6d.^{xxiv}

With 90 houses completed in November 1928, Councillors again raised concerns about the affordability of the new housing. It was hoped that a government subsidy of £7 10s and a local contribution of £4 10s would enable a rent of 6s 3d plus rates. This rent was still too high for some families, but they were forced to move from slum properties to Broadlands, with the subsequent fear of being evicted and made homeless. The answer (as stated earlier) was to refurbish some of the end houses of the Courts and let these families move in.^{xxv}

The Brooking Meadow, a field adjacent to the Estate, was purchased in October 1929 from the Charity Commissioners for £720 to use as a Land Bank for future extension of the Estate, with room for 112 Houses.^{xxvi}

Later Developments.

It was quiet on the Broadlands Estate until the fifth instalment of an additional 20 houses began in June 1933 on Brookings Meadow.

The sixth instalment began in July 1934 on the Estate's west side, comprising 20 three-bedroom non-parlour and 12 two-bedroom non-parlour type houses. The quote from Messrs. Carpenter and Mayne was accepted in December for £9672, with roads and sewers from Mr Foster of New Barnet for £1783 19s 10d.^{xxvii}

January 1935. The NAUDC announced that the Broadland and Addison Road sites comprised 370 properties, housing 1687 people, including 93 lodgers, with an average household occupancy of 4.48. They were concerned about the number of Lodgers.^{xxviii}

September 1935. 7th instalment. 32 Houses. Rents Two Bed 4s 9d, Three Bed, 5s 3d.^{xxix}

March 1936. 8th instalment. 12 Houses.^{xxx}

April 1937 Repairs. The Surveyor reported that several houses needed general repairs, and 12 pairs needed urgent repairs; the asbestos sheets on the external surfaces were unpinned from the steel stanchions. The fault was probably due to expansions and contractions, causing cracks. Tenders were invited to remove the Asbestos from the external faces and render and stucco in cement and sand. The Councillors asked how many such properties using Asbestos exterior cladding were on the Estate. Shocked, the answer was 230, built by the UBC using its patented building method—a costly legacy. But there was no intention of doing all the properties. However, Councillors for Broadlands noted that many such properties were internally deplorable.^{xxxii}

The newspapers did not comment further on the much-needed repairs, safety concerns, and property insulation until 1971.

November 1971. The repercussions of the UBC patented building method finally had to be resolved. There were problems with the external and internal use of Asbestos, a lack of cavity walling, and related repairs, requiring a massive investment of £350,000 (£3.5m 2021).^{xxxiii}

The sudden desire to improve the properties was probably prompted by the Asbestos Regulation Act 1969, which imposed restrictions on the use and handling of Asbestos and Asbestos products across various industries, including construction.

The hazards of Asbestos had been known for many years. A report in the British Medical Journal in 1927, during the second and third instalment phases of the Broadland Development, confirmed that the use of Asbestos was linked to Fybrosis of the lungs.

(Personal Note: My Father died in 1962, aged 50, of malignant Mesothelioma, resulting from Blue Asbestos used to insulate sterilisers in hospital operating theatres.)

Appendix 1: The Patented House Building technique of the Universal Housing Company.

Materials and skilled Labour were in short supply in the mid-1920s. The UHC devised a crude method requiring only two Carpenters and a Bricklayer for the development. The remainder of the workforce consisted of local unskilled labourers and three primary building materials: concrete, asbestos sheets, and steel stanchions.

The first stage was to lay the foundations, sewers, and concrete raft for each House. Steel stanchions and crossbeams were assembled, bolted to the ground, and lifted into position to form a skeleton of the House and serve as supports for the first floor and roof. Next, the roof was tiled, and the door and window frames were fitted to weatherproof the building. Asbestos sheets were attached internally to the steel skeleton and elsewhere to form the various rooms.

The exterior face of the wall consists of asbestos-cement sheets, eight feet long and one foot high. These were fixed to the steel stanchions at close intervals, steel bars were fitted horizontally as reinforcement, and concrete was poured into the cavity between the internal and external sheets of Asbestos. This operation is repeated foot by foot until the wall reaches the eaves. Floorboards were laid directly onto the concrete raft by

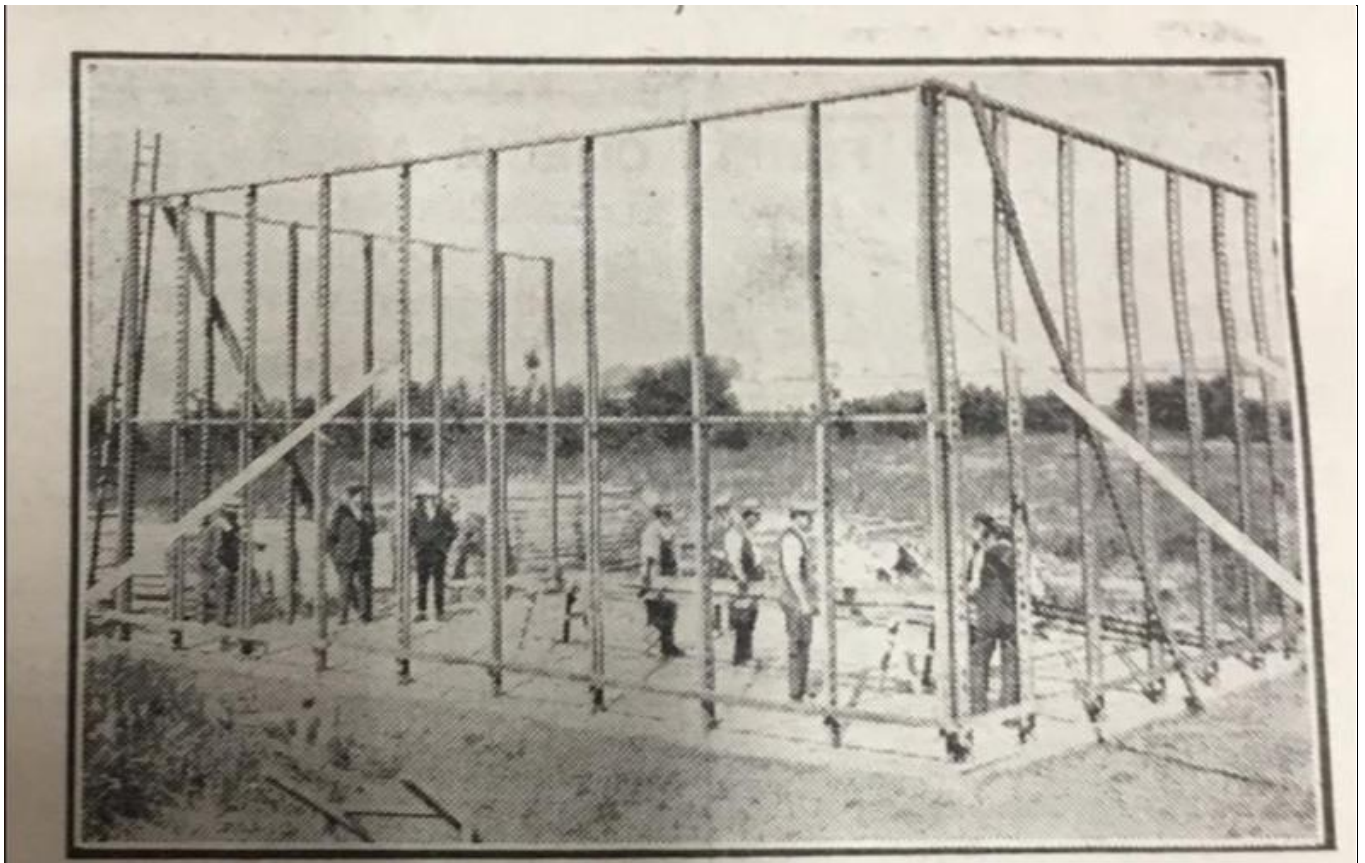
being screwed to wooden strips laid into the base. Brick was used to construct the chimney stack and fireplace.^{xxxiii}

The limited description of the building method (available to the author) did not mention cavity walling, damp course or the Town Gas supply. It was understood that Electricity would be provided.^{xxxiv}

Images^{xxxv}

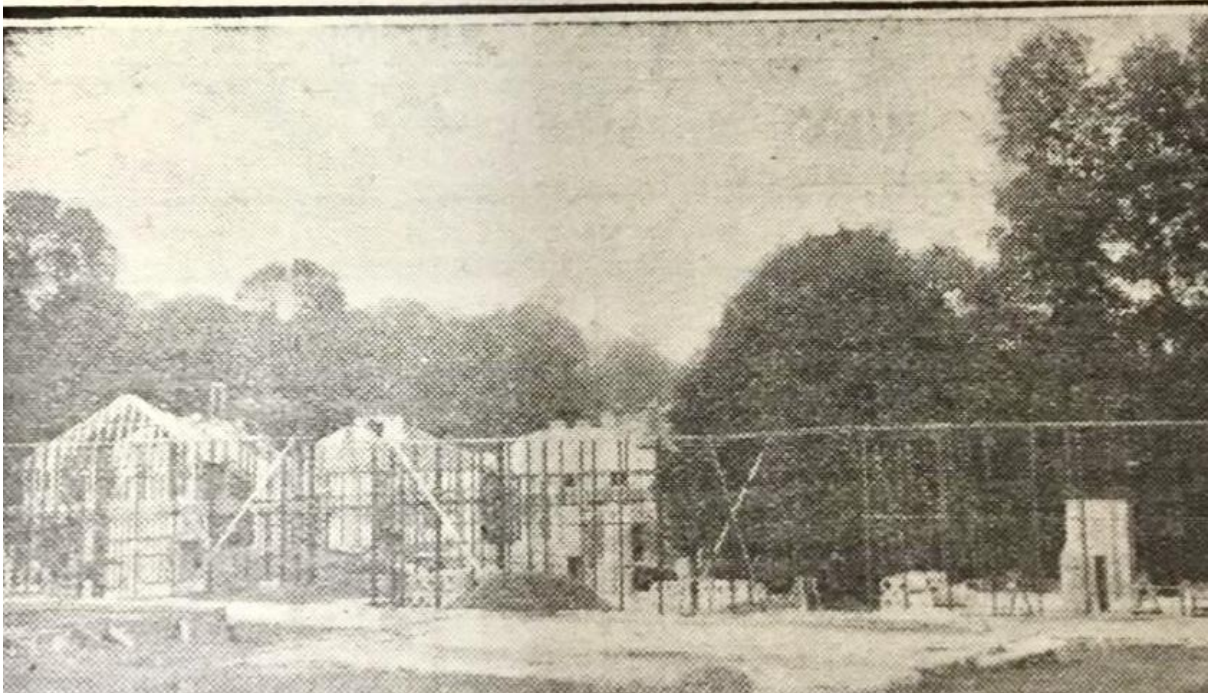
Appendix 2. Building Materials

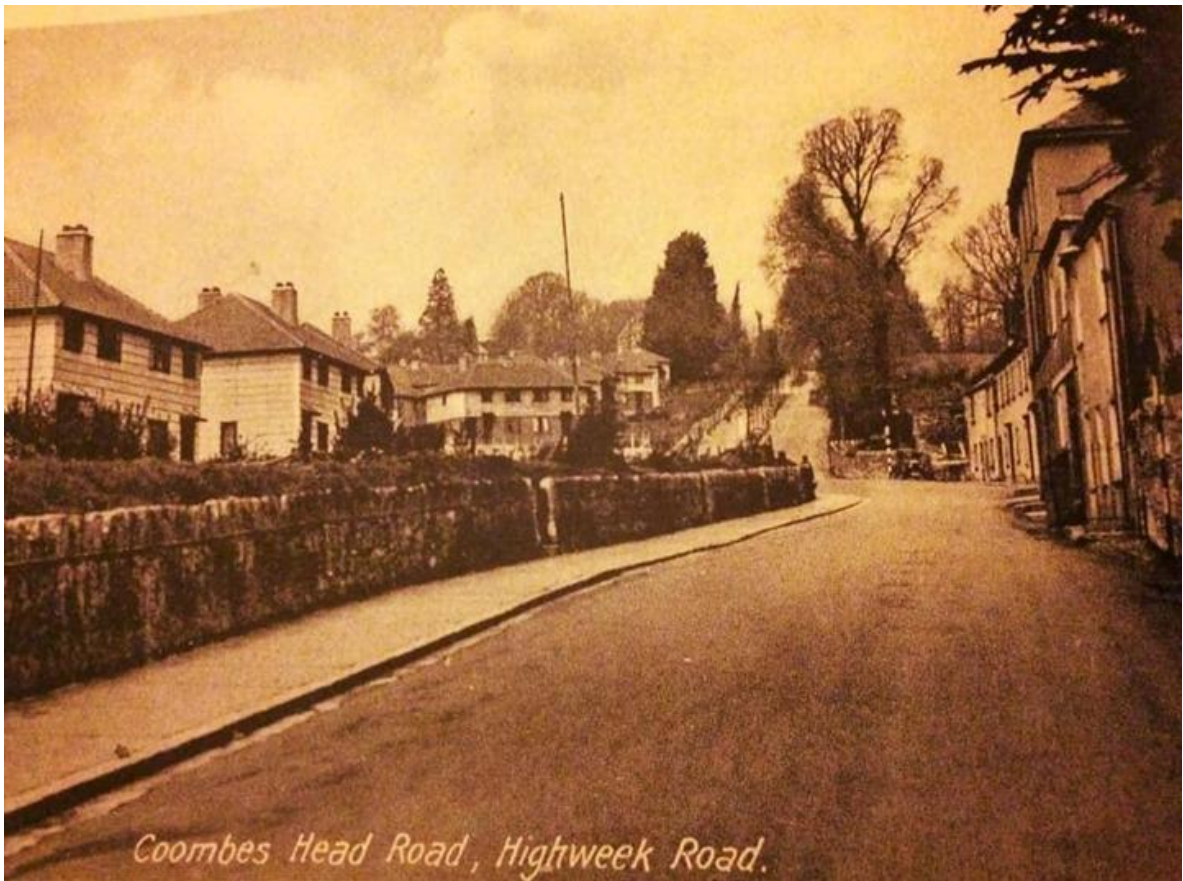
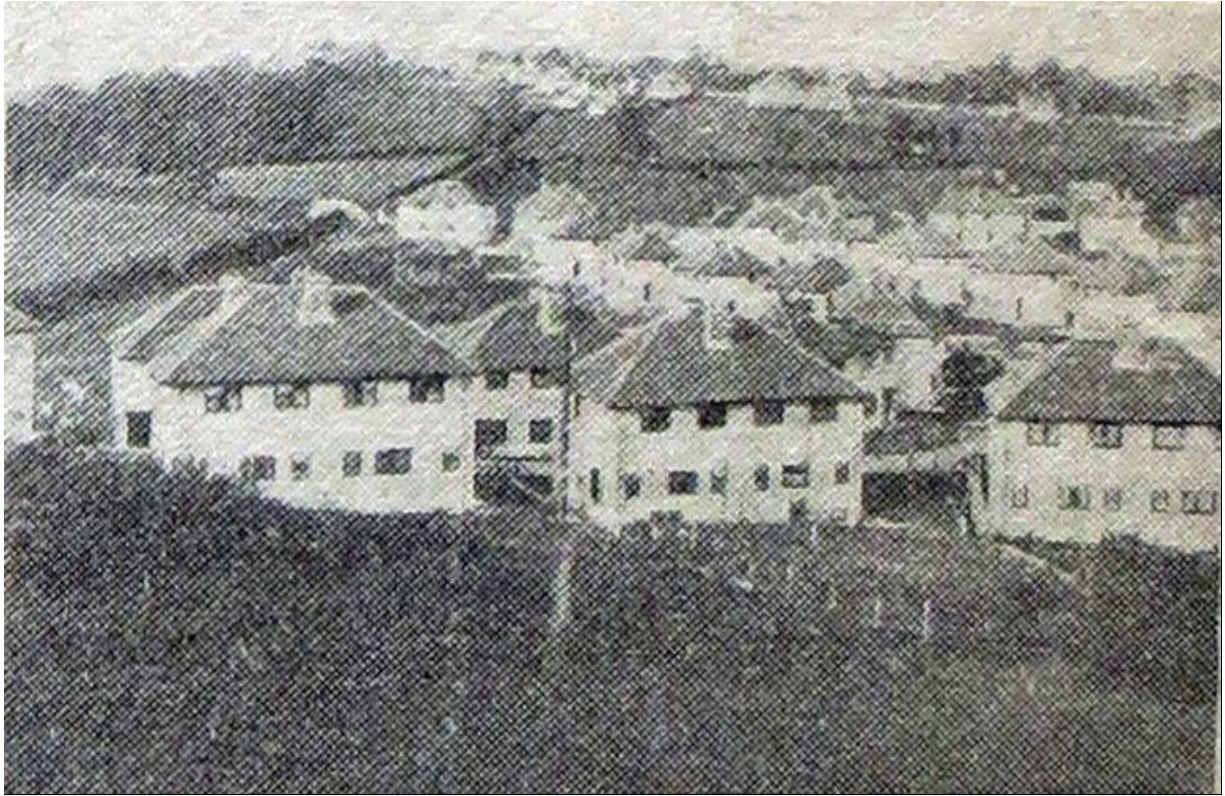
Materials of all types were in short supply in the 1920s, as they were affected by what had been prioritised for the War effort. Hence, Bricks and Concrete that were not needed, so the factories closed, and the equipment was not maintained. Concrete became available by the mid-1920s, but Bricks were affected more by market forces. Denmark, which had remained Neutral throughout the War, could supply Bricks at a lower cost than those locally produced.





BROADLANDS HOUSES.





Coombes Head Road, Highweek Road.

+2



-
- ⁱ From Slum Clearance to Council Housing Estates. Bridget Mary Waters. Published February 1956.
- ⁱⁱ Exeter and Plymouth Gazette. November 22, 1920. Page 3.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Western Morning News. September 20, 1922. Page 3
- ^{iv} Homes Unfit for Heroes – JSTOR, Simon Pepper & Peter Richmond.
- ^v Exeter and Plymouth Gazette. November 18, 1924. Page 8.
- ^{vi} Western Times. July 24, 1925. Page 8. Exeter and Plymouth Gazette. July 21, 1925. Page 7.
- ^{vii} Census and Electoral Registers.
- ^{viii} Exeter and Plymouth Gazette. July 21, 1925. Page 7.
- ^{ix} The Devon and Exeter Gazette. September 22, 1925.
- ^x Western Times. November 20, 1925
- ^{xi} Western Morning News. January 19, 1926. Page 3.
- ^{xii} Wikipedia
- ^{xiii} Devon and Exeter Gazette. September 22, 1925. Page 8
- ^{xiv} Exeter and Plymouth Gazette. March 16, 1926. Page 7.
- ^{xv} Western Times. August 26, 1926. Page 9.
- ^{xvi} Devon and Exeter Gazette. September 21, 1926
- ^{xvii} Devon and Exeter Gazette. October 15, 1926.
- ^{xviii} Western Times. October 22, 1926
- ^{xix} Western Times. December 17, 1926
- ^{xx} Western Morning News. February 16, 1927.
- ^{xxi} Western Morning News. September 22, 1927.
- ^{xxii} Western Morning News. February 21, 1928.
- ^{xxiii} Western Morning News. February 21, 1928
- ^{xxiv} Devon and Exeter Gazette. April 17, 1929.
- ^{xxv} The Devon and Exeter Gazette. November 20, 1928.
- ^{xxvi} Western Morning News. September 17, 1929.
- ^{xxvii} Western Times. July 20, 1934.
- ^{xxviii} Western Times. January 25, 1935.
- ^{xxix} Western Times. September 20, 1935.
- ^{xxx} The Devon and Exeter Gazette. March 31, 1936.
- ^{xxxi} Western Times. April 23, 1937.
- ^{xxxii} Herald Express. November 10, 1971.
- ^{xxxiii} Mid Devon Advertiser. July 17, 1926
- ^{xxxiv} Uxbridge and West Drayton Gazette. February 27, 1925,
- ^{xxxv} Mid Devon Advertiser. July 17, 1926.