

Designed to be assembled by unskilled and semi-skilled workers and utilising prefabricated components the ‘prefab’ was born. 156,623 were erected across the UK between 1946-8. These temporary homes were anticipated to be replaced by permanent housing after 10-15 years but many lasted much longer, some to this day.



Prefabs were built round a central core, or service unit, supplying utilities to the kitchen, toilet and bathroom, designed by the Ministry of Works. For many people the modern conveniences and spacious design of the prefab was a huge leap in quality of life. Prefabs did not look like inter-war British houses, but more like American houses, so many thought they were American in design. Some American prefabs were imported, but most were British designed and built.

There were four main types of temporary bungalows produced in great numbers in the UK after the war – the Arcon (steel frame), Uni-Seco, Tarran (both timber framed) and the all-aluminium AIROH which was manufactured from recycled aircraft.

Time is running out for the remaining prefabs as their original occupants grow older and frail and their homes, where still lived in, are scheduled for demolition and redevelopment. Before it is too late we want to capture, develop and share this under-appreciated heritage and stories of ordinary lives lived in extraordinary homes.

Two groups of prefabs have been listed Grade II; 6 of the Uni-Seco type in Catford, London, and 16 of the Phoenix type in Birmingham.

FURTHER READING

Elisabeth Blanchet, “Prefab Homes”, 2014

Greg Stevenson “Palaces for the People, prefabricated homes in post-war Britain”, 2003

Colin Davies, “The Prefabricated Home”, 2005

Ian Abley, co-author, “Why is construction so backward?”, 2004

Brenda Vale: “Prefabs: The history of the UK Temporary Housing Programme”, 1995

Brian Finnimore, “Houses From The Factory”, 1989

CONTACT US

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The Moving Prefab Museum and Archive



Celebrating Britain's post-war prefab heritage



THE PREFAB MUSEUM

The Prefab Museum tells a story that resonates today and paints a picture of social, domestic, and working class life in Britain from 1946 to the present day.

The Prefab Museum is Elisabeth Blanchet and Jane Hearn. We both love prefabs, especially the post-war ones, built to last ten to fifteen years in 1946 but still standing today!

We love them because of their clever inside and outside design; their practicality; their modernism; their not-so-little gardens around; because of the communities they contributed to create, and the lovely residents who raised their families in them.

To us, and many others, prefabs are a national treasure – and probably Britain's most successful social housing scheme – which is disappearing as the last prefabs are demolished and the oldest residents pass away. A national treasure we are determined to cherish, celebrate and remember.

The Prefab Museum started life in a 1946 post-war prefab in Catford, London, in 2014, inspired by photo-journalist Elisabeth Blanchet's passion for and documentation of post-war prefabs and their residents in the UK since 2002. Welcome to the prefabulous world of post-war prefabs!

THE MOVING PREFAB MUSEUM

The Prefab Museum has been awarded support from the Heritage Lottery Fund for the project The Moving Prefab Museum and Archive, from May 2016 to November 2017.

This exciting project will bring the Prefab Museum to venues and museums across the UK where we will share our prefab knowledge, record and collect stories, photos and memories. Over the course of the project we will publish these collected memories through a regular newsletter, our website and social media, bringing them together to create a national archive.

If you are interested in being involved in this project there are lots of opportunities, from volunteering at events, training in archives and oral history, to seeking out prefabs past and present in your area, to telling us about your prefab, where it was and your memories of it. Join our mailing list on prefabmuseum@gmail.com to receive regular updates or look on our website and social media for our events.

MEMORIES AND ARCHIVE



Oral histories and photos, posts on local forums and comments on blogs, are often the only record that some prefabs existed at all and anyone ever lived in them.

Prefabs were spacious and well designed with modern conveniences; a fitted kitchen with refrigerator, fitted cupboards in every room, indoor toilet and bathroom with heated towel rail, running hot water, a back boiler and ducted warm air heating. Often sited on spacious plots of land these detached bungalows provided space to grow vegetables and flowers, and for children to play.

People liked them straight away, as well as the lifestyle they created; families were from the same working-class background and of similar ages. Prefabs became synonymous with a sense of community and many of the occupants remained in their original prefab until it was demolished.

Their residents loved them, and felt privileged to live in them.

MAP

Our prefab location map started life at the museum. We carefully mapped the prefabs people told us about in the visitors' book and from the flags stuck in our map on to Google My Map.

As part of our project the Moving Prefab Museum and Archive we aim to make the map even better, with more stories, photos and links.

HISTORY

In 1942, following the Blitz, the Burt Committee was set up by the wartime UK Government to provide guidance on the housing shortage. The committee recommended temporary housing as a solution to accommodate servicemen returning from the war, people made homeless by bombing, or living in overcrowded and insanitary conditions.