



HISTORIC EXETER:

Rehousing Exeter After the War

A look at the factory-made houses and model estates which were built to house thousands made homeless after the Exeter Blitz

The Exeter Blitz made thousands homeless and the Council chose to rehouse these unfortunate people by building prefabs. These were not expected to last for many years (though many did) but were an excellent stopgap until more substantial garden-suburb type housing was built.

These prefabricated bungalows with their quick build time and innovative interiors made good use of war materials, particularly from the aircraft industry, when traditional housing materials, especially timber, were in short supply. About a dozen designs went into production, utilising steel, aluminium and concrete (particularly asbestos concrete, a wonder material at the time).

All had a living room, bathroom, two bedrooms, a kitchen (with built-in units, a cooker, a copper for washing

and a fridge – revolutionary luxury!) and generous gardens with sheds. The houses were very warm with a ducted air heating system

Exeter's subsequent post-war estates demonstrated how best to build communities with shops within an easy walk, health centres, a community centre, a church, pubs nearby, a primary school and green play spaces. Main roads ran round rather than through the estates and children's routes to primary school did not cross



any main roads. Secondary schools were close by often serving two estates. It was also considered desirable that leisure facilities – a library, cinema and even swimming baths – be provided.

There would be a mixture of flats and houses, varied in type and interspersed with low-rise blocks of flats or maisonettes. Also, the housing would accommodate mixed ages and socio-economic groups with small one-bedroom homes for young, single people, to sheltered accommodation (retirement bungalows, flats and maisonettes) for the elderly – Toronto House at Stoke Hill won a prestigious RIBA award for its design and layout.

For its excellent design with solid spacious houses and, in its centre, a large open area having playgrounds for small children and football areas, the Stoke Hill estate also won a RIBA award.

Sadly, while most of the estates had shops no leisure facilities were forthcoming – no branch libraries, cinemas, pubs, swimming pools or community centres – due partially to lack of funds but also changes in leisure pursuits and transport. Though Stoke Hill did gain the Stoke Arms.

Gradually the prefabs were removed and their sites used for later housing so that nothing now remains of them. Nevertheless, those post-war estates provide us with noteworthy examples of careful planning and continue to demonstrate how good housing and estate building should look.

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