

Willesden's Post-War Prefab Homes



an illustrated talk by
Philip Grant



In 2011, I was part of a Brent Archives “Prefabs Project”, collecting information, memories and photographs of the borough’s post-war prefab homes.

“Pre-fabs” were an important part of our local history and **Brent Archives needs your help** to create a proper record of them, while there are still people who remember these homes

That is the source for most of the material used in this talk.

In 1942, halfway through the Second World War, Winston Churchill's National Government was already thinking about rebuilding the country after the conflict.

Housing people whose homes had been destroyed would be a major problem.

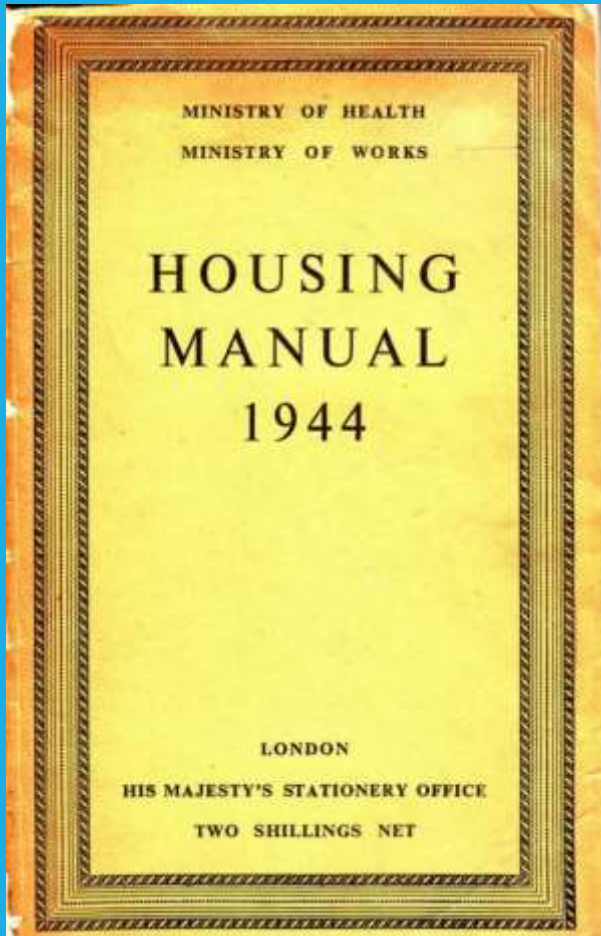




By March 1944, Churchill was ready to announce plans for building temporary factory-made houses, after the war.

Prototypes of designs commissioned by the Ministry of Works were put on display at the Tate Gallery in May 1944.

The 1944 Housing Act promised £150m to supply 250,000 temporary homes, paid for by Central Government. They would be for families with young children, including those of returning servicemen.



Several British groups came up with designs for these “prefabs”, as they came to be known. They all had to use a standard plumbing unit (which required the bathroom and kitchen to be “back to back”), and be in sections no more than 7’6” wide, so they could fit on the back of a lorry.



HOUSING AND TOWN PLANNING COMMITTEE

69

We have carefully considered the sites, which are shortly described below, and subject to the appropriate determination by the War Damage Commission, have authorized the Borough Engineer to negotiate, if necessary, in association with the District Valuer, for their acquisition by purchase or lease, and failing agreement we have instructed the Town Clerk to apply to the Minister of Health for authority to take possession of the land under the Housing (Temporary Accommodation) Act, 1944, and to purchase it compulsorily.

Proposed Site.	Number of houses to be constructed.
(a) The Terrace/Priory Park Road	10
(b) Kilburn Square	5
(c) Beversbrook, Christchurch Avenue	16
(d) "Woodlands," Nos. 61-63 Christchurch Avenue, No. 169 Willesden Lane	18
(e) Nos. 7, 9, 11 and 13 Brondesbury Park	8
(f) "Rosdene, No. 77 Christchurch Avenue	30
(g) Playing Fields, Okehampton Road	135
(h) Bryan Avenue	9
(i) "The Oaks, Donnington Road	13
(j) Uffington Road, between "Shalford" and "Ellesley"	20
(k) Brentfield Road	9
(l) Neasden Lane, Cloke's Yard and land adjoining... ..	39
(m) Oman Avenue	17
(n) North Circular Road, between St. Raphael's Way and Garden Way	6
(o) North Circular Road, between St. Raphael's Way and Ascot Gas Water Heaters Ltd.	4

Willesden Council decided that it would need at least 500 of these "emergency factory-made houses", and the Borough Engineer set about identifying possible sites for them.

This was the initial list, from the minutes of a meeting on 15 January 1945.

At the same meeting, the Borough Engineer explained some of the problems he faced in obtaining permission to use certain sites.

The Ministry of Health had refused an initial request to use land at Furness Fields and Gladstone Park.

2.—The Borough Engineer reported that he had approached the owners of the sites for the accommodation of emergency factory-made houses to be erected by the Ministry of Works to ascertain whether they would sell or lease their land to the Council, but as certain difficulties had arisen he desired specific instructions in each instance. Emergency factory-made houses—sites.

(i) Certain sites are at present occupied (generally under requisition) by the Council for allotment purposes, and the Town Clerk reported to us that such land would in certain circumstances be released by the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries. It was first necessary, however, to consult with the Allotments Associations, and the Officers have accordingly reported thereon to the Allotments Committee, who were proposing to give the subject further consideration next month.

Other land consisted of sites of houses demolished as a result of war damage, and in these cases the Council would only be authorized to use the land for emergency factory-made houses if the War Damage Commission had determined that a value payment (and not a cost of works payment which would enable the house to be re-built) would be made to the owner.

(vi) As to the use of:—

(a) Part of Gladstone Park;

b) Furness Fields;

we are informed that the Ministry of Health have not sanctioned appropriation of the land for housing purposes, but we have given instructions that the Ministry should be asked to re-consider the matter, with a view to the construction of 45 houses in place of the original 160 in that part of Gladstone Park fronting Kendal Road, and to consent to the use of the whole of the Furness Fields for this purpose to accommodate 100 houses. We also authorized application to be made for the concurrent consent of the Middlesex County Council to this use of these lands.

3.—We have received a report submitted by the Willesden Federation of Allotments Societies, regarding the Council's proposals for the use of certain war-time allotment grounds for the erection of emergency factory made houses, and we fully support their view that land which is at present under cultivation should not be used for such a purpose. The Federation also submitted a list of alternative sites which appear suitable for the erection of these houses, and we have referred this list, together with the report, to the Housing and Town Planning Committee. We feel that there is still an urgent need for the production of the maximum amount of foodstuffs, and **we recommend** the Council to adopt the Federation's report and to endeavour to place the houses on other land which is not at present used in any productive capacity.

Sites for temporary houses.

8.—We have considered the reference to us from the Allotments Committee of the representations made by the Willesden Federation of Allotment Societies in connection with the proposal to erect emergency factory-made houses on certain sites at present in use for temporary war-time allotments. The Federation's objections, with a list of alternative suggested sites, has been circulated for the information of all members of the Council, and, after careful examination of the points raised and the alternative sites suggested, we feel that the proposals of the Federation are not such as we can recommend the Council to accept.

Emergency factory-made houses—
Reference from Allotments Committee.

The Allotments Committee backed the Allotments Societies' objections, but the Housing Committee recommended against this on 19 February.

There were also objections from Brondesbury residents to the loss of their local sports ground!

Playing fields
—Okehampton Road.

10.—We have noted an objection submitted on behalf of the residents adjoining the playing fields in Okehampton Road protesting against the erection of emergency factory-made houses.

Local people got the chance to see what part of a “prefab” looked like, during this Victory Parade through Willesden.

The one quarter section on the back of the lorry was from a “Uni-Seco” prefab.

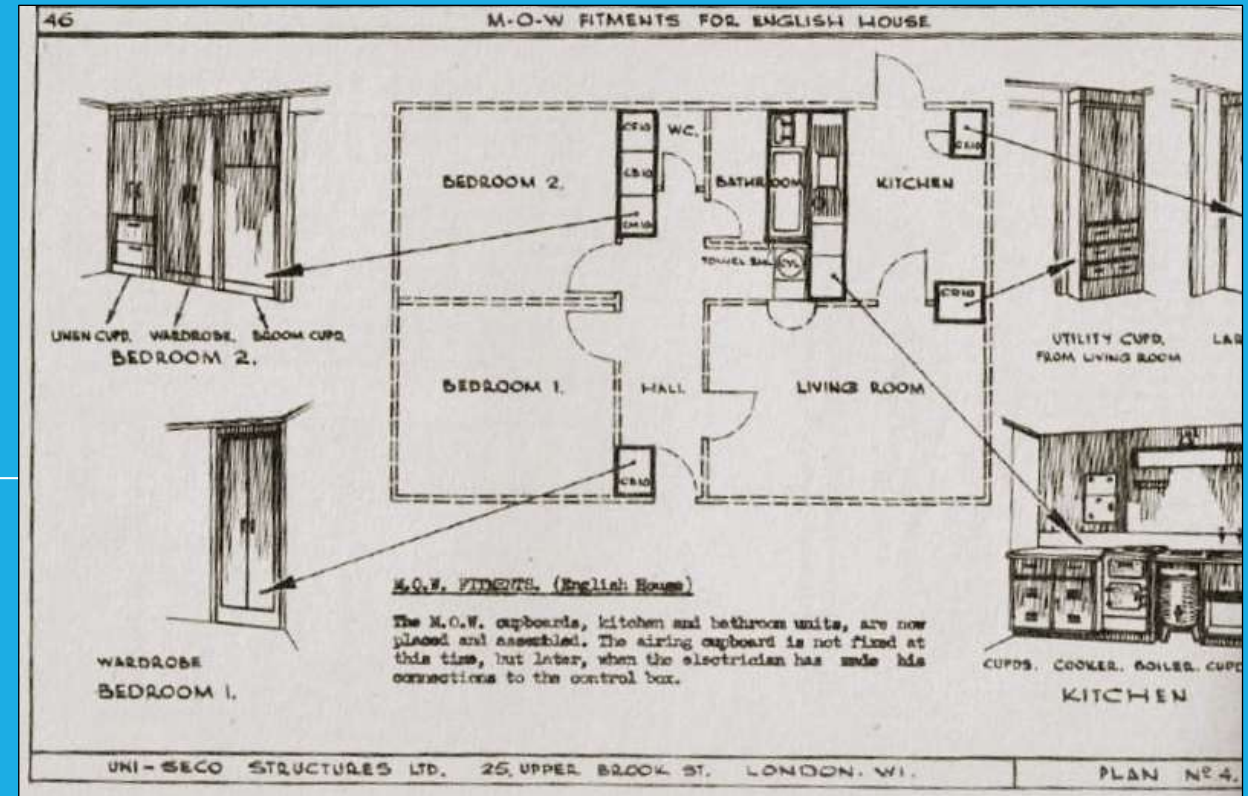
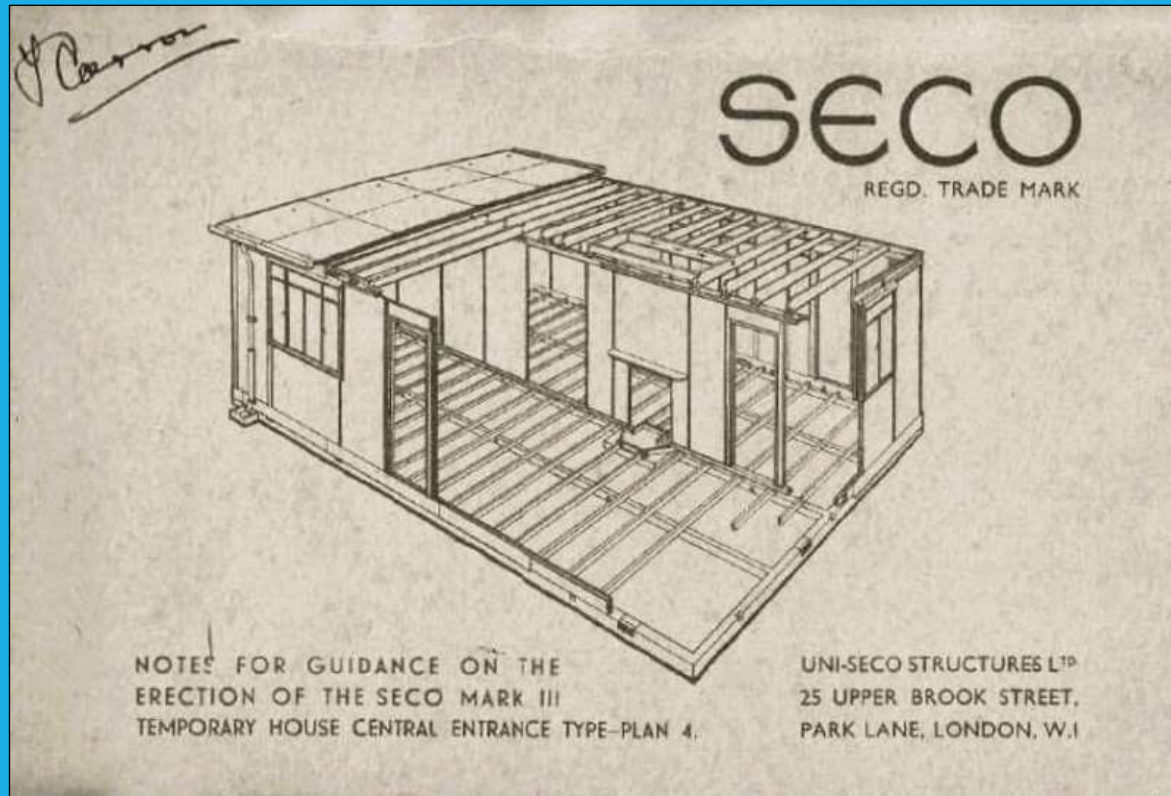




**The prefabs at
Priory Park Road
were the Uni-Seco
type, which would
be used at
a number of
Willesden sites.**

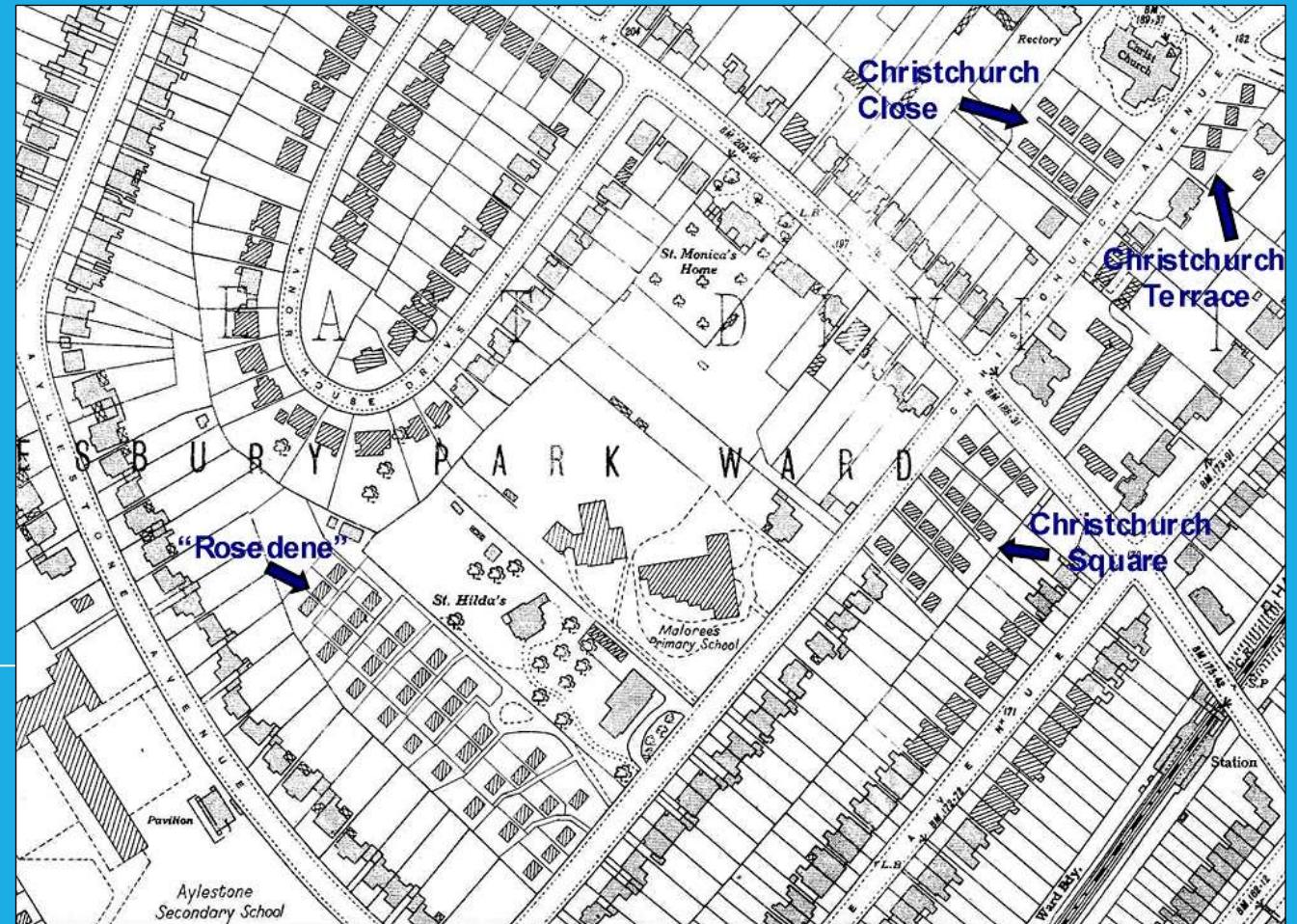
**This photo shows a
training centre, where
builders learned how
to constructed them.**

The Uni-Seco prefabs were built on a concrete raft base, from pre-cut pieces of timber, wood wool and asbestos cement.



Once the outside structure was complete, standard fittings, supplied by the Ministry of Works, were installed.

Further up Willesden Lane, several small sites in Christchurch Avenue were used for building prefabs, including 30 in the grounds of “Rosedene”.





Brent Archives did not have any photographs of the Christchurch Avenue prefabs, but I found this one on the Prefab Museum website (courtesy of Christine Donnell).

Another early Uni-Seco site was The Oaks, at the corner of Harlesden Road and Donnington Road. John was 1-year old when his family moved into No.2 (of 13), from overcrowded conditions in his grandparents flat in Cricklewood in 1946.





John wrote: 'I remember that the prefab was cold, the only heating was a coal fire in the sitting room and of course the cooker in the kitchen, all electric with a penny slot meter. No heating in the 2 bedrooms, lino and rather ill fitting windows, lots of thick blankets on bed, all rather cosy. It had a fridge, Prescold, which Mum and Dad were very pleased with as it was quite a rarity for "working class" people.'

A Uni-Seco kitchen in 1952. (c) Robert Flanders / Prefab Museum.

TEMPORARY HOUSES

Of the 500 temporary houses allocated to Willesden, 282 have been delivered. The Council have completed the preparation of all the 18 sites, which have been handed over to the Ministry of Works, who are responsible for delivering and erecting the houses. During the month eight more have been completed and tenants have gone into four of them. The remaining four will be occupied during the next few days. Practically all the houses delivered have been assembled on the sites and await the completion of fittings, etc.

410 TEMPORARY HOUSES DELIVERED

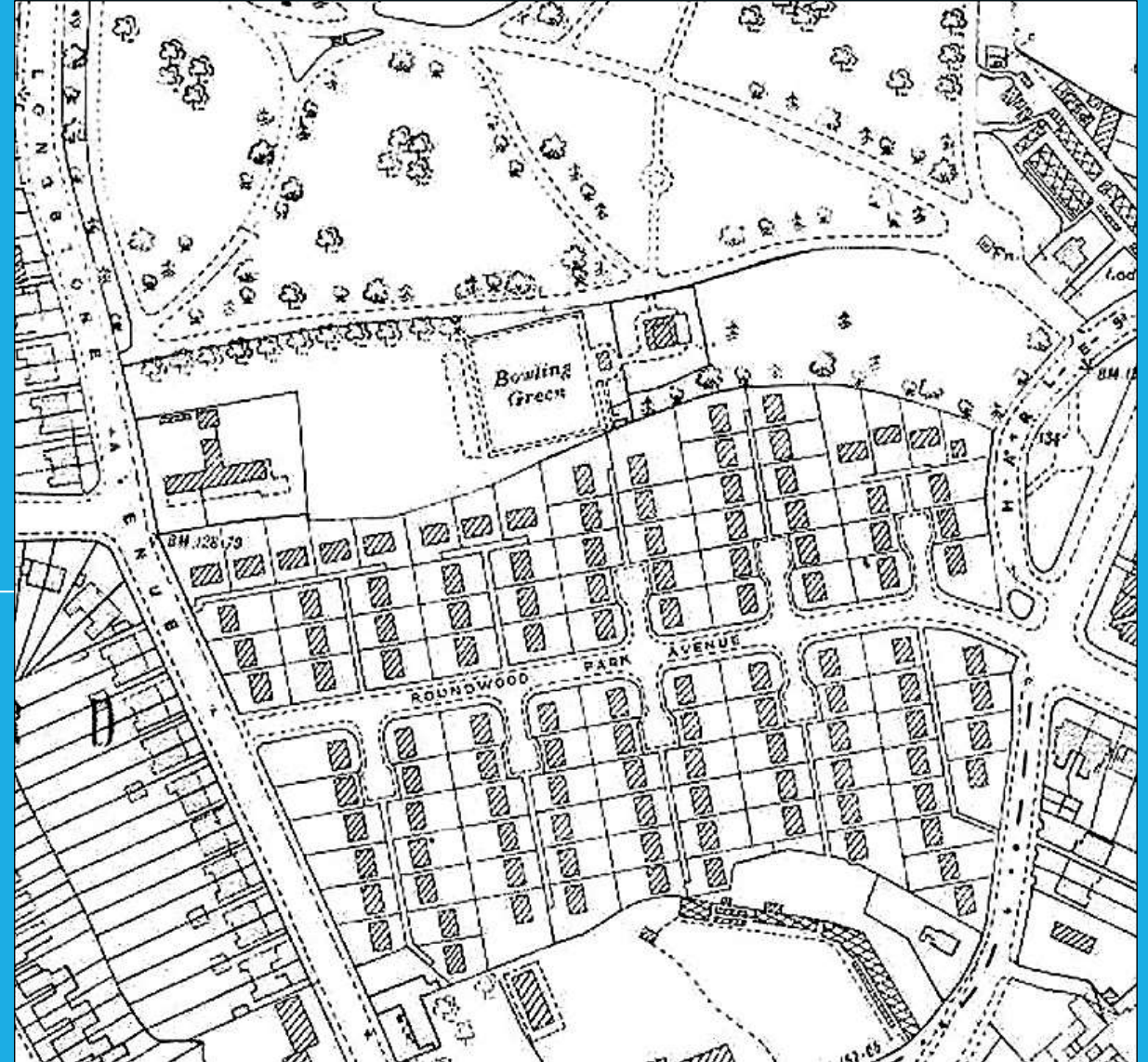
Progress Report To Council

Of the 500 temporary houses allocated to Willesden, 410 have been delivered, and the total number now completed and occupied is 142, states the latest housing progress report presented to Willesden Council, on Tuesday.

The "Willesden Chronicle" reports of Council meetings record that Willesden had prepared all of its prefab sites by February 1946, and that by May 1946 most of the 500 prefabs had been delivered, although only 142 were fully finished and providing homes.

One of Willesden's largest prefab sites was "Furness Fields", acquired just before the War 'for the purposes of public recreation'.

As it had yet to be adopted for that purpose, the Borough was able to lay out the Roundwood Park Avenue prefab estate.



The prefabs at Roundwood Park Avenue were of the Arcon Mk. V type.



Michael Galvin shared a number of photos with Brent Archives during the “Prefabs Project”.



These show a general view, and his Dad, Jerry, with two of his brothers, outside No.44.



As the family grew, the Galvin's two-bedroom prefab bungalow housed parents Jerry and Mary, six children (John, Gerald, Chris, Michael, Catherine and Alice) and their Granddad!



Here are some of the kids, and a couple of their friends (and dogs Bonnie and Rover).

Ken Johnson was born at No.63 in 1948, and also shared some photos from the mid-1950s. His mother, Frances, with sister Caroline, and of him (right) with his sister and Peter (one of his four brothers). He said their prefab was *'very crowded'*.





This aerial photograph from 1961 shows Roundwood Park Avenue (A) still in use, but that the prefabs at The Oaks (B) and Uffington Road (C) had been demolished.

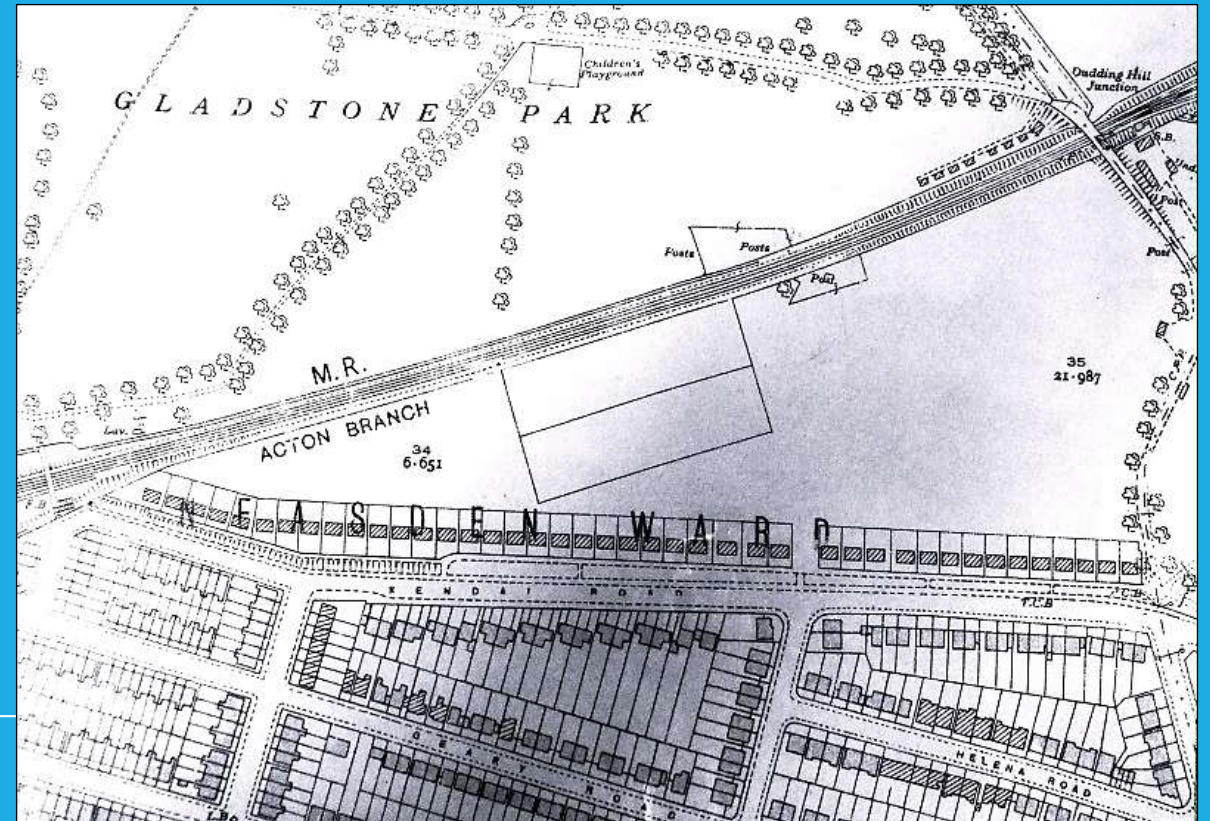
Another aerial photograph, this time from May 1946, shows a row of prefabs being constructed along the Kendal Road frontage of Gladstone Park, and 15 completed ones at Oman Avenue.



David shared this photo of himself outside his family's prefab in Kendal Road. He remembered that the long grass in the park was sometimes set on fire by sparks from passing steam trains. Firemen would have to run down their garden to put out the fire!



The Kendal Avenue prefabs were still there when this O.S. map was updated in 1958.



The Oman Avenue prefabs (A) were still there in 1961, but those in Gladstone Park (B) had gone.

**The Oman Avenue
prefabs were
cleared later
in the 1960s.**



Another “park” prefab site was Ascot Park (A) in Neasden, built on land beside the Ascot Gas Water Heaters Ltd factory.

There were also two smaller groups of prefabs (B) nearby, on the same side of the North Circular Road.





The large white site shown top left on that 1961 aerial view was a Ministry of Works depot, seen in the background of this photo (courtesy of Alan Robins/ Prefab Museum) taken in the back garden of his family's prefab. The MoW depot supplied prefabs to a wide area, mainly Uni-Seco units and fittings.

BOROUGH OF WILLESDEN—WILLESDEN WEST CONSTITUENCY—POLLING DISTRICT R—CHURCH END WARD.

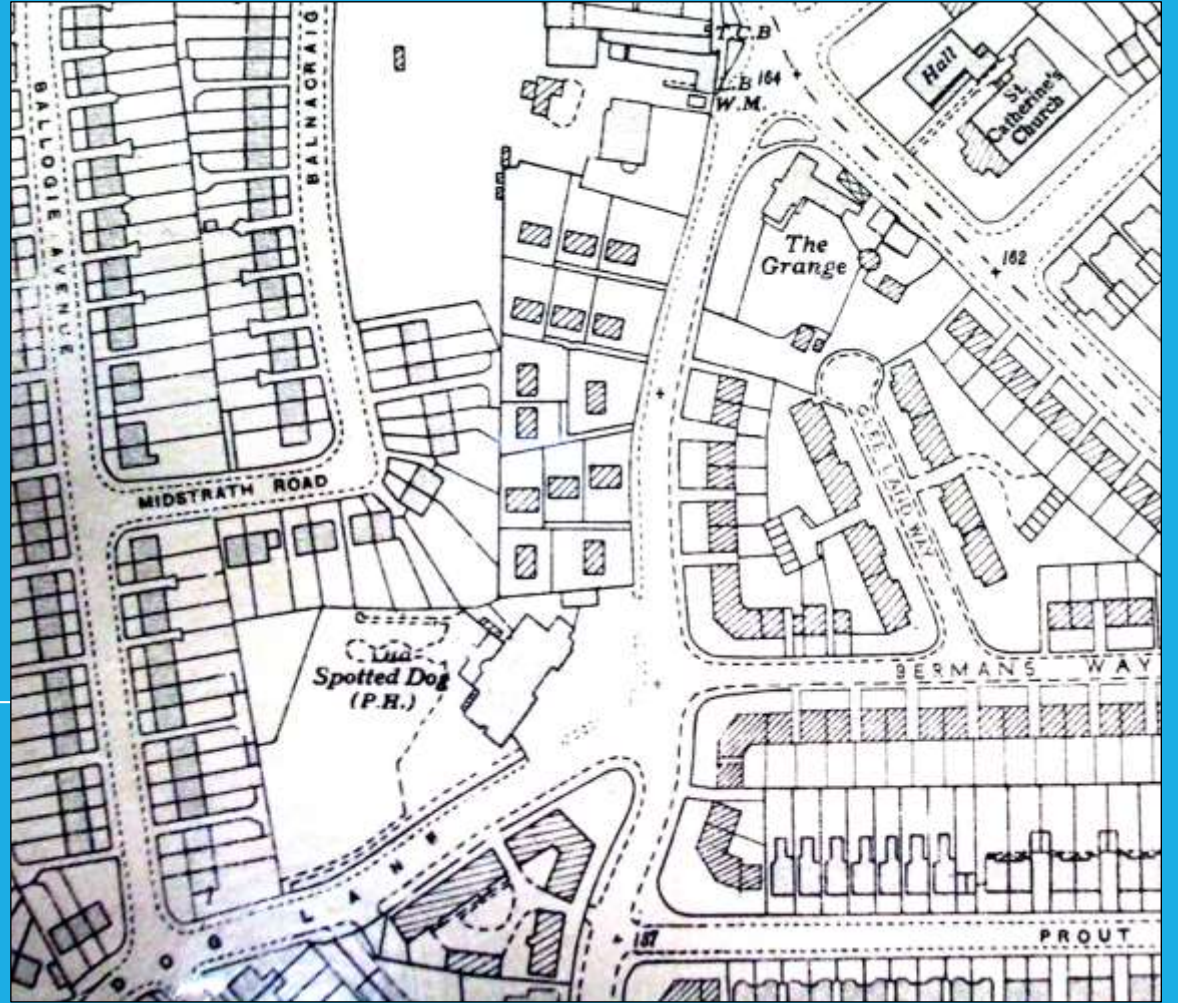
NORTH CIRCULAR RD.—cont.		NORTH CIRCULAR RD.—cont.		NORTH CIRCULAR RD.—cont.		
		ASCOT PARK—cont.		ASCOT PARK—cont.		
1294	McCall, Sampson R.	101a		1422	Vivian, Phyllis R.	50
1295	McCall, Violet	101a	1357	1423	Vivian, William F.	50
1296	Smith, Dorothy V.	101b	1358	1424	Tooley, Arthur E.	52
1297	Smith, John	101b	1359	1425	Tooley, Doris I.	52
1298	Capon, Robert V.	103	1360	1426	Lock, Alfred	54
1299	Capon, Rosemary	103	1361	1427	Lock, Dora	54
1300	Turney, Edgar E.	103a	1362	1428	Brown, Ernest F.	56
1301	Turney, Joyce F.	103a	1363	1429	Brown, Frances A.	56
1302	Turney, May	103a	1364			
1303	Green, Joan R.	103b	1365			
1304	Green, Ruth A.	103b	1366			
1305	Murray, Doris M.	105	1367	1430	Lahner, George W.	100
1306	Murray, William T.	105	1368	1431	Lahner, Nellie A.	100
1307	Kerr, Fanny F.	107	1369	1432	Barnes, Annie	102
1308	Binder, Eltielde A. G.	109	1370	1433	Barnes, Christopher J.	102
1309	Binder, Frederick G.	109	1371	1434	Barnes, Victor C.	102
1310	Binder, Isabella E.	109	1372	1435	Roberts, Eric W.	104
1311	Rumble, Daisy	111	1373	1436	Roberts, Mary E.	104
1312	Rumble, John R.	111	1374	1437	Ellisdon, Leslie	106
1313	Holdford, Frederick D.	113	1375	1438	Ellisdon, Minnie	106
1314	Holdford, Rosetta L.	113	1376	1439	Ellisdon, Nora	106
1315	Parr, Elsie M.	113a	1377	1440	Ellisdon, Ronald	106
1316	Parr, Henry J.	113a	1378	1441	Ellisdon, Vera J.	106
1317	Parr, Lucy E.	113a	1379	1442	Smith, Kate	108
1318	Glennerster, Alfred G.	113b	1380	1443	Smith, Thomas J.	108
1319	Glennerster, Ethel F.	113b	1381	1444	S—Smith, William H.	108
1320	Glennerster, Kathleen	113b	1382	1445	Terry, Peggy I.	108
1321	Glennerster, Reginald A.	113b	1383	1446	Terry, Valentine G.	108
1322	Wright, Beatrice E.	115	1384	1447	Smith, Alice A.	110
1323	Wright, William	115	1385	1448	Smith, Cecil F.	110
1324	S—Coburn, Albert	115a	1386	1449	Smith, Frederick L.	110
1325	Jackman, Alice	115a	1387	1450	Smith, Winnie	110
1326	Wheeler, Edith	115b	1388	1451	Murphy, Constance M.	112
1327	Wheeler, Ellen	115b	1389	1452	Murphy, Minnie M.	112
1328	Wheeler, Frank	115b	1390	1453	Murphy, Thomas F.	112
1329	Wheeler, George	115b	1391	1454	Wheeler, Doreen O. N.	114
1330	Kentish, Ernest D.	117	1392	1455	Wheeler, Nellie	114
1331	Kentish, Rosa M.	117	1393	1456	Till, Nora M.	116
1332	Hefford, Edith M.	119	1394	1457	Till, Thomas A.	116
1333	Hefford, Henry G.	119	1395	1458	Collins, Dorothy E.	118
1334	Wheeldon, Derrick	119	1396	1459	Collins, Frank	118
1335	Dempsey, Dorothy M.	125	1397	1460	Y—Collins, Violet E.	118
1336	Dempsey, Michael	125	1398	1461	Smith, James W.	120
1337	Newton, Albert D.	127	1399	1462	Smith, Lila E. E.	120
1338	Newton, Dorothy	127	1400	1463	Smith, Violet	120
1339	Over, Frederick A.	129	1401	1464	Cheeswright, Elizabeth V.	122
1340	Over, Winifred R.	129	1402	1465	Cheeswright, Walter J.	122
1341	Salter, George L.	131	1403	1466	Higgins, Derek A.	122
1342	Salter, Lillian A. M.	131	1404	1467	Higgins, Irene	122
1343	Jacoby, John H.	133	1405	1468	Newham, Emily	124
1344	Jacoby, Nancy D.	133	1406	1469	Newham, Eric	124
1345	S—Wadeson, Bernard E. C.	135	1407	1470	Newham, Ernest	124
		135	1408	1471	Glanfield, Florence D.	126
1346	Wadeson, Karola	135	1409	1472	Glanfield, Frederick	126
1347	Westram, Ernest C.	137	1410	1473	Glanfield, Jack	126
1348	Westram, Iris	137	1411	1474	Bareham, Cicely A.	128
1349	Souter, William F.	141	1412	1475	Bareham, May	128
1350	Souter, Winifred I.	141	1413	1476	S—Bareham, William E.	128
1351	Goodman, Lawrence T.	143	1414	1477	Pakes, Kathleen M.	128
1352	Goodman, Olive J.	143	1415	1478	Pakes, Leslie G.	128
1353	Conroy, Mary P.	145	1416	1479	Turner, Charlotte	130
1354	Conroy, Patrick K.	145	1417	1480	Turner, Francis	130
			1418	1481	Turner, Frank J.	130
			1419	1482	Turner, Patricia K.	130
			1420	1483	Turner, Reginald A.	130
			1421	1484	Briggs, Ada F.	132
1355	Lazenby, Bridget A.	1				
1356	Lazenby, Tom	1				

The residents of the 37 Ascot Park prefabs are shown on this 1952 Voters' List.

But the next photos come from the Over family, who lived just along the road.

Jeff's Mum and Dad were staying with his grandparents in Neasden when he was born. He wrote: *'I lived with my parents Arthur and Winifred at 129 North Circular Road from October 1948 to March 1968. Our prefab was the last to be vacated from both sites, ours on the North Circular and a bigger one nearby, the Ascot Park site where IKEA is now.'*





A small estate of 14 Uni-Seco prefabs, on George Cloke's former builder's yard in Neasden Lane, can be seen in this 1946 aerial photo and 1958 O.S. map.

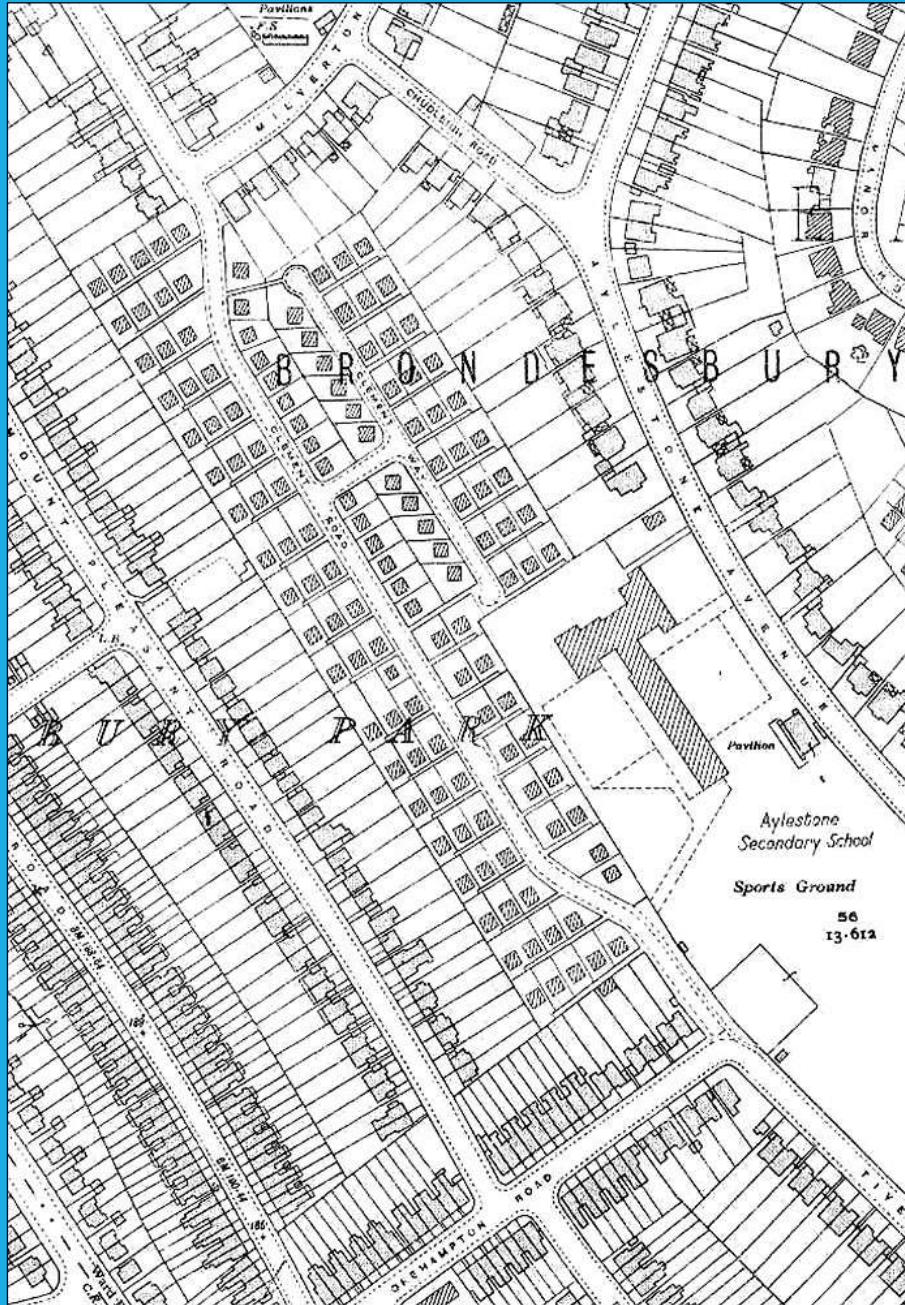
The prefabs here were called Crispian Close. Penny shared some photos from her time growing up there, from a baby, with Brent Archives in 2011, and with the Prefab Museum.





View north up Neasden Lane

These Neasden Lane prefabs were still there in a 1961 aerial photograph, and in the background in a 1964 picture.



I referred earlier to objections by Brondesbury residents against plans to build prefabs on their local Okehampton Road playing fields.

Willesden Council went ahead, and built its largest prefab estate there!
(seen here on a 1959 O.S. map)



The Clement Road and Clement Way prefabs were wooden factory-made bungalows, imported from the U.S.A. under a “lend lease” agreement. (Photos courtesy of Irene Ottaway)

Barbara's family moved into 1 Clement Way in 1946, when she was 7 years old. She wrote: *'Each prefab had a porch entry with a wooden trellis on the side. There was a small lobby inside where you could keep a pram or a bike. This led into your Front Room. There was a door on the right leading to the kitchen and back door, and on the left side it lead you through to the two bedrooms and bathroom/wc. The prefabs had flat roofs, and large gardens, both front and back.'*



Sadly, the wooden construction of these prefabs made them vulnerable to fire. These Clement Road pictures were from a roll of film taken by a schoolboy, Brian Aris, c.1964, which lead him to a career as a photographer.





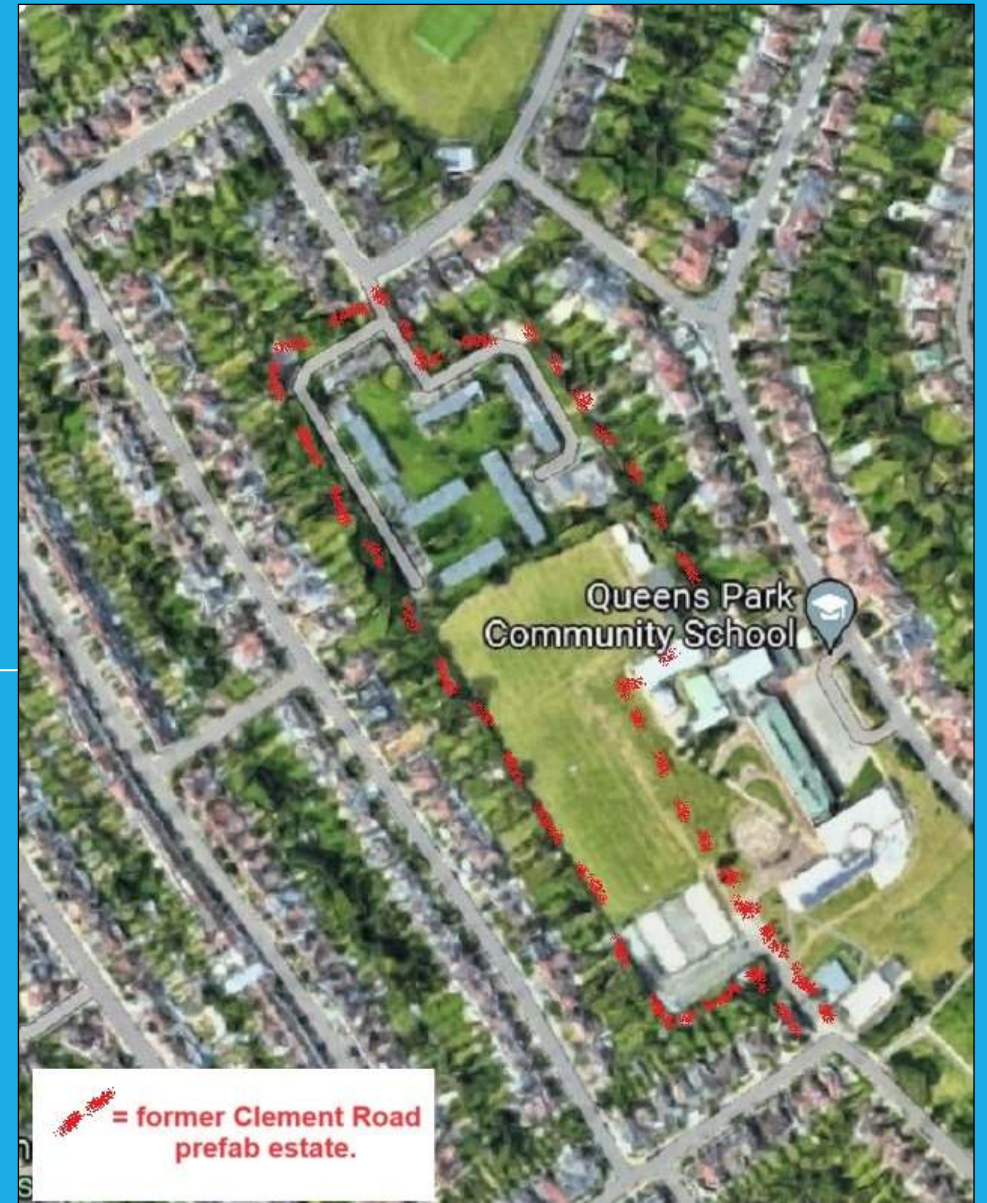
As some families were being permanently rehoused, others were being moved into these prefabs on a temporary basis.

Ed's family moved to 3 Clement Road in 1962, before being transferred to 40 Clement Road for a few months in early 1968, when their first prefab was being demolished.

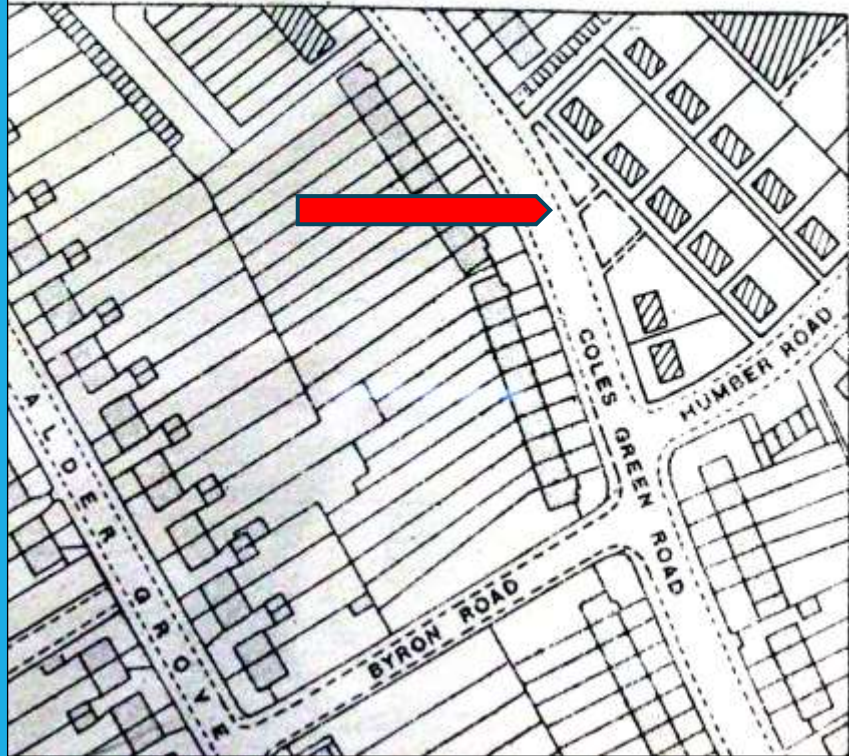


**Mrs Maisey, at 70 Clement Road, was one of the first residents on this prefab estate in 1946, and one of the last to leave in 1968.
(Photos courtesy of Irene Ottaway)**

The northern end of the estate had been redeveloped by Brent Council as Clement Close, while the cleared southern end was added to the grounds of the next door school.



MIDDLESEX SHEET XI. 14.



Other former prefab sites were also redeveloped for Council housing. A small site at Humber Road in Cricklewood became Aneurin Bevan Court.



The sites at Crispian Close and The Oaks have kept their names, but the new housing there is very different from the former prefabs.

But Furness Fields was returned to Public Open Space, alongside Roundwood Park, as Willesden Council had originally intended.



Willesden's 499 prefabs were part of the 156,623 temporary factory-made bungalows constructed across the country between 1945 and 1949, at a cost of over £200m.

They provided homes, and lots of memories, for the families who lived in them.

(Final Clement Road photo courtesy of Christine and Peter Bedell / Prefab Museum.)



Prefab Museum

Celebrating Britain's post-war prefabs and their residents



[CONTACT US](#)

[HOME](#) [ABOUT](#) [ARCHIVE](#) [HISTORY](#) [DESIGN](#) [MEMORIES](#) [MAP](#) [GET INVOLVED](#)



As well as the local material on prefabs collected by Brent Archives, you can discover much more about Britain's post-war prefab homes on the Prefab Museum website at: <https://www.prefabmuseum.uk/>

THE END

I hope you have enjoyed these pictures and the memories shared by people who lived in some of our local prefab homes.

If you have any photos or memories of local prefabs, please share them with Brent Archives, or with me.

Thank you.