

# INVESTIGATING YOUR BUILDING SYSTEM

Information is power. The more you know about your estate the stronger your campaign and organisation will be. This broadsheet is based on tenants campaigns in 2 famous flat systems — Bison and YDG. It's aimed at any tenants organisation involved in a campaign to tackle damp, defects or heating problems. To show you how to find out: how your estate was built, why some of those defects exist and how you can find out more from other areas. Using the ideas in this broadsheet has practically helped tenants groups for instance in demanding and gaining demolition, arguing for insulation and changed heating systems and in spotting false claims from Council officers. While the ideas are mainly for tenants in systems housing (see box for definition), most of the information can be applied to more traditional housing. In fact it is aimed at any group who can see the importance of gaining information to strengthen their campaign.

## WHAT'S THE POINT

Gathering information can be seen as a diversion from time spent on organising on the estate. It can be. Nothing can replace effective organising. However any campaign is going to benefit from having the answers to some very basic questions:

1. Who built the estate and when?
2. What was the standard of building like? Did they use the good quality materials? Was there good site supervision?
3. How is each flat or house constructed?
4. Where are the defects or dampness? In how many flats? Is there a pattern?
5. What repairs or remedial work has been done to deal with these defects? Was it successful? If not, why not?
6. What health problems have been caused by dampness, defects or lack of heating?
7. Does the heating work efficiently? Is it the right type of heating for the construction?
8. How much and what kind of insulation is in your homes?

Don't worry that you will be sucked into complex technical areas since almost every system fault has a very

simple explanation. What is needed is the challenge to professionals to explain everything in simple language.

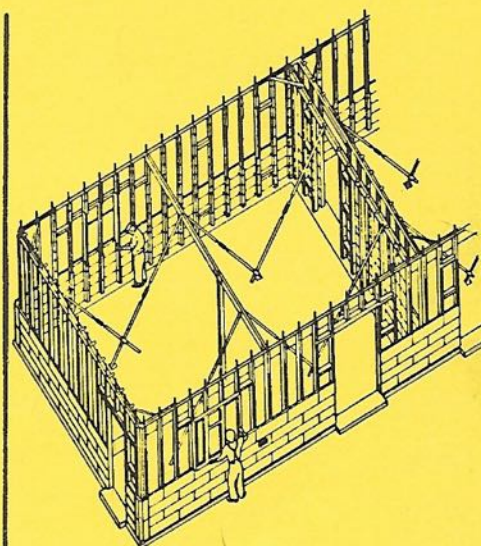
The list above is not a blueprint, just some ideas of the kind of questions you may find worth trying to answer. And by answering these you can begin to answer even more crucial questions, for instance:

- are the Council's official reports right? What do they miss out or distort?
- what repairs and modernisation should your group demand?
- who is really responsible for the state of the flats? The original builder? The designer? The Council?
- when you look for faults (inside and outside) how do you know what is significant and what isn't?
- if the Council propose repair or modernisation work will it really work?

You can start to answer these and many other questions by using these notes. And as you ask more crucial and critical questions you will find your campaign being taken even more seriously.

## EXPERTS TO HELP?

Why not use an expert instead. An



architect or a surveyor? You can but there are real dangers.

For example one YDG tenants group asked a local Polytechnic building lecturer for advice. He advised them to campaign for extract fans in the kitchen. A year later the TA's campaign won the demolition of 647 flats! Not all experts are like this but they must be used on your terms and used carefully. Later on we suggest how.

## CAN'T COUNCILLORS AND OFFICERS PROVIDE THE INFORMATION?

It's important to press councillors to provide as much information as possible and to get them to instruct officers to answer questions in a clear and concise manner. In many areas though this is impossible or difficult. You will also have the problem of looking carefully at the information they do provide. However there is certain research that only tenants associations can do e.g. contact unions, building workers, resource centres and other tenants associations and it is these contacts that often produce the most useful material. So do not forget to get councillors to write written requests, ask questions in Council or get items raised on relevant Committees but do not rely on this process alone.



## WHAT'S SYSTEMS HOUSING?

There are no easy definitions of exactly what is traditional, non-traditional, systems or industrialised housing.

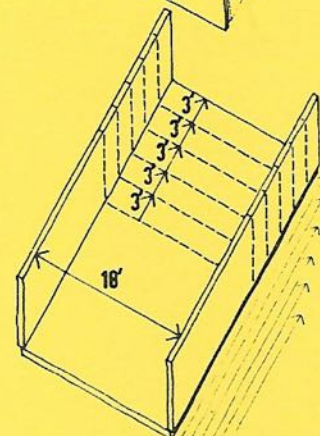
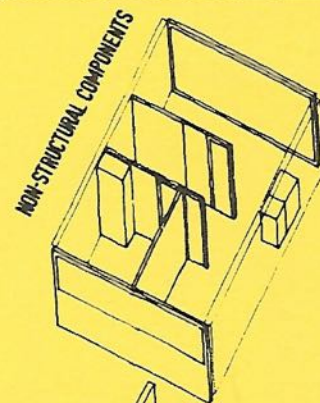
Roughly though traditional building usually means all the materials e.g. bricks, cement, tiles, plaster etc. are assembled together on site and then used in order by skilled craftsmen, although traditional building may use some prefabricated materials.

Industrialised housing usually involves a high use of mechanical plant, the use of prefabricated units and less skilled labour. The building process becomes more like a factory process than a craft process.

A system usually describes an industrialised system. It is a particular design and technique which is usually available only from one organisation.

Non-traditional is not a very helpful term. One description says non-traditional may use new or the same basic traditional materials in new ways, e.g. alternative systems of walling like No-Fines.

None of these terms matter too much, all that really matters is to see the huge difference between the traditional use of bricks, cement, wood and tiles and the use of factory made concrete panels, plastic and asphalt. In between these two extremes are many different variations.



STRUCTURAL COMPONENTS

## WHERE TO START?

There are so many possible sources of information that you need to decide within your organisation which to follow up and how much time to allocate. One tenants group set 2 meetings aside to sit down and list every piece of information they definitely knew, bits they half knew but needed checking and information they definitely wanted (or thought would be useful) to help their campaign. They then used the summer to collect as much information as possible in order to use it in the winter, which is the best time for campaigning.

Investigating a system does take time and some money. It's difficult to estimate but most of ideas could be covered by 3 people working for one or two weeks full time. So could you spare 2 or 3 members of your organisation for this time? Or could you get a student to help?

Once started you'll probably find that information you turn up will lead on to other information or issues that can be followed up. But is it worthwhile doing all of these? An obvious danger is that researching your system becomes a major task in itself and hinders strengthening your group or developing your campaign.

Initially you should not need a lot of money. A number of second class stamps and access to a phone. The phone bill can add up so can you access to a community project, federation or union phone?

## WHICH SYSTEM DO YOU LIVE IN?

You may already know but if you don't it shouldn't be too difficult to find out. Try the obvious first contact either the Housing Department or the Chief Executive. Also ask for the date of the decision to build (either by the Housing Committee or when the full Council decided) and the name of the builder.

It's now worth finding the original Council and Housing Committee minutes and reports if they are available. If you still don't know the name of your system at this stage you will need to look through a number of years but are likely to find the name of the system in the reports. Your main central library or local archives should keep this information. Some authorities just keep minutes available whilst others leave the reports open for inspection. The Report will usually include such details as numbers of flats, which types are to be built, the total construction fee, loan charges, the builder's name and so on. Make a photocopy to save going back later.

If you still don't know what system you have either you can try asking local 'experts' or in embarrassing your landlord in the press for instance secrecy over this classified information.

Having found the name of our system you can now use any section in this guide however you want, although we would advice that one of the next best places to go is to a library.

# FAULTS

These are just some of the faults found in systems building:

- Water penetration
- Condensation
- Slabs not vertical or horizontal
- Uneven joints
- Cold bridges
- Corroding re-inforcement
- Use of asbestos
- Noise
- Re-inforcement too near surface
- Whole blocks unstable
- Cracks of various depths and sizes
- Insects
- Inadequate heating system
- No baffles in joints
- Dry pack missing
- Rotten or corroding windows
- Unsafe balcony supports
- Lift failures
- Bowing panels
- Missing or inadequate insulation
- Blocked rubbish shutes
- Dangerous electrics
- Fire risks
- Bits of concrete falling off
- Corrosion or wall ties



# LIBRARIES, INDEXES...

Millions of pounds are spent on Polytechnic and University libraries yet they are rarely used except by students and lecturers. Whilst other libraries may be useful (see later) these libraries are the best place to start.

There are a number of ways of getting access:

- walk straight in and use it.
- walk in and approach the librarian in the right section, explain who you are and ask for their help.
- get a student to go in with you as well.
- write in to the Chief Librarian, explaining what you would like to use the library for (and how trustworthy you are!) and ask permission to use the library and/or borrow books.

How you get access depends on you, but it's worth knowing that some of these libraries do spot checks and go as far as banning people for life! Apart from this form of library policing you should generally find library staff ready to help and show you around.

If you have a choice of libraries, first try the one serving the departments which deal with courses such as building technology, surveying etc. Within Nottingham, for instance, the Polytechnic Library dealing with these subjects is better than the University one dealing with architecture.

## INDEXES AND ABSTRACTS?

Once in the library there are a number of sections you can look at. First try looking at the following indexes and abstracts. Abstracts and indexes are very helpful since they make it unnecessary to search through hundreds of individual periodicals to find specific articles. An abstract is a very condensed version of an article giving the main points as shortly as possible, you can then decide whether to look up the article or not. The kind of entry you will see is illustrated on this page.

Few indexes are perfect so it is worth checking 3 or more headings. For instance an article with the title: "YDG Mk 1: Shepherds industrialised building system planned for Hull" could have been entered under "YDG" or "Yorkshire Development Group" or "Hull" or "Shepherds" or "Industrial Building" or any combination of these. So before using an index have a

careful look at the various headings and also see if any sections have headings like this "Industrialised building - see also systems defects, concrete, GB housing, steel frames".

The best place to start with is the Architectural Periodicals Index published by the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA). It's published 4 times a year and then these 4 volumes are combined each year. It started in 1973 but before that there was a very similar publication called RIBA Annual Review of Periodical Articles published 1965-72. Hundreds of journals are indexed in this publication. A student with SCAT has gone through all the indexes and we have extracted about 200 articles from it, we can't guarantee it's a comprehensive list but if you phone us we may have a few references for you.

## OTHER INDEXES

Other indexes that you may find useful are:

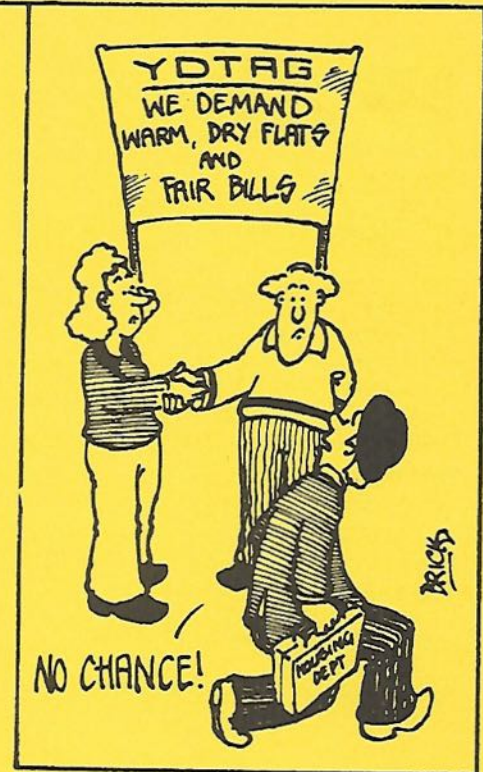
- Department of Environment/Library Bulletin. This was started in 1970 and is issued twice a month and contains abstracts. An annual index is published which is the best place to start.
- Building Science Abstracts. Published monthly with an annual index.
- Construction References. Abstracts, books, pamphlets and periodical articles and is published 6 monthly.
- Times Index. Indexes "The Times" and was started in 1906. Takes some time to go through each volume and you then have to look at the Times on microfilm.

These indexes should turn up almost every reference to journals, government reports, conferences,

periodicals, books and other sources that feature your system.

The most productive years to look at are the ones when the system was first being used, since the firm would then issue a number of glossy press releases on what is different about the system, how it is built and why it is so wonderful. The building press would often then reproduce this word for word or with some comment. Articles about faults in systems have generally appeared in the past 4 or 5 years.

Having found the references take them down in detail so you don't have to go back and look them up again. Most of the articles should be stored in the library, often on microfiche, but you may have to ask the library (or your local library see later) to get them for you. Alternatively you could write to the journal concerned and ask for a copy, library staff of trade journals can be helpful and it can be worth writing to the main ones e.g. Building Design, Construction News, Architects Journal, Building, RIBA Journal (for addresses see end) just asking them if they have any reference to your system.



69.057.1 : 728.22

MORRIS, A. E. J.

Life ends at forty.

*in Building*, v. 227, no. 6858, 15th November 1974.  
p. 131-133.

Outlines how 938 system-built flats came to be built at Quarry Hill in Leeds, with a 1930's French housing system, and looks at what subsequently went wrong including cladding failure, and early obsolescence of the individual flats.

KEY WORDS: Architecture; Claddings; Defective; External walls; Flats; Frames; Prefabricated construction; Steel; Structure  
CIB/UK



# BOOKS & PAMPHLETS

Turning to the books section, it is worth asking the librarian if they have a special section on prefabricated, systems or industrialised buildings. Have a look through it but the main books to look for are:

**Industrialised Building** by R. Diamant. Published by Ilife Books this comes in 3 volumes and features 170 international systems and a large number used in this country. If your system is covered it gives a detailed run down of each system with pictures and is excellent basic material. Don't miss it.

**The Comprehensive Industrialised Building Systems Annual** by Deeson is another excellent book. It covers some 300 systems and 230 components. It doesn't have the same detail as Diamant's book but provides some basic information and often some drawings.

**The Association of Metropolitan Authorities** has published **Defects in Housing Parts 1 and 2** covering all systems since the war. There is also a brief description of each system with some very useful diagrams. Also they list further references to follow up. These 3 are essential books to look at.

**The British Systems Yearbook** published by the **National Federation of Building Trades Employers (NFBTE)** was produced each year from 1971-8. Only half a page including a picture is produced for each system so it is not very helpful.

**Interbuild** published a monthly magazine on systems starting in 1959 and also some pamphlets covering a number of systems in some detail. For instance in 1963 a pamphlet called "Systems" covers 21 British systems and in 1969 they published the **Europrefab Systems Yearbook**. These pamphlets may have been revised or published in other years.

**Barrie Russell** has written **Building Systems, Industrialisation and Architecture**. A huge book it does look at the background of systems but largely concentrates on schools and architecture generally. However useful sections on Arcon, 5M, Bison and Ronan Point (Larsen Nielsen).

A brilliant pamphlet which very briefly describes 40 systems used in Scotland and also outlines where they were built and what faults have been found. SCAT has a copy of **Non-Traditional and Systems Housing Bulletin** by the **Scottish Local**

## Authorities Special Housing Group (SLASH).

Lastly look at **Systems Building: an International Survey of Methods** by T. Schmid and C. Testa. Not much information but worth checking through, for instance they include pictures of particular blocks in particular areas.

These are the main books that look at particular systems. However there are many other books dealing with systems in general where you might find references. We have not checked them all but you might wish to check the following:



**The Politics of Mass Housing in Britain 1945-75** by Patrick Dunleavy published by Clarendon Press 1981. It is the most comprehensive account of why we got systems building and looks at Bristol, Birmingham and Newham in detail. It shows how the construction companies 'sold' their systems and how tenants never got a look in. Major firms like Wates, Wimpeys, Laing and Concrete are often mentioned plus there are a lot of references you could follow up. Well worth looking at but takes sometime to read!



## THE BISON FACTPACK

An excellent action guide which looks at the history of Bison flats, all the faults found by tenants, what action can be taken over these faults, how remedial works don't work and the dangers of privatisation. Essential reading for any tenants organisation in systems built housing. Available from National Association of Bison Tenants, c/o 205A Mansfield Road, Nottingham. Price £1 plus 30p for p & p. to tenants groups, £2 to others.

## CRACKS IN CONCRETE

A tenants action guide on how to look at cracks on your estate. What they mean and what action you can take. Details from SCAT.

Other books include J.B. White's **A History of Prefabrication and Tomorrow's Houses** by J. Madge which covers some post-war systems. A.W. Cleeve Barr's **Public Authority Housing** gives details of a number of housing schemes throughout the country. There are so many books that its impossible to list them all, one of the best ways is to look down the bibliographies and indexes at the back of the main ones e.g. Dunleavy's and Russell's and see if there is anything else that particularly interests you.

Remember that if you are looking for any of these titles some will be stored in the book section, some in the pamphlet section and some in the oversize section.

Patrick Dunleavy

## The Politics of Mass Housing in Britain 1945-1975

A Study of Corporate Power, and Professional Influence in the Welfare State

## OTHER SECTIONS - OTHER LIBRARIES

So far we've looked at specialist libraries but there are other places and sections to look.

Firstly check the theses and dissertation sections in the building department/architecture section. Often students will have written large research projects and they may have concentrated on local systems. As an alternative to this contact local lecturers and ask them if any students have ever looked at your particular system.



Secondly don't forget your local library. Whilst local libraries will have few if any of these books they can get them for you. Either at your local or central library you can request ANY book and they will try and get it for you. You may have to pay a small fee and wait a few weeks but you should get it. You will need to give the name of the author, the title, and the publisher. Taking in this broadsheet should speed up the process, since they usually doublecheck this information at a central unit unless you have booklist or bibliography with you.

Few people also realise that many local libraries will also get a photocopy for you of any article from any magazine. Again they may charge extra for the copying. Also many local libraries will keep on microfiche a list of all magazines and periodicals and where they can be found in your area. So if you want to look at back issues of the trade press you can start here.

If you have anything to do with Further Education Colleges you can usually either use their libraries or get inter-library loans without a fee.

Lastly new technology may be of some help but may prove expensive and not as efficient as doing it yourself. Academic and many central libraries will do a computer search for you. This has been tried for 'Bison' it only produced 5 references when we already had over 40! However the quality of the search depends on the librarian who asks the computer questions and in a few years there should be more indexes on computer.

#### LOCAL HISTORY LIBRARY

Many main libraries have a section which concentrates on local history. They can often keep press cuttings on particular areas of estates and other information. Staff can also be very helpful not only in pointing you to relevant material but also in suggesting other contacts in your area who might be helpful.

#### WORTH IT?

Is it all worth it? It should be. The kind of information that has been turned up using the information above has included: names of key firms involved, descriptions and diagrams of the building process, design details, site plans, aims of the system, details of insulation, details of faults and Council reaction to them, news of Council suing the builders, mention of which areas have the system, costs of the system and so on. A lot of it is glossy promises but there should be more than enough to give you a much better understanding of your system.

# BUILDING WORKERS

No-one knows more about how the flats were actually built than the building workers who built them. Missing baffles, defective panels, botched joints, missing reinforcement, cover ups, botch ups .... you name it they know about it.

Trying to find workers involved is well worth the time. For instance a Nottingham TA found 3 original workers and they gave invaluable information. They were all found by members of the TA who asked around the estate, their friends and their relatives. The evidence they gave was not only very useful in understanding about the flats but when printed as part of a larger report helped panic the Council into launching top level meetings and investigations.

Before even starting to make contact you need to be clear about confidentiality. Most workers will be reluctant to make statements in public. The Economic League, for instance, maintains a blacklist of trades unionists and activists including those in the building trade who might in any way be seen as a threat to employers. So building workers are aware of the dangers of being blacklisted, sued or victimised by the powerful construction employers. So any approach must take into account:

- whether the worker is willing to give just background information or is willing to be quoted in print anonymously and in such a way that no story can be traced to them.

● that their name and address will be completely confidential and not passed on to anyone under any circumstances. The media will try hard to gain interviews if the evidence is controversial. However any request from the media must go through the TA contact to the building workers concerned to give total protection.

However some workers are retired or willing to appear publically and to appear on TV (full face or in silhouette).

Building workers can also explain the building process, assess the level of site supervision, know what fiddles went on on site and other background information.

Making contact can be difficult. Start with TA members asking personally as well as in pubs, newsletters, in fact, everywhere. Contact the local union offices and branch secretaries of UCATT, TGWU, EPTU, GMBATU who should provide useful contacts or information. Appealing on the radio, through phone ins or by getting special programmes on your estate has resulted in valuable contacts including the clerk of the works.

All these contacts are aimed at finding out what happened when the estate was built. Don't forget to also search for trade unionists who know what's happened since. Direct labour organisation stewards and workers on the estate, or from the local depot, are obvious contacts here.

#### WHO PUSHED SYSTEMS BUILDING?

All political parties in the 1964 elections claimed industrialised housing was the answer to slum clearance programmes and the desperate need for more housing. The large national building firms like Wates, Wimpey, Laing and Bovis all saw their chance to lessen the power and influence of skilled craftsmen like plasterers and bricklayers and replace them with unskilled labour working long shifts.

Claiming that industrialised building was cheaper, faster and better designed and better quality, central and local government officers together with central and local politicians pushed for huge new housing schemes without any critical looks. As one Birmingham councillor said having been wine and dined by Concrete Ltd: "We bought 5 blocks just like a bag of sweets."

The whole building system then and now needs turning upside down. Tenants should be in control of what is built and the quality not the producers.

For a fuller discussion on who's to blame and the lessons see High and Dry.



## 40 MPs call for inquiry

**By Paul Finch**

This first report deals with the 1940s and

Its work on the subject is intended to steer the Government towards the

able in the dec war, who at p receive grant ai renovation work.

one house showed a survey of chunks of corroded steel. The survey also showed

# IONM

# Shock defects report

**By Neal Morris**

The £10 billion salvage contrasts with the £2 billion current housing allocation, the last government.

This accounts for one third of the entire public housing programme. Mr. T's actions when he the Commons last £200 million sum marked to help in types of period we

gradually beginning to force the government to force up wages.

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tional, more and chloride contents i-

worked out cheaper. about 10 per afternoon.

CU

# Buy re

## Costly

# £2.4 million bill to fix Howard homes

...ward (Alrey-lype) houses on  
120 systems whi  
able in the dec  
war, who at p  
receive grant a  
renovation work.

AMA has been cam-

Although the council stres-  
es that none of the houses are  
in "immediate" danger of col-  
lapse, it admits that a survey of  
one house showed "size-  
able chunks of corroded steel."  
The survey also showed "new  
wip-

Deegan added that the pe-  
ple who had bought the  
houses "would not be com-  
pensation for the damage they  
have done."

High-rise bl  
costly repair

Minister John Stanley has admitted  
that the system built housing  
has "serious problems."

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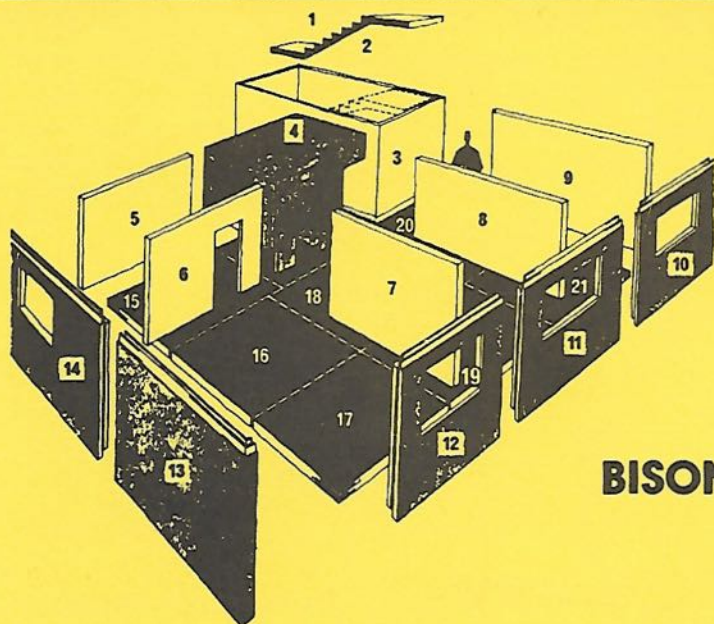
about 10 per cent attention.

# QUESTIONS

**Can you recognise a system just by looking?** A few people can recognise some systems. However the same systems often have different panel finishes or some design changes so you can't expect to spot them straight away.

**If we discover major faults, shouldn't we keep quiet or tenants might panic?**

This problem faces many groups. As an example one tenants association discovered asbestos in their flats, they thought they would be responsible, find out more and inform the council but not make it public. The council did nothing. So 3 months later they went to the press, the Council was panicked into action whilst only few tenants expressed worries. What's crucial is not to publish misleading information.



## BISON

## Cladding calamities

THE problems of defective cladding in the latest example of flats in the last tends to be seen as an issue. The poor who frequently more appendage the investment in

# Repair bill to run into

REPAIR costs "running into millions" will have to be carried out on a London council housing estate completed less than 10 years ago.

1,000-dwelling Marquess estate. Islington is now empty and damp.

Contracts are now being let for a damp-proof course, and the problem getting an

According to an Islington spokesman, "poor design and incorrect use of materials" is the root of the problem, although there are a number of other "contributory factors."

Marquess Estate was built between 1969 and 1974 to a design by Richmond-based architect Darbourne and Darke. It was built in two phases by MJ Gleeson and Sir Lyndsay Parkinson at a total cost of around £6 million.

According to an Islington spokesman, "poor design and incorrect use of materials" are at the root of the problem, although there are a number of "contributory factors".



patch-up before demolition

# ME RUNS Action on defective homes adds to fire dilemma

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system-  
l homes

funds being distributed to a  
thorities who would need the  
for the repairs. It said Gove  
ment action was belated  
inadequate  
AMA



'TELL ME HE'S KIDDING.'

## ANSWERED

**How can we find good experts?**

Experts who will do a good job for you (rather than for themselves) are hard to find. Ask other groups, contact SCAT and write to the Association of Community Technical Aid Centres for possible contacts near you. ACTAC, c/o Planning Aid Unit, TCPA, 17 Carlton House, Terrace, London SW1Y 5AS.

**Would we have to pay?**

Not necessarily, you can use the green form legal advice scheme to pay experts to work with you.

**Did any paper used to print all the contracts that a particular firm or system had?** Yes apart from items in the trade press, the Financial Times used to print details of almost every contract.

Lastly don't forget to talk to caretakers and cleaners on the estate. They may have access to repairs sheets.



## Concrete faults leave homes facing demolition

Thousand homes face demolition after  
with concrete which has led to  
estate  
millions' 150,000 HOUSES  
IN NEW CRISIS

started. These homes are built to the same design as Saffron Lane. The council is embarrassed because a number of homes have been sold under the government's right to buy scheme, and it now faces claims that the houses were over-valued or in poor condition.

"So we have started a programme of decanting houses, mainly in the estate," W. Smith said.

A spokesman for Henry Boot said: "The company built five or six thousand of these homes, but our records are not very complete. We have not been approached by officials to find out where they all are. In fact we

## Floodgates set to open over system building

DETAILED reports published last week on seven types of housing built before 1960 look set to open floodgates to private owners claiming compensation.

Many of the system-built homes were erected between and after the wars to combat the acute housing starvation of the time, but several systems continued into the 1950s and 1960s. The reports by the Building Research Establishment were released less than a month after Ian Gow, the Construction and Housing Minister, announced plans to introduce legislation that would widen the coverage of the scheme to system-built houses.

more problems". And he added: "The preliminary results of our study of 1940s and 1970s systems and industrialised housing are every bit as horrific as our first report."

Last week's publications contain detailed technical appraisals of seven types of housing: Boocornish Unit, Orbit, Unity, Wates and Woolway; all of which are prefabricated reinforced concrete blocks. With the exception of the Smith houses, the six other systems account for nearly 87,000 units throughout the country. By far the greatest number of houses studied conform to the Cornish Unit model.

cent of the samples. According to BRE, there was also "very poor quality HAC (high alumina cement) concrete" in some of the concrete stitches used throughout the building. There are some 7,500 Boocornish buildings in its report on the condition of these houses. The BRE pointed out that the concrete components, those containing dense aggregate probably being in better shape than those containing "breccia" aggregate which are likely to be cracked to some extent. The report, in its findings...



# THE COMPANY

Investigating the building company and perhaps the subcontractors can turn up useful information. For instance company reports can list where they built other flats, and can reveal how much they are paying to put mistakes right. Other research can reveal which organisations or other companies your building company is involved in. Sometimes councillors argue its not worth suing a building company, it would only go bankrupt, however you may be able to show large reserves or assets or other companies owned by this company which are producing profits.

The first place to start is with basic business books. The **UK Compass Register of British Industry and Commerce** lists some 30,000 firms and contains basic information such as the number of employees, subsidiary companies and directors. The **Times 1000** gives very basic information on the top 1,000 UK companies. More detailed information can be seen on **Moodies Cards** e.g. new acquisitions, new directors, quotes from annual reports and also on the **Extel Companies Service** which cover companies quoted (i.e. quoted on the Stock Exchange) and unquoted companies.

You can try writing off to the registered office of the company asking for an annual report. Public companies usually produce glossy ones.

The best place to look is at Companies House. All limited companies are meant to file their annual accounts and for £1 you receive a copy of all of them which you then have to read on a microfiche reader which is available

in most large libraries. The accounts may be a bit of a mystery but you should be able to get a general idea of the state of the company. If you want to understand the accounts more closely get a copy of **Chris Hird's Challenging the Figures**.

You will also be able to see a full list of directors and see if they are directors of other companies. It's difficult to say exactly what you will get out in your case, in YDG's case a number of points came out including the fact that Shepherds had spent £600,000 on remedial works much of which they had offset against tax. In looking at Bison more Bison blocks were identified as well as the sudden changes of directors in 1977 showed something very odd was going on. In fact this turned out to be when they were getting ready to sell the company to an Arabian sheik whilst keeping quiet about lawsuits for faulty Bison blocks.

Companies House is at 55, City Road, London EC1 and the nearest tube is Old Street. Unless you live in London it's expensive to get one or two microfiches, so perhaps you can get someone to go for you. Of if you can supply SCAT with the fee, the full name and preferably the address of the company we can do it for you but allow a few weeks to co-incide with regular visits to Companies House.

When you've discovered who the directors are you might want to follow them up further. If so use the Investigator's Handbook by Community Action (updated in issues 33, 34, 35 and 36 of Community Action). This handbook also suggests other business sources to look at.

## OTHER PROFESSIONALS

If you want to trace, or find out more about the architects, surveyors involved in your estate turn to the professional yearbooks. For instance the **RIBA Directory of Practices** lists firms with qualified architects involved whilst there is also a **RIBA Directory of Members**. The **RICS Yearbook** lists members of the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors and there are many other yearbooks e.g. Institute of Structural Engineers, Institute of Civil Engineers as well as other relevant reference books such as the **Consulting Engineer's Who's Who**.

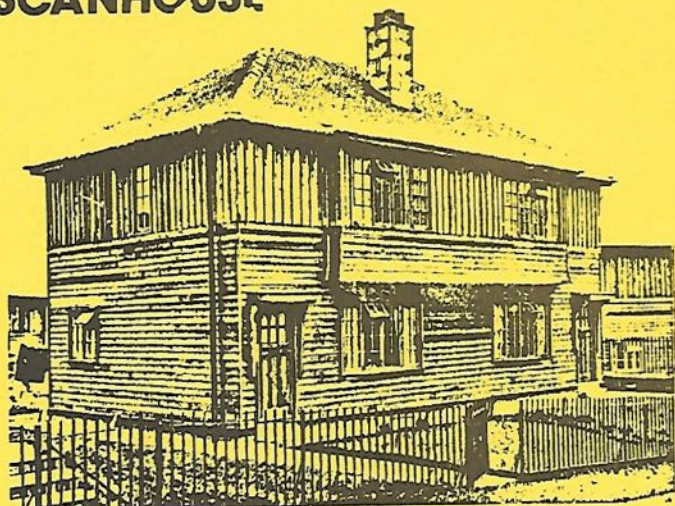
Once you've traced these professionals it's worth thinking how they can be of use to you. Is it worth phoning them and appearing naive? Or putting them straight on the spot? or arranging a meeting? What they can tell you can be of use, if they refuse then you can obviously use this in your publicity and give the press their names to contact and put difficult questions to them. Remember to keep a record of any conversation or meeting so that you can use quotes from it.

## SURVEYS BY YOU AND BY EXPERTS

A very obvious way of gaining information on your estate is to do a survey. We won't go through how this can be done here (see High and Dry). But remember a survey can not only reveal patterns of defects and valuable information but also be used to increase your membership and the strength of your organisation.

Using other experts can be a difficult process (see box). However you can find architects, and various engineers very helpful. If money is a problem you may be able to use legal aid to get in the expert you want, see a law centre or friendly solicitor about this.

## SCANHOUSE



## AIREY





## HIGH AND DRY

**A unique action guide based on the successful campaigns of 4 tenants associations in one particular building system. Available from SCAT £1 incl. post.**

Still in libraries, though probably different ones, there are Council minutes to check. Earlier we talked about the original minutes and reports when the estate was built but minutes after this should also be checked through, you can often find them talking of dampness problems 10 years ago and proposing remedial work. As a guide it took 4 of us just under 2 hours to check 13 years of Hull Housing Minutes and photocopy the relevant bits.

In other cities it could take longer and whilst the Housing Committee is the obvious place you may find other Council Committees may contain information. Don't forget to check through questions and answers in full Council meetings, councillors often ask questions on these issues with bland replies.

### THE LOCAL PRESS

Local papers, and radio stations, keep press cuttings. Sympathetic journalists may be willing to copy the whole file, or bits or just tell you the key dates and events. If they've been around sometime they will probably remember a lot about personalities, decisions, cover ups concerning controversial housing developments. They may also have confidential Council reports in their possession.

Journalists, particularly any working on a free lance basis, may be particularly interested if your system has problems in other cities and if there is a chance of selling stories to the national media. They may therefore be helpful in getting contacts in other cities or information or in asking questions that you want asked to officials, companies or politicians. If you do not know sympathetic journalists ask other organisation or contact the local NUJ branch chairperson or secretary.

### RESOURCE CENTRES AND TRADE UNION RESEARCH UNITS

A number of cities and boroughs have such centres who may well have files or cuttings or contacts related to your estate. Try these centres early on, for general advice.

### COUNCIL OFFICERS AND COUNCILLORS

Some councillors and officers are willing to pass on plans and reports with no objections, some to do it secretly, others to refuse to do it at all. Detailed technical drawings may not

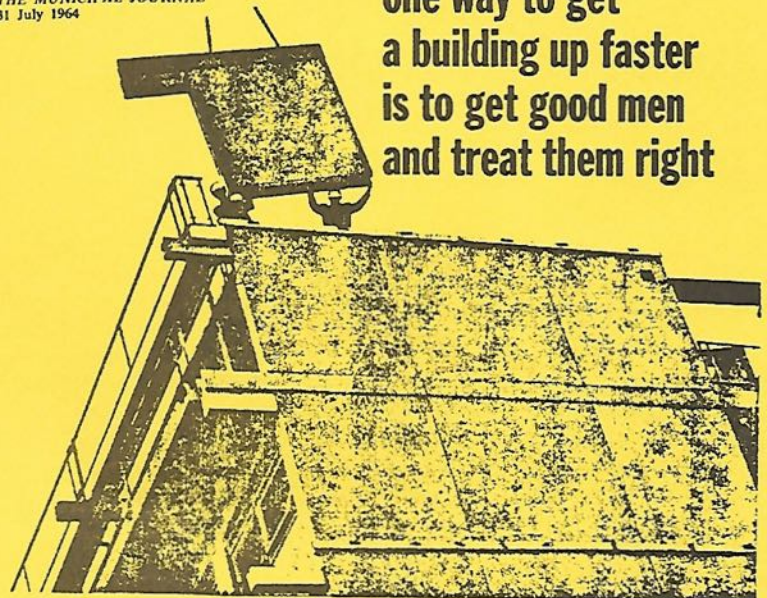
seem very important to you but if you have a structural engineer or surveyor who's willing to work with you they would certainly like to see these drawings. So it's worth thinking how you can get the plans but you may need to know which bits to ask for because any complex will have hundreds of detailed drawings. It can often be that housing has not been built to its original specification.

There are no general rights to see all plans but the 1971 Town and Country Planning Act (section 34(1)) does require every Council to allow the public to see all applications for planning permission which would include some details on any estate.

Talking to councillors, or getting councillors to get information out of the Council can be very helpful. When the housing was built site minutes should have been kept, as well as records from the clerk of the works and the Building Inspectors. Councillors can also get the original legal documents e.g. guarantees and bills of quantities. Get a councillor to ask for these. Using the local history library you should be able to find a list of councillors who originally approved the scheme. A number may have left local politics but still live in the area. Using the phone book you may be able to find some who may be helpful.



THE MUNICIPAL JOURNAL  
31 July 1964



**one way to get  
a building up faster  
is to get good men  
and treat them right**

TODAY, a small team of men build more in a week than twice their number, five years ago. How is this possible? It's the Wates System in action.

Building used to be largely an unskilled trade. Bedevilled by insecurity. But under the Wates System, site operatives are full staff members. They enjoy seven special security benefits. Guaranteed time—full payment during sickness or injury—extra holiday pay—free life insurance. They can join the company's pension scheme. Apply for company shares. Are entitled to one month's notice.

#### Better amenities all round

There's a canteen on-site which puts on a good three-course meal. Each man has his own heated locker for drying clothes. And specially designed protective clothing. There are washrooms with hot water, towels and soap.

#### Get good men and treat them right

They're on the job and working hard. Driving the crane. Pouring concrete. Stacking units. Facing walls. No wonder the building goes up faster. Each man is an expert, highly skilled and, of course, highly paid. So, after all, it's not surprising that this one small team, with the help of the Wates System, builds more in a week than twice their number could have built five years ago.

#### LCC saves £37,500 on additional contract

For example, Wates won an extension to a previous contract at Brindley Road, Paddington, where a 21-storey block is soaring skywards at the rate of a floor a week. We're building two blocks here for the LCC at a saving of £37,500. And we're building faster than ever before. A lot of Britain's present success in rapid rehousing is due to the Wates System.

### RESEARCHING PAST DEFECTS

Much of this broadsheet has concentrated on what happened when the estate was built. Just as important is the history of repairs and attempts to solve problems. Apart from Committee minutes and building workers there are ways. Firstly, getting information from other areas through press cuttings and also by writing to Councils you know have the system and secondly going into the Council using your rights to inspect the Council accounts.

Once a year you have the right to see "all books, deeds, contracts, bills,

vouchers, and receipts relating thereto," (see sections 154-167 Local Government Act 1972). Arguing that repairs tickets form part of the accounts a TA gained access to all repairs tickets for a year. This provided valuable information (even allowing for the fact that many people don't bother to report damp since they don't expect to get anything done), of how bad water penetration was, which flats were affected, how many faulty electrics needed repairing and so on. It was a very easy way to get a lot of information, much easier than doing your own survey, and moreover it was information a Council could not disagree with.



# MAKING LINKS

## MAKING LINKS WITH OTHER AREAS

A number of systems have formed alliances or links which have brought huge benefits. The Yorkshire Development Tenants Action Group formed in 1981 linking YDG estates in Hull, Sheffield, Leeds and Nottingham. Now two of these cities have decided to demolish and the other two are committed to demolition or huge remedial works; tenants have also won heating allowances and rate reductions.

Similarly the National Association of Bison Tenants has linked many areas together and shared information, experience and tactics plus undertaking joint action. However links don't have to be as formal as this they can be by letter or by phone or joint visits can be arranged as did the tenants from Boot houses in Leicester and Bradford.

Finding other TAs or estates can be difficult. The following ways should work in most cases:

- follow the advice in the broadsheet showing where other estate names may be turned up e.g. in articles, books and company accounts and reports.

- contact SCAT in Nottingham, we now have list which only covers just over 20% of local authorities and their complete list of systems. We also have a list of where 30 particular high rise systems are. Lastly we have other references mentioned in this broadsheet besides contacts in many areas.

- ask for contacts through Community Action magazine

- use local contacts e.g. active trades unionists, Labour Party members,

journalists, tenants federation members if they have contacts in the cities you are interested in

- write to the Defects Section at the Department of the Environment, they supplied an incomplete list of Bison estates. Or get your MP to request a full list from the Department of the Environment.

- use national organisations to see if they can identify helpful organisations in the places you are interested in e.g. Law Centres Federation, SHELTER, NCVC, federation of advice centres.

- try City information bureaux, alternative bookshops (the Radical Bookshop Guide gives bookshop addresses and phone numbers), community projects, in fact even phoning the local housing department can help identify where an estate is and if it has problems!

Once you have identified the areas and also the exact location of the estates, you face the problems of there being no organised group. Either you can contact local organisations and try and persuade them to start one e.g. Federations of TAs, local Labour Party branch, Law Centre etc or you need to try yourself.

YDTAG faced the problem of having only 3 out of 4 cities involved. Having located the estate, groups of tenants set off in 2 cars to leaflet 2 estates and knock on doors. A list of people interested was drawn up and a meeting organised for 6 weeks time at which only one person turned up! However learning from this a second visit was made, this time with 600 leaflets with contact addresses and phone number. Only 3 people replied but from these contacts an active TA was created.

## PRINT YOUR RESULTS!

If you do spend sometime looking at your system it's going to help other estates if you can duplicate or list what you find it's going to be very useful for other groups to have a copy and save time. Please let SCAT have a copy.

## ADDRESSES

SCAT, 83 Beauvale Road, Meadows, Nottingham. 0602-412563. 31, Clerkenwell Close, London EC1 01-253-3627. Please contact Nottingham for enquiries about systems:

Law Centres Federation, 164 North Gower Street, London N1.

Federation of Independent Advice Centres  
c/o Sheffield Advice Centre, 124 Devonshire Street, Sheffield S3.

SHELTER, 157 Waterloo Road, London SE1. 01-633-9377.

National Housing Liaison Committee, 35 Deri Road, Penylan, Cardiff.

National Tenants Organisation, 37a Torquay Road, Newton Abbott, South Devon. 0626-64664.

London Tenants Organisation, 17 Victoria Park Square, London E2. 01-981-1221

Scottish Tenants Organisation, 56 Millar Street, Glasgow G1. 041-221-0033

Building Trades Journal, 10 Elm Street, London WC1.

Construction News, 10 Elm Street, London WC1.

Building, 1 Pemberton Row, London EC4.

Building Design, Morgan Grampian House, Calderwood Street, London SE18.

Architects Journal, 9 Queen Anne Gate, London SW1.

## OTHER SOURCES

A number of firms did Public Relations films, many are now being withdrawn. SCAT has details.

The Department of Environment have published a list of 1940s and 1950s prefabricated systems and which local authorities have them.

Housing and Construction Statistics used to publish a list of systems during the 1960s showing how many of each system were built each year.

## USING EXPERTS

Whether they're heating or structural engineers, architects or community workers, treat experts carefully. Try and go on recommendations from other groups. Decide in your organisation on what relationship you want at the start and agree:

- what you want them to do
- that they won't talk to anyone, bring anyone else in or make public statements without your approval
- whether or not any payment is going to be made and if so what for.



# A LIST OF SYSTEMS

SOURCES: Housing and Construction Statistics. AMA Defects in Housing. Comprehensive Industrialised Systems Handbook, Deeson. British Systems Yearbook.

Whilst we have taken as much care as possible this will not be a final and definite list, for instance, some names will have been omitted. However we hope it is the most complete list that has been produced to date.

ABERDEEN CORPN  
AIREY  
AIREY DUO SLAB (see Duo Slab)  
ALCRETE  
ALFRAME  
ALUMINIUM BUNGALOWS B1/B2/BL8  
AMBROSE TF  
ANCHOR 12M  
ANGLIA (TAYLOR-WOODROW-  
ANGLIA)  
ANVIL SIX  
ARBOR SYSTEMS HOMES  
ARCAI (G80) DEVELOPMENTS  
ARCON  
ARROW  
ARROWHEAD HOUSING (EX RIGID  
FRAME)  
ARROWTRIM  
ATHOLL  
  
BALENCY (HOLLAND & HANNEN AND  
CUBBITTS)  
BALFOUR BEATTY  
BANTON  
BATES T AND SON RATRAD & 4LBOX  
BATTERY CAST PANELS  
BCCF  
BDA  
BEANLAND NO 2  
BEAUCRETE  
BELFRY (BARRY HIGH LTD)  
BELLSTONE  
BIRMINGHAM CORPN  
BISF  
BISON WALLFRAME (CONCRETE  
LTD)  
B-J  
BLACKBURN  
BLACKNELL 400  
BLYTH  
BOOT  
BOSWELL TYPE 1  
BOSWELL TYPE 2  
BRAITHWAITE  
BRECAST  
BRITISH HOUSING (JOHN LYNN & CO)  
BROADMEAD  
BRYANT LOW RISE  
BUCKSBURN TF  
BUILDING SYSTEMS  
BULLOCK SYSTEM HOUSING  
BUTTERLEY  
  
CALDER HOMES  
CAMUS  
CANADIAN TIMBER FRAME  
CANISTER  
CARLTON

CARMYLE  
CASPON (see Spooner)  
CAST RENDERED  
CAWL  
CEBUS (CENTREPRISE BUILDING  
SYSTEMS)  
CELTIC HOMES  
CENSPAN  
CLOTHED CONCRETE (see Dyke)  
CLUGSTON  
CM (CALVERLEY INDUSTRIALISED  
BUILDINGS)  
COIGNET  
COLES DUDLEY (see Dudley Coles)  
COLT  
COMMODORE  
CONCRETE BLOCK  
CONCRETE (see Bison)  
CONDER KINGWORTHY  
CONNELL  
CORNISH TYPE 1  
CORNISH TYPE 2  
CORNISH UNIT (SELLECK NICHOLLS  
WILLIAMS)  
CORNIS  
CORONATION  
COSELEY KINGSTRAD/PARAMOUNT  
COSMOS  
COVENTRY CORPN  
COWIESON  
CRAFTCAST  
CRANE  
CROUCH TRADITIONAL  
CROSSWALL  
CRUDENS (see Skarne)  
CRUX  
CUSSINS  
  
DEAN  
DENNIS  
DENIS POULTON  
DENNIS WILD  
DEVON LADY HOUSING  
DG (EAST ANGLIAN DEVELOPMENT  
GROUP)  
DISCUS  
DORRAN  
DORLONCO  
DORMAN  
DRURY SYSTEM 3  
DUNEDIN  
DUO SLAB  
DUPLEX  
DYKE  
  
EASIFORM TYPE 1  
EASIFORM TYPE 2  
EASIFORM (LAING)  
EDRON  
EKLECTON  
ENGINEERED HOMES  
  
FACTRAD  
FACULTY  
FALKINER NUTTALL  
FIDLER  
FOAMSLAG  
FPA FINNEGAN  
FRAM BRS  
FRAM COMPONENTS  
FRAMEFORM

FREDERICKS CEDARWOOD  
FREDERICKS FRAME SYSTEM

GART  
GATESHEAD  
GEE, WALKER AND SLATER  
GERRARD INCON/INTRAD  
GILLS  
GLASGOW FOAM SLAG  
GLE-SYSTEM (M.L. GLEESON)  
GOLDCREST HOMES  
GRAYHOLME  
GREGORY HOUSING  
GRID  
GUILDWAY

HALLAM VIC MARKS  
1/2/3M/HALLAMSHIRE/VOLUMETRIC  
HALLIWELL F & J  
HALLS PROGRAM  
HARVEY FRAME  
HAMISH CROSS  
HAWTHORNE LESLIE (BUILDINGS)  
LTD  
HAWKSLEY ALUMINIUM BUNGALOW  
HEATH  
HERALDS  
H FRAME  
HITCHIN  
HOMEVILLE INDUSTRIALISED  
HOWARD  
HOUSING DEVELOPMENT AND  
CONSTRUCTION LTD  
HSSB (S.L.P. INDUSTRIALISED  
BUILDING)  
HULTSFREDS PREFAB HOMES  
HUMPHREYS KNIGHTSBRIDGE  
HOMES

IBIS  
INTRAD/H  
ISEC  
ISLAY

JACKBLOCK  
JANSELL  
JEMM FLATTED  
JOHNSTONE  
JONES AND HARVEY  
JURA

K D HOMES  
KENKAST  
KEYHOUSE UNIBUILT  
KEYLAND  
KIER B.D.C.  
KINGCORTH  
KINGSTON  
KINGSTRAND

LAILAW THORNTON  
LAING  
LAMELLE  
LANARKSHIRE  
LARSEN NEILSON (see  
ANGLIA/TAYLOR WOODROW)  
LAWRENCE  
LC SYSTEM  
LECAPLAN (W & C. FRENCH)  
LESSER



LIFT SLAB  
LILLESALL  
LINDSAY  
LINTON  
LLEWELLYN TF  
LONDON CNTY COUNCIL  
LOVELL TF  
LOWTON CUBBITT

MACTRAD (J. MCLEAN & SONS see  
below)

MALTHOUSE  
MAYCRETE  
MAYLIN  
MAXIM  
MCALPINE  
MACGIRLING  
MACGREGOR  
MARLEY HOMES  
MATTHEWS AND MUMBY (M2)  
MECLEAN (WOLVERHAMPTON)  
MCLEAN RATIONALISED  
TRADITIONAL  
METIATION  
MEDWAY  
METRACON  
METRATIM  
M.F.C. (MOSS & SONS)  
MIDDLETON RATIONALISED  
TRADITIONAL  
MIDLAND HOUSING CONSORTIUM  
(MHC)  
MILLER SYSTEM  
MINOX  
M & J (MORRIS & JACOMBS)  
MODULAR 6  
MODUS  
MORRELL  
MOWLEM  
MUCKLOW  
MULTIBUILD  
MULTIFLEX H-12 (SWIFTPLAN)  
MULTILITE (SELLECK NICHOLLS  
WILLIAMS)  
MULTI-STOREY CONSTRUCTION  
MULTEX  
MUNDIC BLOCK  
MYTON NEWLAND  
M.W.M. (STANLEY MILLER)

NCB HOUSE  
NEWCASTLE CORPN  
NEW GEORGIAN  
NEWLAND  
NEWTON IRON  
NISSSEN PETREN  
NO FINES  
NORLOG  
NORWEST  
NORTHHOLT  
NUTTAL (see Falkiner Nuttall)

OPEN SYSTEM BUILDING  
ORLIT  
O'SULLIVAN  
OVERSEER

P.A.C.  
PARKINSON

PERMABUILT  
PARKWALL (SIR LINSAY PARKINSON  
& CO)  
PEAK HOMES (HENRY BOOT & SONS)  
PERREN  
PLASTEEL  
PRESWELD  
PROMETO (WILLIAM THORNTON &  
SONS)  
PUBLIC BUILDING FRAME  
PURPOSE BUILT

QUICKBUILD

RAB  
RATRA  
REEMA  
REEMA CONCLAD/CONTRAD  
REEVES FRAME  
RESIFORM  
RIDGEWAY  
RIGID FRAME  
RILEY  
RILEYFORM  
ROFTON  
ROTINOFF  
ROWCON (ROWLINSON  
CONSTRUCTION)  
RT  
RUSH AND TOMPKINS  
RATIONALISED TRADITIONAL  
RUBERY OWEN  
RYDAN

SB2 (WALE-SINDALL)  
SCHINDLER GOHNER  
SCOTCON  
SCOTTISH SPECIAL HOUSING  
ASSOC  
SCOTTWOOD  
SEAC 2A BRICK  
SECTRA (LAING)  
SELLECK NICHOLLS RATIONALISED  
TRADITIONAL  
SF 1  
SHADOW WALL (F & H. SUTCLIFFE)  
SHEPHERDS RATIONALISED  
TRADITIONAL  
SHEPHERDS TF  
SHERWOOD  
SIMMS  
SIMMCAST  
SIMMS C-DA  
SIMPLIFIED BRICK  
SIPOREX  
SISICON  
SKARNE (CRUDENS)  
SMITH  
SMITHFIELD TF  
SMO  
SOLID CEDAR  
SPACEMAKER (SHEPHERD)  
SPOONER CASPON/URBAN  
STENT  
STEM  
STEANE  
STEWART AND LLOYD  
STONECRETE  
STORIFORM (LAING)  
STOUR P  
STUART

STUBBINGS INDUSTRIALISED LOW  
RISE  
STUBBINGS RATIONALISED  
TRADITIONAL  
SUNDH  
SUNLEY ALLBETONG  
SUREBUILT (PEARCE & BARKER)  
SWEDISH TIMBER  
SWIFTPLAN

TARRAN  
TEEBEAM  
TELFOR  
TEMP BRICK  
TERRAPIN  
TERSONS  
THOMSON  
THORNCLIFFE  
TIMBERCRAFT  
TIMBER HSES (LANARK CITY  
COUNCIL)  
TOWNSON  
TRACOBIA (GILBERT ASH)  
TRADA  
TRIM MK 2 HOUSING  
TRUSCON  
TRUSTEEL  
TRYGON  
TYBUILT

UCO  
ULSTER  
UNDERDOWN  
UNICORN  
UNIT SYSTEM 66/67/MID RISE (UNIT  
CONSTRUCTION)  
UNITY  
UNIVERSAL (different types)  
UNITROY  
UNISECO

WALFOR  
WALLER  
WATES (including highrise and tf)  
WEIR QUALITY/MULTICOM/TIMBER  
WESTHOLM  
WESTS 5M  
WH HOUSES  
WHITSON FAIRHURST  
WILLET INDUSTRICON  
WILSON BLOCK  
WIMPEY  
WIMPEY NO-FINES  
WIMPEY 6M  
WINGET  
WL RING  
WOOLAWAY

XW (SELLECK NICHOLLS WILLIAMS)

YORKSHIRE DEVELOPMENT GROUP  
HOUSING MARK 1  
YORKSHIRE TF  
YOUNG ELIZABETHAN  
YOUNGMAN SYSTEMS  
C.M. YUILL

4 H/7 (H.A. HOLMES)  
5M (MHLG)  
12M JESPERSEN (LAING)  
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