

Farmhouse to Village

Respect for tradition is an excellent thing, provided that the tradition respected is a genuine living tradition. A true tradition is subject to growth and development.

Thomas Sharp, 1926⁹²

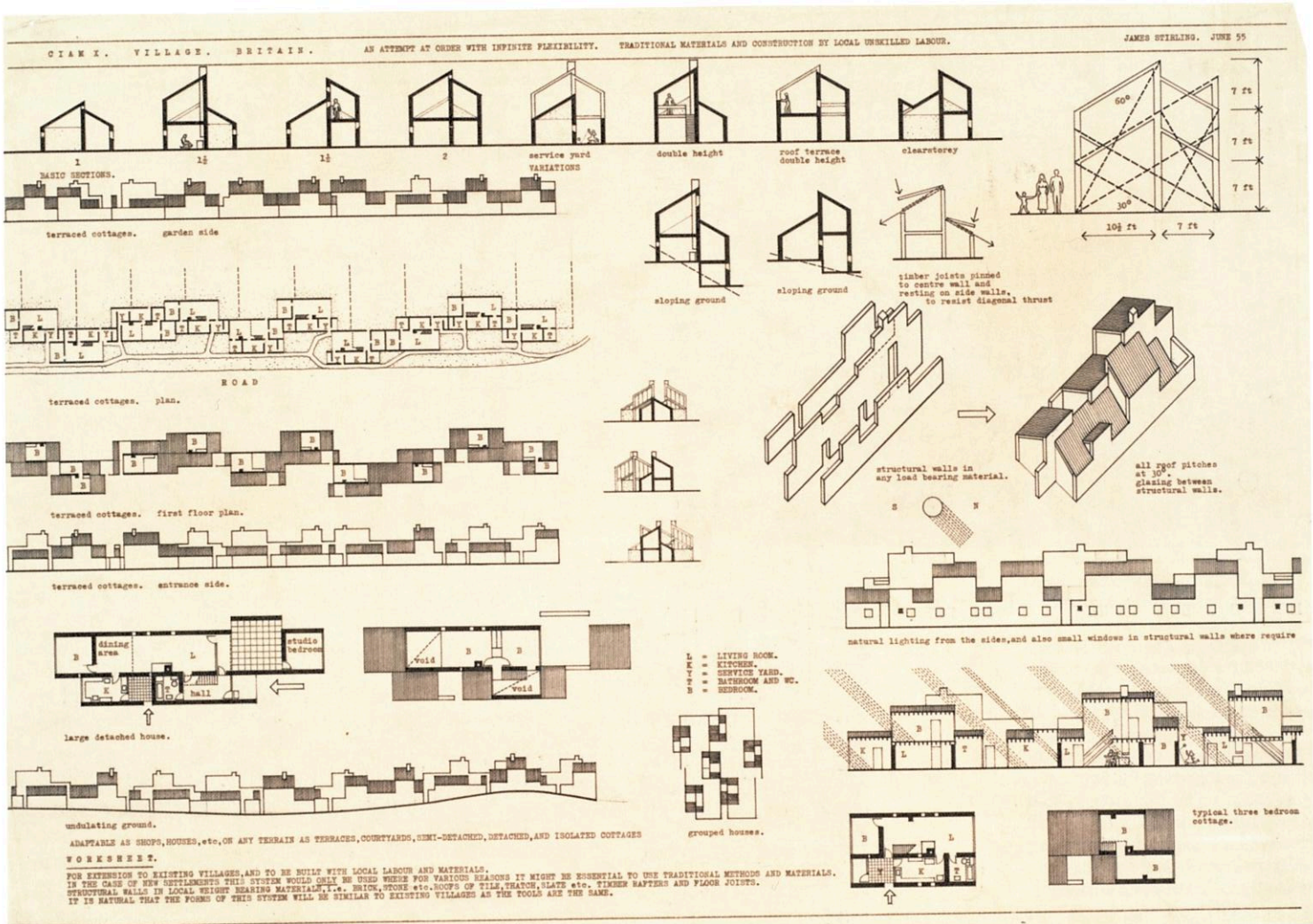
The call for entries to the tenth meeting of CIAM, to be held in Dubrovnik in 1956, was based on the theme assayed at the previous meeting of CIAM at Aix-en-Provence in July 1953, "Habitat," where a group of younger members including Jacob Bakema, Aldo van Eyck, and Georges Candilis, with the Smithsons, Bill Howell, and John Voelcker from England's MARS group, had sought to substitute a "Charter of Habitat" for the original Charter of Athens (1933). Organized into grids, under the titles of "Hierarchy of Association" and "Urban Re-Identification Grid," their new categories, replacing the old "dwelling," "work," "transportation," and "recreation," emphasized the connections between house, street, district, and city, dramatically illustrated by photographs of young children at play. At the preliminary meeting for CIAM held at Doorn in 1954, the Smithsons produced their declaration on "Habitat," which was presented as the Doorn Manifesto, based on a reconsideration of Patrick Geddes's "Valley Section," itself taken from the work of the sociologist Frédéric le Play, together with five of their designs under five categories: "Isolated" ("Bates' Burrows Lea Farm," originally designed between 1953 and 1955); "Hamlet" ("Galleon Cottages," in the Dales hamlet of Bainbridge, North Riding, Yorkshire, 1954); "Village" ("Fold Houses for Village Infill," in the Dales village of West Burton, North Riding, Yorkshire, 1955); "Town" ("Close Houses"), and "City" ("Terraced Crescent Houses," London, 1955).⁹³ Bill Howell prepared an entry based on his scheme for a competition for old people's houses, John Voelcker submitted a project that linked village houses along a bedroom spine, and Stirling's tackled the problem of village development.⁹⁴

Stirling, who was the only member of the group not to attend—and indeed not invited as a result of the Smithsons' opposition—engaged the problem with great seriousness. His scheme was based on the plan of what Thomas Sharp, in his timely book, *The Anatomy of the Village* (1946), had called the "Roadside Village," among other types such as the "Squared Village," the "Seaside Village," and the "Planned Village." Taking the roadside village of West Wycombe, together with its plan taken directly out of Sharp's set of elegant drawings, Stirling paraphrased Sharp in his typed explanation to the two boards submitted to Doorn: "The form of the English village has not changed in the last 400 years and has hardly been affected by the Industrial Revolution," and he proposed a system of party-wall structures with pitched lean-to roofs built out of local materials by unskilled labour. It was a system, he wrote, that would provide "order with infinite variety," that could be adapted to flat or sloping ground and,

92. Thomas Sharp, *The Anatomy of the Village* (1926) (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1946), 5.

93. See Alison and Peter Smithson, *The Charged Void: Architecture* (New York: Monacelli Press, 2001), 130–39.

94. W.G. Howell, "Village Housing," *The Architects' Journal*, 126, no. 3264 (19 September 1957): 428–36. Howell is reviewing the rebuilt village of Rushbrooke in Suffolk by Richard Llewelyn Davies and John Weeks, designed for agricultural workers on the private estate of Rushbrooke. He compares these houses—"the first scheme ... which breaks right outside the established



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94. James Frazer Stirling, Village Housing for CIAM 10: plans, sections, elevations, details and axonometrics, 1955 ink on paper: 47.2 x 66.4 cm (18 5/8 x 26 1/8 in); AP140.S2.SS1.D9.P1.2

Demonstrating interest in prefabrication, and the need for architects to provide templates for self-built dwellings—later realized at PREVI—Stirling designed these houses to be built “in traditional materials [brick, stone, tile, thatch, slate, timber] and [for] construction by local unskilled labour.” The scheme was to be applied “for extension of existing villages,” and was adaptable to flat and undulating sites. Prototypes included terraced rows, clusters, and individual detached houses. Stirling thought that “it is natural that the forms of this system will be similar to existing villages” because the “tools” he prescribed would be the same. It was, he concluded “an attempt at order with infinite flexibility.”

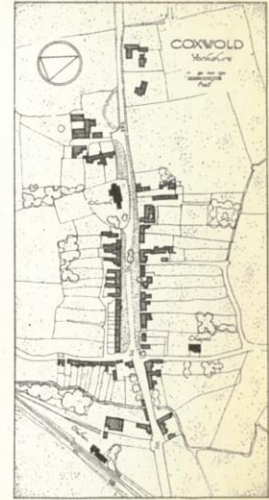


to be, because the country about it could support only a fixed number of people; and its inhabitants were essentially people of the countryside. So not only was the length of each village more or less fixed, there was necessarily a considerable interval between one village and the next.

The old roadside villages get most of their character from their buildings. But they may get a good deal, too, from subtleties which occur in their apparently elementary form. The village which merely borders a straight road so that, approaching the village, one can see through it and out beyond it before one actually gets into it, starts with a handicap which not even the most beautiful buildings can overcome. Fortunately, this does not often happen in English villages. Whether the buildings were built to line an already crooked road, or whether the road was made crooked by having to avoid curiously situated buildings, it is difficult to say; but, whichever way it was, most English roadside villages seem somehow to contain their road rather than to be merely a string of buildings pushed aside by it. The road may curve gently away from the straight or it may take a sharp and sudden turn; in either case the village is thereby transformed into a *place*; a place with a way in and a way out and not merely an incident on the roadside.

WEST WYCOMBE (opposite). The slight curve in the street blocks the outward view.

COXWOLD, Yorkshire (200). At the junction of five roads. The main street, climbing up from a small stream with wide sloping green verges, is dominated by the church at the top of the rise. Trees in and out are all closed. A few narrow fenced green gardens, but houses mostly on the street line. Stone; roofs of stone-slabs and gambrels.



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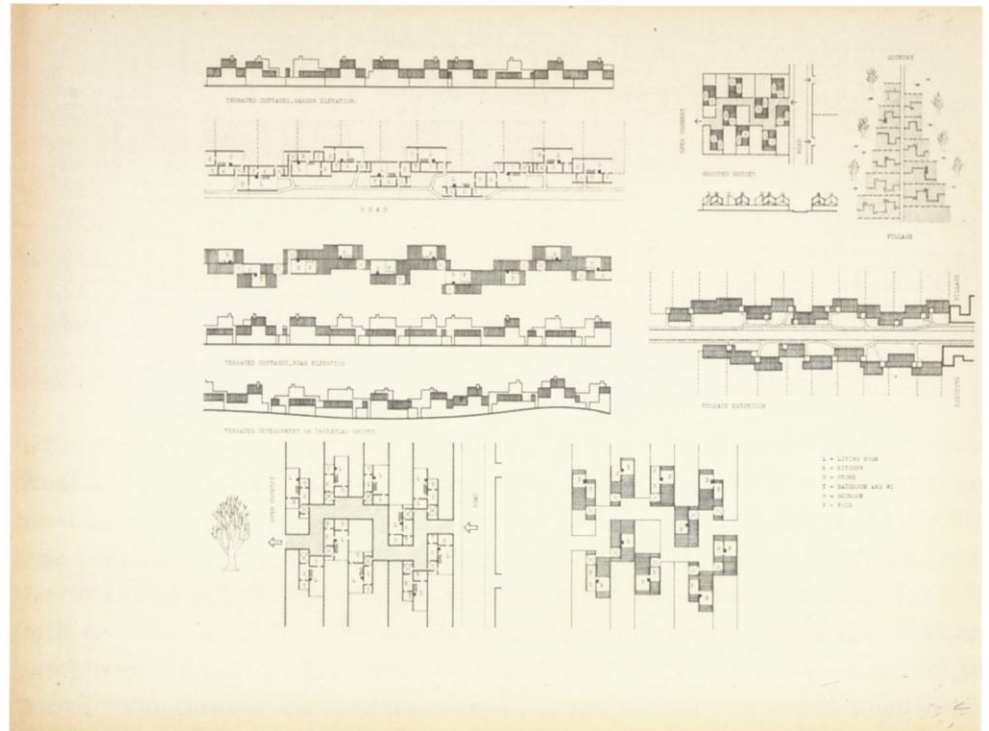
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95. Thomas Sharp, High Street, West Wycombe, Buckinghamshire, from *The Anatomy of the Village* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1946), pp. 8-9

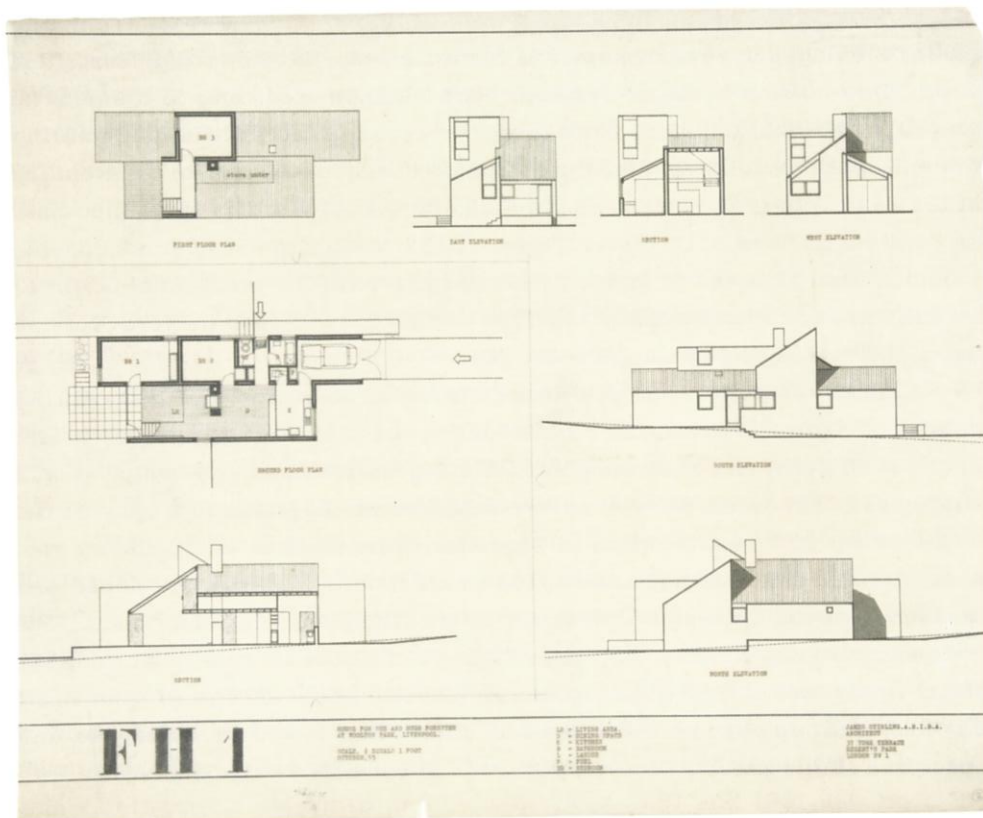
The threat to the British village, from suburban development, the flight to the cities, and more importantly from ill-conceived building and planning in the villages themselves, was noted long before the Second World War. The planner/architect Thomas Sharp published widely on the subject, and investigated the plan-types, visual structures, and potential design criteria for responsible development. He was seen by Stirling's generation as a counter to Gordon Cullen from the *Architectural Review*, whose response was primarily small-scale and visual rather than systematic and rational. Stirling was unique in taking Sharp's description of West Wycombe as a program for his village housing project for CIAM 10.

96. James Frazer Stirling, Village Housing for CIAM 10; combinatorial plans, 1955
diazotype; 50.8 x 66.9 cm
(20 x 26 5/16 in); AP140.S2.SS1.D9.P2.1

Stirling demonstrates the flexibility of his housing prototypes by showing terraced cottages on flat and irregular ground, and grouped houses around courts, always preserving open country at the village edge.



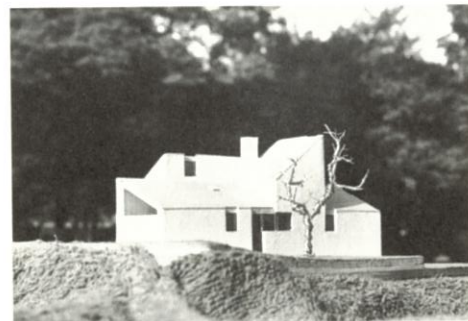
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97. James Frazer Stirling, Woolton House, Liverpool, England: plans, sections and elevations, 1955 ink, transfer type and traces of coloured pencil and graphite on paper; 54.4 x 66.2 cm (21 3/8 x 26 1/16 in); AP140.S2.SS1.D8.P1.1

Designed as a regional-vernacular building, with pitched roofs and embedded in a sloping site, construction was abandoned, according to Stirling, because of the unstable garbage fill beneath the foundations.

98. James Frazer Stirling, Woolton House, Liverpool: sketch, 1955 ink on paper; 19.2 x 27.4 cm (7 1/2 x 10 3/4 in); AP140.S2.SS1.D8.P2.3

A perspective drawing of the Woolton project as if it was a rural farm building—photographs of which Stirling published in "The Functional Tradition and Expression."

99. James Frazer Stirling, photographer and architect, Woolton House, Liverpool: view of model, 1955 gelatin silver print; 12.6 x 18.4 cm (5 x 7 3/4 in); AP140.S2.SS1.D8.P3.1

in a series of different arrangements, used as linear extensions to an existing roadside village, or, at right angles to the main road, develop small clusters in depth. One- to four-bedroom cottages were planned according to the general two-segment Woolton house, with their pitched roofs carefully angled to bring in light—perhaps following the Corbusian precedent of the Maisons Murondins of 1940, but with greater attention to the notion of standardization, if not mass production, that would be a preoccupation of Stirling's in many of his housing schemes from Runcorn to Lima.⁹⁵ In accordance with the program of CIAM 10, Stirling also submitted a board with the design of his House in North London described as a typical “Suburban” house.

Equally important, demonstrated on two large boards, was the maturity of Stirling's graphic approach, unique among the presentations, with its clear plans, elevations, and sections demonstrating the additive and compositional strategies of the units, as well as the axonometric diagrams that showed the load-bearing wall construction, in sequence, from parallel walls, timber roof members and final cottages. Here, ten years before the fully developed axonometrics of the Leicester University Engineering Building and Cambridge University History Faculty Building, Stirling hints at what will be his very personal vision, not only of representation, but also of the design process itself, carefully built up element by element in a form that shows structure, use, and space in a single iteration.

Village to Worktown

Home may be private, but the front door opens out of the living-room on to the street, and when you go down the one step or use it as a seat on a warm evening you become part of the life of the neighbourhood. To a visitor they are understandably depressing, these massed proletarian areas; street after regular street of shoddily uniform houses intersected by a dark pattern of ginnels and snicket (alley-ways) and courts; mean squalid and in a permanent half-fog ... But to the insider, these are small worlds, each as homogeneous as a village.

Richard Hoggart, 1957⁹⁶

I dare say, this building looks a bit Victorian.

James Stirling, 1965⁹⁷

The long-drawn out battle over the proper forms for new housing and rehousing developments that were a constant preoccupation of sociologists and reformers in the postwar years, was essentially a battle over the nature of a neighbourhood.⁹⁸ The grand designs of the modern movement, and especially those urban

imagery of postwar rural housing”—with the four projects presented by the English group at CIAM; see “Village Housing, Rushbrooke,” *Architectural Review*, 121, no. 727 (August 1957): 98–102; John Voelcker, “Farm Buildings,” *Architectural Review*, 127, no. 761 (September 1960): 180–89.

95. James Stirling, “Village Housing for CIAM X,” typed explanation in Stirling/Wilford Archive at the CCA, reproduced in *James Stirling: Buildings and Projects 1950–1974*, 36.

96. Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of Working Class Life* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1957): 37–38.

diagrams of CIAM and its followers, were already the object of critique by the younger generation raised in an era of heightened sociological (and anthropological) understanding of the working classes and their districts, and less prone to demolish indiscriminately. Without necessarily abandoning the preconceptions over densities and certainly without forsaking the modernist project as they saw it, architects like the Smithsons attempted to reconstruct the social relations of housing through ideas of cluster and network, most directly demonstrated by their schemes for Golden Lane (1952) and Robin Hood Gardens (1966). Later, other architects, like Leslie Martin and Patrick Hodgkinson, were less enamored of the "high slab with streets in the air" schemes, and proposed low-rise high-density alternatives, four and five stories stepped back over inner courtyards for play and security. Somewhere in between, and at a scale of an existing neighbourhood, were infill projects of "rehousing," developed to maintain community life and its structures without the displacement of a local population.

Through the firm of Lyons, Israel and Ellis, where he had worked from 1953, and now in partnership with James Gowan, Stirling received the commission for a rehousing development in the Avenham district of Preston, Lancashire; as determined by John Turner and Sons Ltd., the local contractor that had control of the work through the Borough Council, the low-rise terrace housing was to be designed by Stirling, the old-people's housing by Gowan, and the tower flats retained by Lyons, Israel, and Ellis with Alan Colquhoun.

This project, designed and built between 1957 and 1961, has been the object of a unique and comprehensive analysis by Mark Crinson.⁹⁹ In his article Crinson surveys the attitudes toward working-class housing and rehousing in 1950s Britain in the context of Stirling's turn toward regionalism, and the sociology of street-life that was emerging among postwar social scientists—the "rediscovery," so to speak, of the vitality of working-class communities, and the paradoxical problem of a modernist housing strategy that failed to recognize the role of the street and the neighbourhood in this vitality. Paradoxical, because the need for new and modernized environments and services had, in this vision of working-class life, to be balanced against the potentially regressive move of locking communities into their own past. Stirling's industrial brick terraces with their blunt outlines and formal reference to the "backs" of Victorian terraces—the outdoor toilets and sheds that were seen as symbolic of slum life at its worst—were immediately criticized by supporters and critics alike: supporters feeling that the social ideals of the modern movement were betrayed by this obvious allusion to a "bad" history; and critics who might have been satisfied with a "Swedish" solution, finding Stirling's formal rigour at odds with the varieties of social life it sheltered. On the one hand, modernists felt that the move signaled a romantic nostalgia that paternalized the working class; on the other even lovers of Victorian architecture like Nikolaus Pevsner felt that progress was being reversed.

97. Stirling, "An Architect's Approach to Architecture," 233.

98. See also P. Addison, *Now the War is Over: A Social History of Britain, 1945–51* (London: Pimlico, 1995); Lewis Mumford, "East End Urbanity" (1953), in *The Highway and the City* (London: Secker S Warburg, 1953); N. Tiratsoo, *Reconstruction, Affluence, and Labour Politics,*

1945–1960 (London: Routledge, 1990); P. Dunleavy, *The Politics of Mass Housing in Britain, 1945–75* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981); J.M. Richards, "Failure of the New Towns," *Architectural Review*, 114 (1953): 29–32; Gordon Cullen, "Prairie Planning in the New Towns," *Architectural Review*, 114 (1953): 33–36; Arthur Korn, *History Builds the Town* (London: Lund Humphries, 1953);



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100. James Frazer Stirling, photographer, street in Avenham, Preston, England, 1957–61
gelatin silver print; 12 x 10.6 cm
(4 ¾ x 4 ¼ in); AP140.S2.SS7.D1.P1.122

101. James Frazer Stirling, photographer, backs of houses in Avenham, Preston, Lancashire, 1957–61
reproduced from black and white negative; 5.4 x 5.6 cm (2 ¼ x 2 ¼ in); AP140.S1.SS2.D2.P3.10

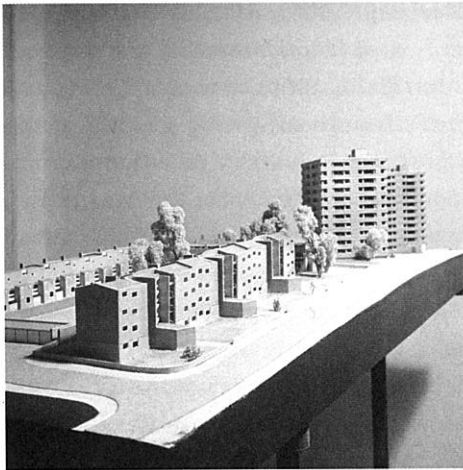
Reyner Banham, Stirling's friend, had the difficult task of defending the project while admitting all these objections.¹⁰⁰ His article in the *New Statesman*, February 1962 was entitled "Coronation Street, Hoggartsborough," referring to the popular television series "Coronation Street," set in and around a pub in a Manchester working-class district, that had premiered in December of 1961, and to the book by the critic Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, published in 1957. From Banham's point of view, Coronation Street represented the false claim that "working-class virtues were the product of physical proximity," and what he called "Hoggartry" was merely a sentimental nostalgia for a world already passed away. Housing for the working class was, Banham warned, poised between two uneasy poles—"socialist formalism" and "working-class scene painting." Certainly the "street" as a focus of sociability could be retained in a modernist guise—he cited Denys Lasdun's cluster-block solution at Claredale and Jack Lyn and Ivor Smith's housing at Park Hill, Sheffield. But the evident vernacular/regional aesthetics of Preston would (and perhaps he implicitly meant *should*), Banham averred, raise the question: "if this isn't socialist (or any other kind of) formalism comparable to the 'William Morris Revival' sponsored in the early Fifties by the party group in the LCC Architect's Department"? And, despite the fact that Banham admits that "these cottages, considered purely in the abstract are a joy to look at," and that the architects had "taken over a vernacular language of local warehouse-builders' usages" in such a way that "everything fits together with an unforced logic," he was nevertheless perturbed by the unspoken intentions of the architecture: dangerously close to one "that forces the working-class into the role of picturesque peasantry, a foreground frieze of Roger Mayne Figures armed with Nigel Henderson bassinets, bicycles and Yogi Bear masks."¹⁰¹ Here Banham was referring, not so charitably, to Nigel Henderson, a fellow member of the Independent Group, and Roger Mayne, both documentary street photographers whose work in the East End of London had served to support the new sociology of the street. His conclusion was clear, even if couched as a question: Stirling and Gowan had produced a "visual setting" for the present state of working-class culture—but did this not "leave a developing working class lumbered with an unsuitable functional environment 20 affluent years from now?"¹⁰²

The popular press was less ambiguous: on the awarding of the Good Housing Competition prize to the Preston rehousing in 1963, the correspondent of the *Daily Mail* asked, "Frankly, do you think this is WORTH A PRIZE?" For many, this development simply represented a "nostalgia for the slums," the last gasp of "the kitchen sink school of architecture" that believed in "bolts and bricks," where the public were looking for "something pretty and cosy." It was perhaps with a certain defiant pride that Stirling clipped the article and carefully preserved it in the archive.¹⁰³

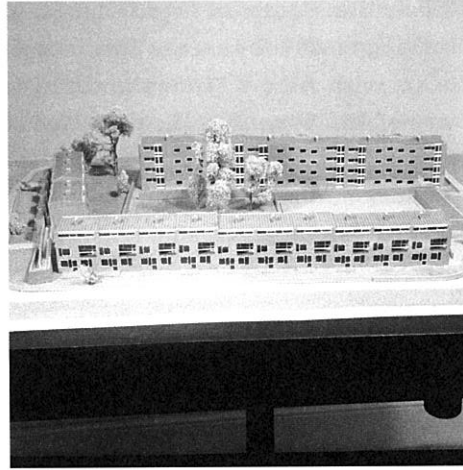
F.E. Gibberd, *Town Design* (London: Architectural Press, 1953); Tom Harrison, *Britain Revisited* (London: Gollancz, 1961); Michael Young and Peter Willmott, *Family and Kinship in East London* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957).

99. Mark Crinson, "The Uses of Nostalgia. Stirling and Gowan's Preston Housing," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 65, no. 2 (June 2006): 216–31.

100. Reyner Banham, "Coronation Street, Hoggartsborough," *New Statesman*, 9 February 1962, 200–201.



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That nothing now remains of the terrace houses at Preston, re-roofed in pitched style in the 1970s and torn down in 1999, might well lead us to agree with Banham's prescient commentary, but a closer examination of the representations and statements by Stirling and Gowan might also lead to a different conclusion. Certainly Stirling opened himself up to the charge of nostalgia—quoting Somerset Maugham's memory of Charlie Chaplin revisiting his South London childhood habitats as exhibiting the actor's "nostalgia of the slums," and publishing a reproduction of L.S. Lowry's painting of a factory town. But in all his other statements, nostalgia is strictly resisted; rather he finds himself agreeing with the sociologists of worker life, that something not-yet-dead has been killed by the wholesale demolition of slum-clearance programs, and the isolated blocks in a park favored by post-CIAM development. Already in 1954 Stirling had criticized the point blocks of the London County Council housing estates as "intellectually completely meaningless,"¹⁰⁴ and following the completion of Preston had emphasized in a lecture delivered to the California Council of the AIA at a conference dedicated to the analysis of the problems of suburban sprawl, in 1963: "TOWERS NO GOOD ... 'new slums,'" referring to the tower blocks by Lyons, Israel and Ellis on the Preston site. Against what he called in the same lecture "French barracks," Stirling advocated a low-rise terrace solution that would continue to nurture working-class cultural vitality through propinquity:

The character of a society is formed to a very great extent by the buildings it inhabits, and we have tried here to maintain the vital spirit ("Saturday Night and Sunday Morning") of the alley, yard, and street houses that the new development is replacing, and from which its occupiers have recently moved.¹⁰⁵

101. Reyner Banham, "Coronation Street," 201.

102. Reyner Banham, "Coronation Street," 201.

103. Shirley Conran, "Frankly, do you think this is WORTH A PRIZE?" *Daily Mail*, 18 October 1963.

104. Crinson, ed., *James Stirling: Early Unpublished Writings*, 41.

105. James Stirling and James Gowan, "Rehousing at Preston," *The Architects' Journal*, 1, no. 221 (8 June 1961): 845.

102–103. Stirling and Gowan, rehousing redevelopment, Avenham, Preston: views of a presentation model, 1957–1961 reproduced from black and white negative; 5.8 x 5.6 cm (5 ⁵/₁₆ x 2 ³/₁₆ in); AP140.S2.SS1.D18.P15.1.2 / P15.2.1

This scheme for rehousing for the neighbourhood of Avenham shows three-storey terraces with one-bedroom apartments on ground level, and maisonettes above entered from a raised walkway.

Novels like *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1958), Alan Sillitoe's tale of working-class life in a northern town (later turned into a film directed by Karel Reisz, with Albert Finney and Shirley Anne Field, 1960), and his *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* (1959), far from celebrating the life of the pubs and factories, streets and alleys of postwar industrial towns, were stories less of disillusion than rebellion, moods mirrored in John Osborne's play *Look Back in Anger* (1956) and John Braine's novel *Room at the Top* (1957). This last was also noted by Stirling, together with Joan Littlewood's production of Shelagh Delaney's *A Taste of Honey* (1958), an equally desperate depiction of life in industrial northwestern England. Yet despite his admission that "the 19th century industrial town is justly condemned," Stirling insisted on the existence of "a neighbourliness and a community vitality which are quite absent in

104. Shirley Conran, "Frankly, Do You Think This is Worth a Prize?" *Daily Mail* newspaper, 18 October 1963 AP140.S2.SS1.D18.P11.1

This will not be the last time that Stirling's housing faces criticism in the press—this time for apparently looking too much like the housing it replaced.

DAILY MAIL . OCT. 18. 63. *Daily Mail* Oct. 18. 63.

Frankly, do you think this is WORTH A PRIZE ?



THE awards to winners of the 1963 Good Housing Competition, which were presented yesterday, have caused an uproar among architects.

One winner, for high density housing — that means slum replacements — was deliberately designed, and I think successfully, to look like a slum.

Architects Stirling & Gowan, who designed it jointly with Lyons, Israel & Ellis, have publicly stated this. They believe there's a nostalgia for the slums.

Look at

THEY have announced that they "strongly believe in forcing people to live in each other's lives" and go on to describe their winning award, presented by Sir Keith Joseph, the Housing Minister, as having "something of the familiar environment of the alley and the back yard."

"A lot of borough council houses are built as garden suburbs of semi-detached houses," commented Jim Stirling.

"We were trying to pre-

serve the community sense, creating an environment where people can rub shoulders, and not lead a lonely existence.

"If you move people coming from 19th-century slums into suburbia, they get lonely. You must remember what these people are, like—they are self-conscious."

So in the present scheme, Stirling & Gowan used red engineering bricks for the building. In other words, those unfortunate new occupants are being given a new, more hygienic, version of what they had before.

and cosy," he said. "And it won't accept inhuman homes."

What next?

I asked the ebullient, mustachioed editor of the *Architectural Review*. Said he: "New Brutalism" is about to be old hat. In fact it's probably dead now having reached the normal point of "obsolescence. Actually I'm writing a history of it."

I hope the last chapter will end with yesterday's award.

by
SHIRLEY CONRAN

Live in

NOW I don't mind an architect expressing his personality. I do object when he imposes it in the form of a home, on unfortunate people who are going to live in it, and look at it, for years.

I am fed up with the kitchen-sink school of architecture that has been labelled New Brutalism. Bolts and bricks can be beautiful but not when they are used as belligerently as this.

"New Brutalism isn't really in these days. It doesn't reflect the public taste," architect David Green, of Taylor & Green, a pioneering partnership in the design of good rural housing, told me.

"I believe that the public now wants something pretty

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the standard solution—the suburban dilution of the garden city.” Garden City developments were, for Stirling, “an anachronism, evoking a villa system of living inappropriate to an industrial mass community.”¹⁰⁶

Here he takes his cue not from “kitchen sink” literature or film, whose scenes no doubt evoked images of his own childhood, but from contemporary sociology, and especially from the publications of the surveys of the group known as Mass Observation, a social research organization founded in 1937 by the anthropologist Tom Harrisson, the poet Charles Madge, and film-maker Humphrey Jennings, concerned to understand the cultures of the working class through direct observation. Harrisson’s project in “Worktown” (the town of Bolton, Lancashire) was renewed after the war, and published in his book, *Britain Revisited*,¹⁰⁷ with the object of recording the changes that had occurred since the late 1930s. As Harrisson wrote in 1961, “it is difficult to remember (now) how in those far-off days, nearly everybody who was not born into the working-class regarded them as almost a race apart,” an attitude that explained both the shock and the excitement of the middle-class “discovery” of working-class life after the war, as well as the discomfort of those, like Hoggart, and perhaps Stirling himself, as they were propelled by education into another world, in which they belonged by talent, but not by birth.¹⁰⁸

Harrisson, on returning to “Worktown” in 1960, observed that indeed “some things had visibly changed,” but what struck him most forcefully was that “Others had visibly unchanged—including many that anyone reading newspapers and listening to the radio from abroad would expect to have changed almost beyond recognition.”¹⁰⁹ It was this statement that attracted Stirling as he made the argument for retaining some of the forms if not the original substance of worktown’s street and alley life. “Recently it has been noted,” he wrote, “(‘Britain Revisited,’ T. Harrisson, Mass-observation) that the most remarkable aspect of worktown over the last two decades is its great unchange, particularly in the habits and character of its people—despite greater affluence.”¹¹⁰ Perhaps too Stirling was interested in Bolton as the birthplace of Lord Leverhulme, benefactor of Liverpool University and builder of Port Sunlight. Beneath this sense of a vital community surviving the depredations of the emerging consumer society and increasing suburbanization, was perhaps a lingering and more modest version of the grand utopianism of the modern movement that he had declared lost in the transition from Garches to Jaoul, from the villa to the domestic house; an architecture that assumed as its purpose the retention of social values, while at the same time “incorporating the essential improvements in space, light and convenience,” might “perpetuate a familiar and vital environment.”¹¹¹

Accordingly, Stirling strived to invent what we might call a “realist regionalism,” with brick details taken from the “idiom” of the cotton mills: “functional brick detailing; bull-nosed sills, splayed set-backs, and brick-on-edge

106. Stirling and Gowan, “Rehousing at Preston,” 84

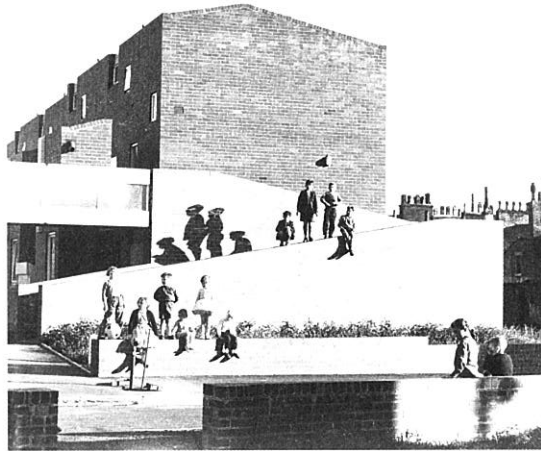
107. Tom Harrisson, *Britain Revisited* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1961).

108. Harrisson, *Britain Revisited*, 26.

109. Harrisson, *Britain Revisited*, 28.

110. Stirling and Gowan, “Rehousing at Preston,” *Architects’ Journal*, 221 (8 June 1961): 845.

111. Stirling and Gowan, “Rehousing at Preston,” 845.



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copings,” all constructed out of local red engineering brick in order to “reiterate the thin, brittle surface quality of the outsides of the mills.”¹¹² Instead of repeating the street pattern of the old “by-law” town, however, Stirling privileged the public areas—the terraces grouped around a central communal space with playground and a grassed-over pyramid built out of the rubble of demolition, and the houses accessed by ramps and galleries that encouraged social interrelations.

Perhaps the strongest indications of his thinking at Preston, however, were the numerous photographs he took of the completed development. As if in competition with the photographers of East End life, Nigel Henderson and Roger Mayne (and certainly with the Smithsons), Stirling took shots of children playing, running up and down the access ramps, sitting with their legs dangling over the brick walls, as if the entire complex was overrun by children. The only adults to be seen are two mothers with their strollers and shopping, and an elderly woman standing in front of Gowan’s old people’s houses and flats. Enlarged and mounted on boards for exhibition, these photos claimed ownership of a special kind of social purpose for architecture: not one of utopian isolation, nor one of windy and empty streets-in-the-air, but rather one of direct relationship with conditions on the ground, so to speak, social conditions that might be held in precarious balance with the intrusive effects of “piped radio and television,” all the while improving the hygienic and health standards of the dwelling.

In an article written some fourteen years after the completion of the Preston housing, Nicholas Taylor, perhaps echoing J.M. Richards’s piece on “The Failure of the New Towns,” published in the *Architectural Review* in 1953,¹¹³ traced what

112. Stirling and Gowan, “Rehousing at Preston,” 845.

113. Richards, “Failure of the New Towns,” 29–32.



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he called "The Failure of 'Housing,'" accompanied by a series of deeply disturbing photographs by Marilyn Stafford and others edited by Cedric Price and Brian Richards depicting the completed housing estates in use. The results, wrote the editors, were "collectively frightening," despite the fact that most developments had received Ministry awards for "Good Design in Housing."¹¹⁴

Preston was among them, and the photographs are not at all inviting: indeed the commentators speak of the "humiliation" of an environment that combines "visual bedlam and environmental pathos;" admittedly the total development was the result of an indifferent block plan designed by the Borough Engineer, and the combination of high-rise tower blocks and low rise housing from four different architectural firms, built by a local contractor. But the critique is nevertheless reserved for Stirling and Gowan's project. While lauding the aspirations of "two brilliant architects" who "turned their backs on arid functionalism" in an attempt to re-create "the best qualities of the local Victorian environment," the editors pointed out that the original Victorian vernacular housing possessed walled private yards for all the activities of children's play, adults' hobbies, storage, rubbish disposal, washing lines and even a bit of gardening." The replacement, however, was set back too far from the road to accommodate anything more than a patch of grass, and the "access deck" turned out to be no more than "an exposed gallery of the minimal width and maximum exposure to the elements." The architects, they concluded, "have not done what they set out to do."¹¹⁵

Yet for Stirling and Gowan, as for many postwar architects, the issue was one of joining a sense (visual and functional) of the vernacular with an attempt to construct a modern alternative to the nineteenth-century slum. The

105–107. Stirling and Gowan, James Frazer Stirling, photographer (presumed), views of housing redevelopment at Avenham, Preston, 1959 or after gelatin silver print;

19.8 x 19.9 cm (7 ³/₁₆ x 7 ³/₁₆ in) /

19.3 x 19.3 cm (7 ⁵/₈ x 7 ⁵/₈ in) /

15.5 x 15.2 cm (6 ¹/₈ x 6 in);

AP140.S2.SS1.D18.P3.13 / .P3.8 / .P3.14

These mounted photographs form part of a series of twenty-eight boards presenting the completed re-housing at Preston, with numerous images of children populating the ramps, walls, terraces, and streets, as if to rival the contemporary photographs by Nigel Henderson of London's East End that had been used by the Smithsons to animate their perspectives of the Golden Lane scheme.

114. Nicholas Taylor, "The Failure of Housing," *Architectural Review*, 142, no. 849 (May 1965): 29.

115. Taylor, "The Failure of Housing," 345–346.

contradiction lay in the stubborn resistance of modernist housing typologies to that essential component of traditional urban life, the street and its adjoining facilities. The gradations that pertained to a homogeneous row-house development, from the public (the neighbourhood, the block, the street) and the semi-public (the front door, the back yards and sheds and garden plots) to the private (albeit deprived of essential amenities), were inevitably destroyed in an assemblage of autonomous elements arranged in imitation of streets and squares, but controlled by by-law setbacks that did not allow for back yards, and access "galleries" that stood in for the street but without the density of public occupation. Turned away from the street, the inner "green" courts emulated the ideal of modern movement open space, but were without defined function. The result was an arrangement of modern pieces in a simulation of vernacular planning, where the amorphous ground around high-rise blocks was replicated by amorphous ground around bits of row housing.

Here the by-law legislation against slum development, a trickle-down space-planning technique derived from the health codes of the 1930s and 1940s, entirely negated any reconceptualization of the traditional environment, while the postwar idealization of the gallery-street as a mechanism for preserving modern planning techniques, whether "in the air" or on two or three storeys, worked against the functioning of the traditional community spaces. In subsequent housing projects, in the two stages of Runcorn and the competition for Lima, Stirling would attempt to address these contradictions by adopting entirely modern construction techniques joined to planning principles with a more distinguished heritage than that of the Victorian tenement street, but with similar contradictory results.

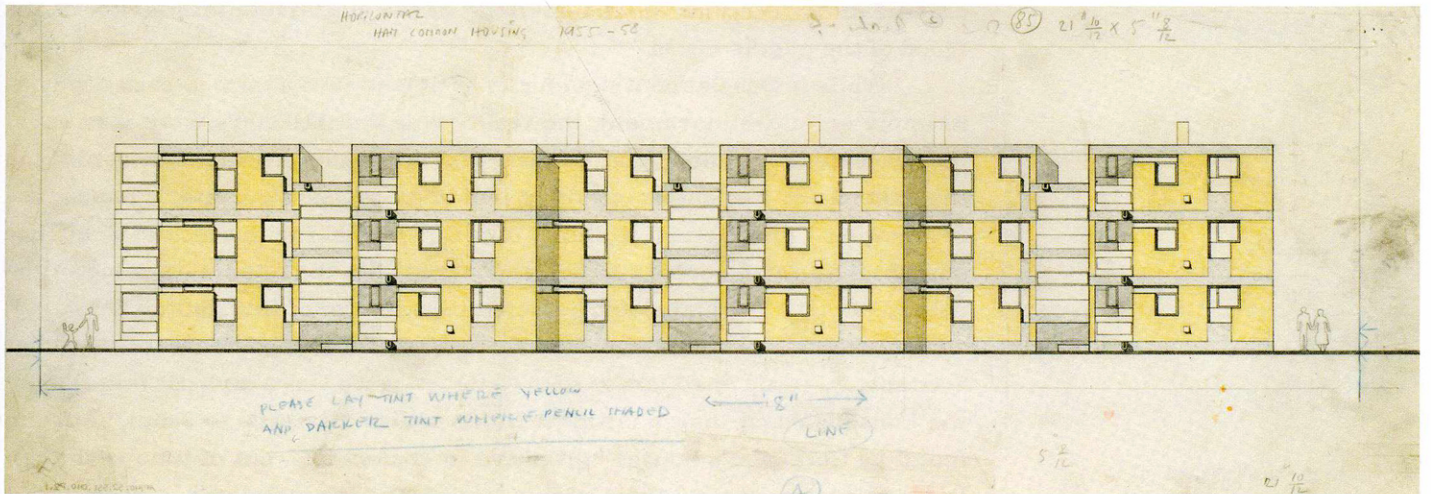
Definitely Not "New Brutalism"

The "new brutalism," a term which we used to regard on the one hand as a narrow interpretation of one aspect of architecture, specifically the use of materials and components "as found"—an already established attitude; and on the other hand, as a well-intentioned but over patriotic attempt to elevate English architecture to an international status.

James Stirling and James Gowan, 1959¹¹⁶

When Reyner Banham wrote his seminal article on "The New Brutalism" in 1955 he was deeply ambiguous about the use of descriptive art-historical labels that all too easily became "applied" or simply "decorative," while at the same time attempting to demonstrate that the phrase "The New Brutalism" held more content than most as referring to the ethic as well as the style of Britain's "first

116. James Stirling and James Gowan, "Afterthoughts on the Flats at Ham Common," *Architecture and Building* (May 1959): 167.



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native art-movement since the New Art History arrived” with the forced exile of the Pevsners and the Wittkowers in the late 1930s.¹¹⁷ Yet for all his enthusiasm and detailed exposition of what the movement represented and implied, he had only two major examples in architecture to play with: Alison and Peter Smithson’s recently completed school at Hunstanton, and their competition entries for the Golden Lane and Sheffield housing developments, and one non-British example, Louis Kahn’s Yale University Art Gallery. By the time he published his book on the movement ten years later, however, he had gathered a host of other buildings under this umbrella, again noting that few architects themselves were prepared to adopt the appellation.

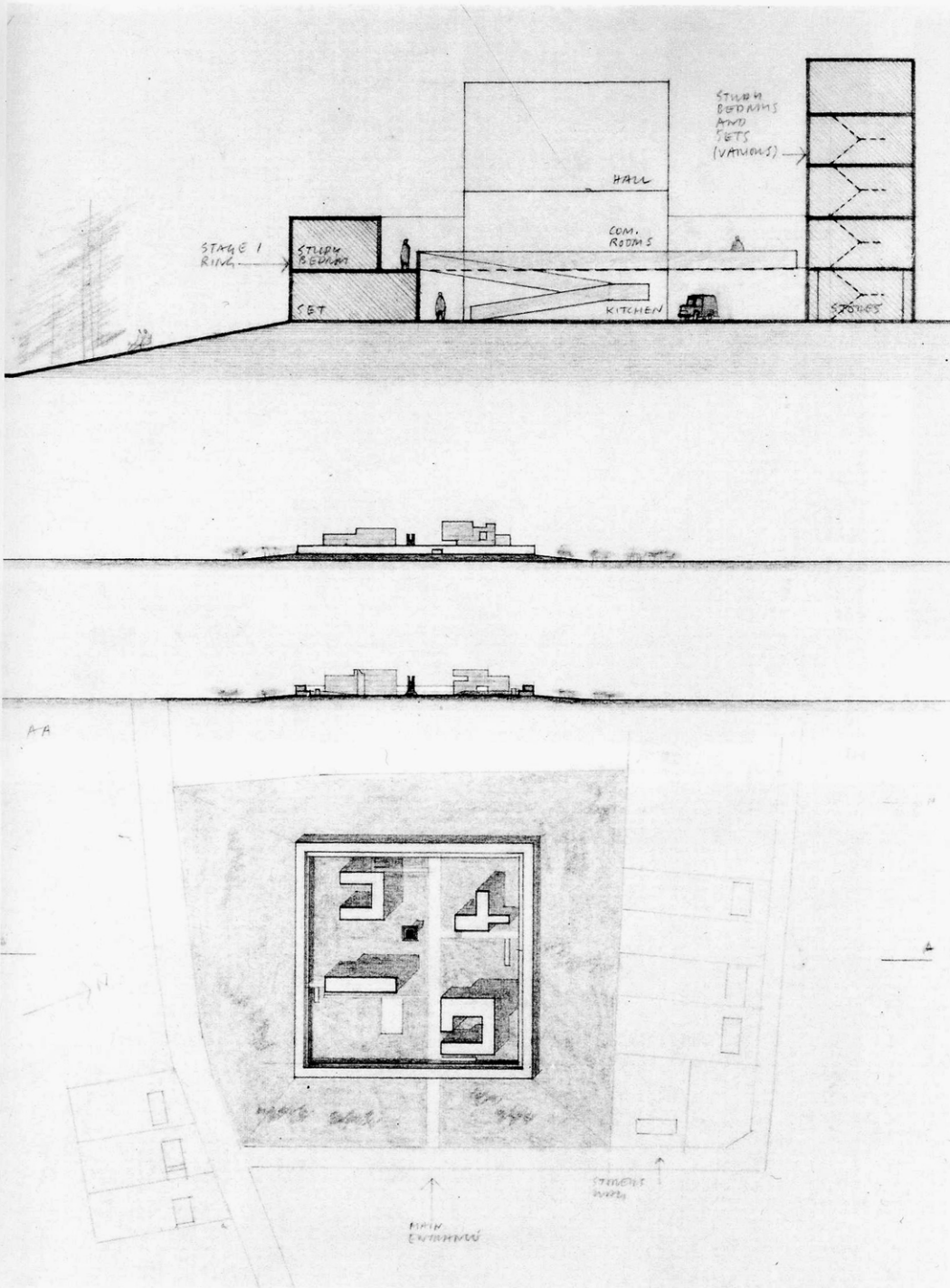
As we have noted, Stirling and Gowan were among the first to reject the term “The New Brutalism” as applied by Banham in his review of the Flats at Ham Common. Despite this, it was these flats that figured in Banham’s book as paradigmatic exemplars of what he meant by the term. Admitting that the firm of Stirling and Gowan had “repudiated it both in spoken and printed statements,” he concluded that this was less an ideological opposition than an opportunistic one—their fear of “frightening off clients”—and that in the event Stirling’s major role in introducing the Maisons Jaoul to Britain made it “impossible for critics and historians to avoid calling them [the Flats at Ham Common] Brutalist.”¹¹⁸ For Banham, indeed, the entire movement was bracketed between Hunstanton and Ham Common at the beginning and Stirling and Gowan’s Engineering Building for Leicester University at the end—the last photograph in the book. Leicester was, Banham stated, even “nearer to Brutalism” than the Smithsons’ Economist Building, “in the emotional sense of a rough, tough building, and in the dramatic space-play of its sectional

108. Stirling and Gowan, Ham Common Flats, Richmond, London, 1956–63: elevation, 1955–58
graphite and coloured pencil on tracing paper; 20.9 x 59.7 cm (8 ¼ x 23 ½ in); AP140.S2.SS1.D10.P2.1

A three-storey terrace and two two-storey pavilions set in the garden of a Georgian House overlooking Ham Common.

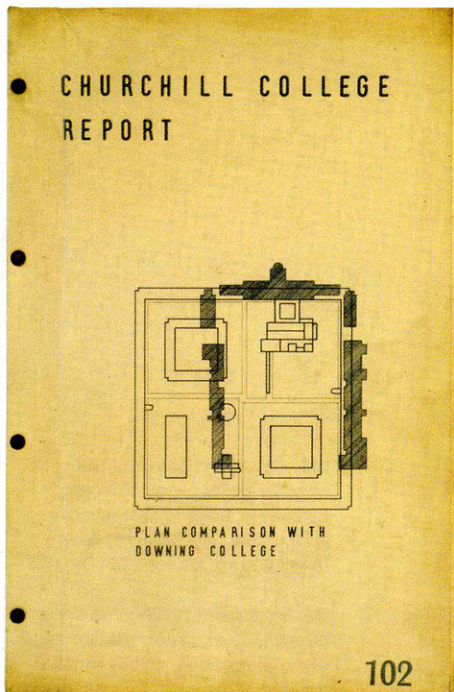
117. Reyner Banham, “The New Brutalism,” *Architectural Review*, 118 (December 1955): 354–61, reprinted in *A Critic Writes: Essays by Reyner Banham*, selected by Mary Banham, Paul Barker, Sutherland Lyall, and Cedric Price (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 7–15.

118. Reyner Banham, *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic?* (London: The Architectural Press, 1965), 87.



109. Stirling and Gowan, limited competition for Churchill College, Cambridge, England: first scheme gelatin silver print; 20.6 x 15.6 cm (8 1/8 x 6 1/8 in); AP140.S2.SS1.D19.P3.1

This first scheme for Churchill College, probably developed for the first stage of the competition, already contains the idea of the enclosed court with individual buildings within, raised on an earthwork in the flat landscape of the Cambridge fens.



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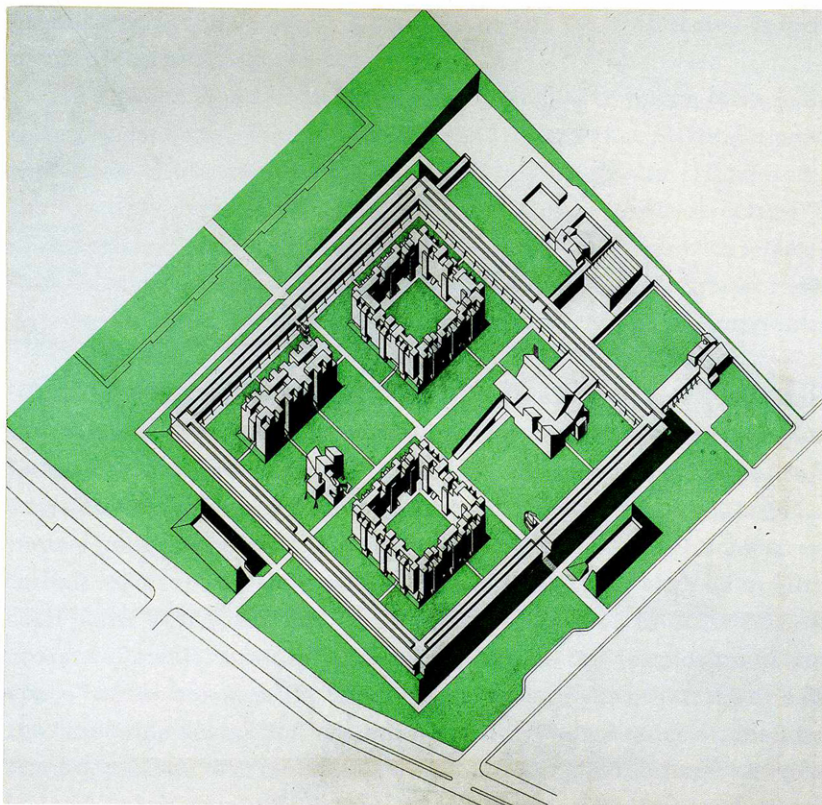
110. Stirling and Gowan, Churchill College: Report and Outline Specification, 1958
33 x 22 x 0.5 cm (13 x 8 5/8 x 5/16 in);
AP140.S2.SS1.D19.P11.1

Stirling and Gowan's Report on their scheme went to great lengths to justify the scale of their court by comparison with other Cambridge courts, here a plan comparison with Downing College. Colin Rowe in his 1959 article on the competition results remarked on what he saw as an "epidemic of claustrophobia" that "infected" the submitted designs. ("The Blenheim of the Welfare State", *The Cambridge Review* (31 October 1959))

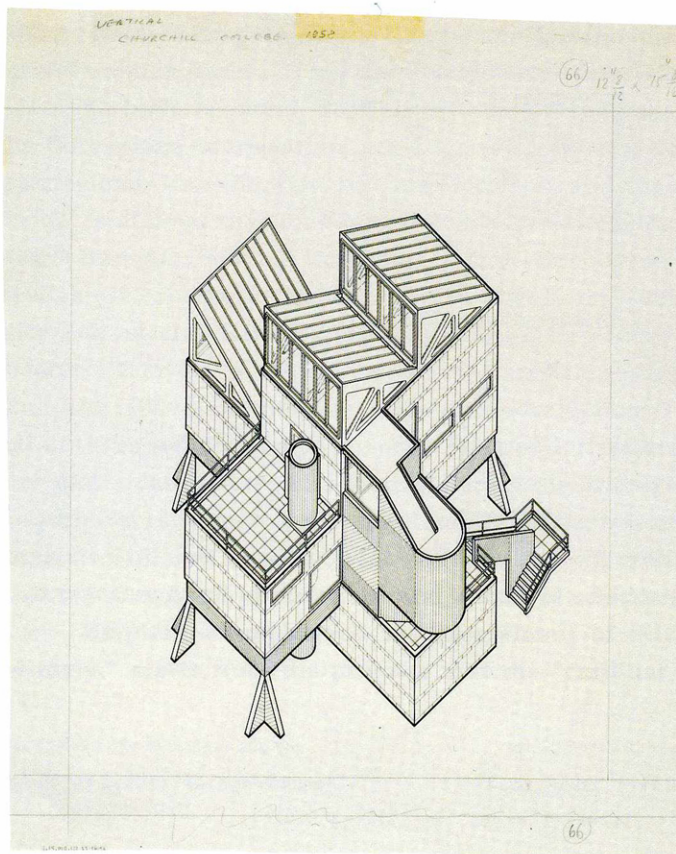
111. Stirling and Gowan, Churchill College, Cambridge: axonometric, 1958 or after
gelatin silver print with colored transfer film mounted on masonite panel;
81.7 x 84.6 cm (32 3/16 x 33 5/16 in);
AP140.S2.SS1.D19.P2

112. Stirling and Gowan, Churchill College, Cambridge: axonometric of the library, 1958
ink on paper; 50.1 x 40.6 cm
(19 3/4 x 16 in); AP140.S2.SS1.D19.P1.1

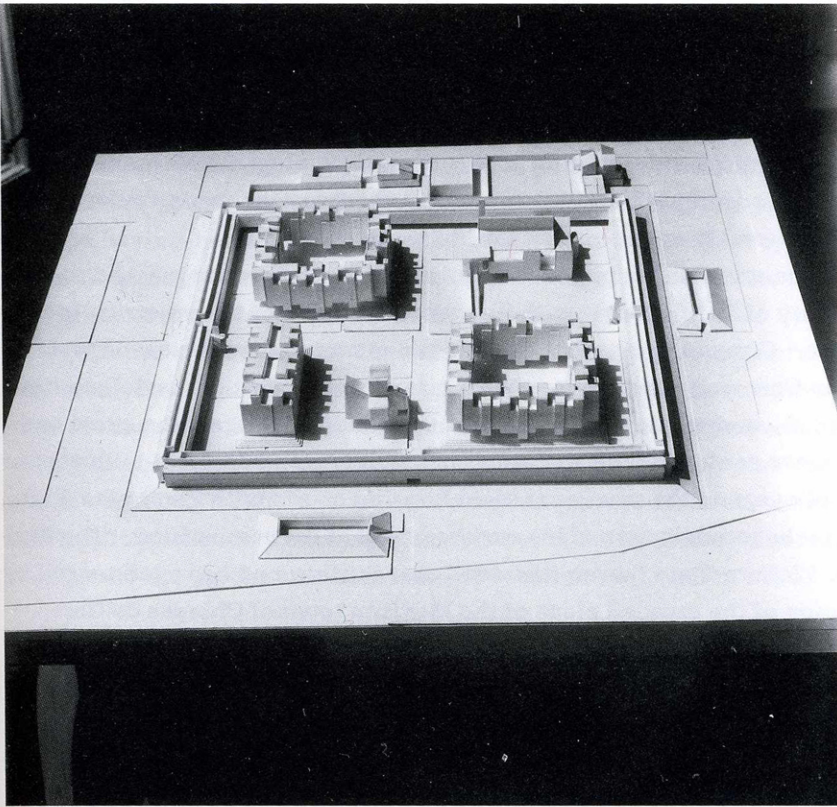
This axonometric, probably prepared for publication in the "Black" volume nevertheless demonstrates the way in which the early work was already conceived in these three-dimensional terms.



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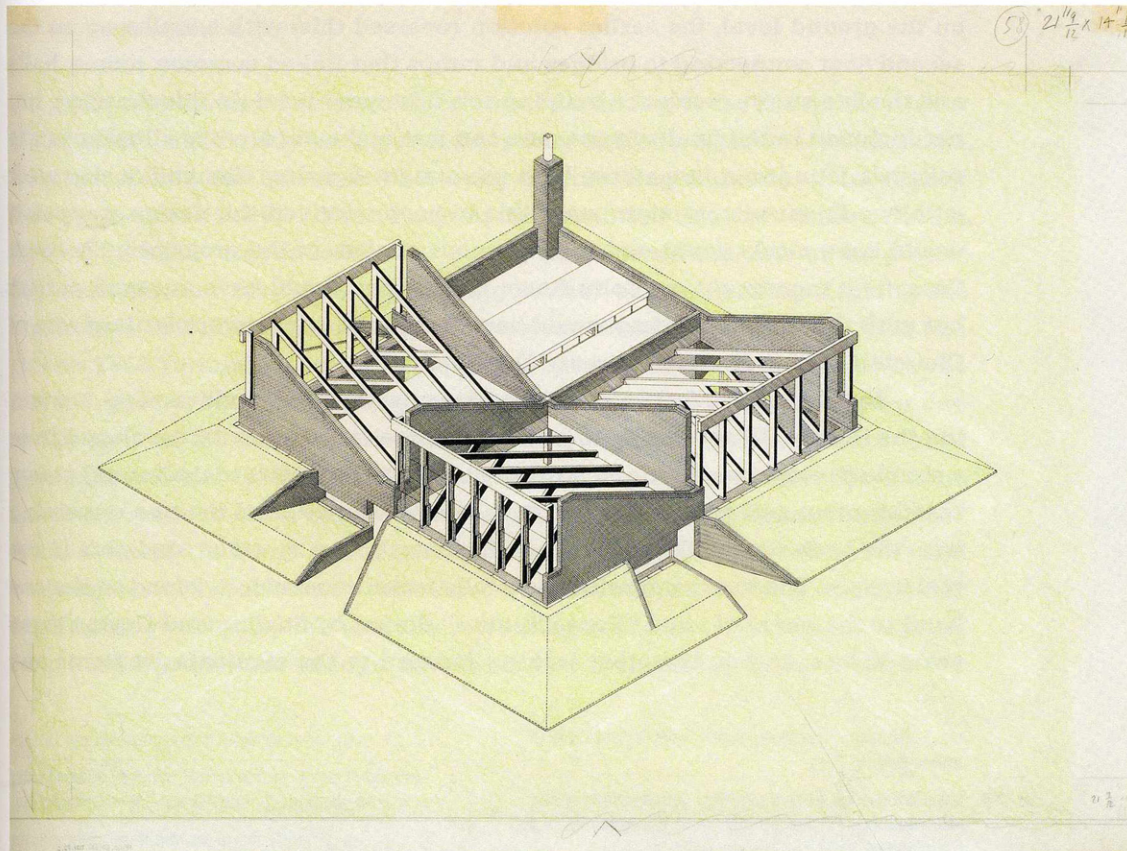


113. Stirling and Gowan, Churchill College, Cambridge: view of model, 1958
gelatin silver print; 10.9 x 10.6 cm
(4 ¼ x 4 ⅜ in); AP140.S2.SS1.D19.P4.10

114. Stirling and Gowan, School Assembly Hall, Brunswick Park Primary School, Camberwell, London: axonometric, 1958–61
ink, coloured pencil and graphite on paper; 49.1 x 67 cm (19 ¾ x 26 ⅜ in); AP140.S2.SS1.D21.P2.2

Unsuccessful at Churchill College, Stirling and Gowan nevertheless succeeded in retaining some of the primary features of their design in microcosm in this school building raised up on a steep berm and composed with geometrical precision.

113



114

Stirling's work are the dialectics between "high art versus low art and high tech versus low tech" as represented in the "distinct aspects of a native 19th century 'vernacular.'"¹²³ This dialectic began to emerge strongly in the late 1950s, when the notations of regional style that pervaded the earlier domestic projects began to emerge side by side with more conventional references to the historical traditions of high architecture and experiments in reformulating the languages of the early avant-gardes for the present.

Thus, the competition project for Churchill College at once pays homage to the long history of fortifications, with its square court set on a geometrically pure bank of earth—Girouard notes that Gowan had photographed the castle walls at Restormel in Cornwall (a reference that is echoed in the vertical castellated residential blocks)—and to the architecture of Cambridge colleges; the great court itself is directly contrasted by the architects in scale and in form with that of Downing College, and the smaller student housing courts with Pembroke. Rowe, in his note to the republication of his review article of the competition, "The Blenheim of the Welfare State," even hazarded that Stirling had been influenced by the description of the arcaded plaza of the Mexican town of Chiapas de Corzo.¹²⁴

Here, however, historical references stop, and are translated into a strict geometry of ideal city proportions: square great court with four pavilions set within it. An early scheme, preserved in the archive, diagrams the plans of these pavilions—residential blocks, library, and dining halls, but with a sectional development that differs from the final submission. Where the final plan designed the perimeter student residences to form a colonnaded cloister arcade on the ground level, the earlier solution reversed this, with a walkway on the second floor connecting to bridges and ramps that linked common rooms, halls and the five-storey residence buildings on this upper level. In this drawing, but not included in the final scheme, one can just make out a witty allusion to the college's founder: a two-storey-high monument figuring Churchill's characteristic two-finger victory sign; were this to have survived the design process it would have nicely countered the enormous obelisk in the project by Sir Hugh Casson—a monument, as Colin Rowe noted, that would have enraged purists but with the passage of time would have joined the wind-swept fenland site of Churchill College to other spires of the old city.

But the *tour de force* of the project was the smallest pavilion of all, containing the library. This was a little jewel of volumetric complexity developed from a simple Greek-cross plan, one arm taken up with the stairs to the second-storey reading room and stacks; another with administration, and the two remaining with the book stacks. These last were lit from the top by raked skylights in the roof trusses. The total composition is a fully transitional object, joined on the one hand to the series of ideal "House Studies" drawn by Stirling and Gowan three years before, and on the other looking forward to the elementarist forms and

123. Frampton, "Transformations in Style: The Work of James Stirling," 135.

124. Colin Rowe, *As I was Saying: Recollections and Miscellaneous Essays*, ed. Alexander Caragone, 3 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1960), 1: 43.

angular glass constructions of Leicester and the Cambridge History Faculty. A miniature version of this unbuilt project was realized, however, in the School Assembly Hall at Camberwell in 1958, where a square plan, also set on sloping berms, was bisected into four, containing a kitchen and the hall, each with steeply monopitched roofs, and a flat-roofed service wing, the whole faced in white brick.

Their grand square great court for a free-standing and isolated Churchill College having been refused, Stirling and Gowan adopted an opposite strategy when planning an extension to Selwyn College, this time in the gardens of the existing courtyard structure. Rather than replicating what Colin Rowe had called, in the context of the Churchill College competition, the “claustrophilia” that seemed to attack all who took on Cambridge college development, the architects produced a scheme in three gently curved segments that established itself as a “new garden-wall building reminiscent of Jefferson’s plan for the University of Virginia.”¹²⁵ Again raised up on a grass-covered mound, these four-storey apartment blocks were entirely glazed towards the interior with a faceted façade facing onto the gardens, with service towers and rear wall in brick.

And Certainly Not “New Historicism”

Let me ask this question to start with: is one entitled to speak of Neo-Expressionism today? My answer is “yes.”

Nikolaus Pevsner, 1967¹²⁶

Six years after he had delivered his celebrated warning to the RIBA that a “new historicism” was swiftly taking over the purity of Modern Movement language, Pevsner visited the Leicester University Engineering Building, then already four years old. In his BBC Third Programme account of this visit to the building, he took, he said, “a good look at it,” noting the exposed concrete of the projecting auditoria and the “blue engineering-bricks” of the cladding. Linking the building to Paul Rudolph’s Art and Architecture Building at Yale and Eero Saarinen’s TWA Terminal at Idlewild (Kennedy) Airport, he summed them up in one word: Expressionism, concluding that “We cannot, in the long run, live our day-to-day lives in the midst of explosions.”¹²⁷ If we ignore the fact that his “good look” mistook red for blue bricks, and detected exposed concrete where none existed, Pevsner’s observations stand as the lament of a die-hard “modernist” in the Gropius tradition, concerned at the impropriety of “self-indulgent” and “self-expressive” architecture where decorum called for simplicity and low-key functionality—what he felt was the increasing tendency of architects to transform buildings built for anonymous clients into monuments to themselves.

125. Stirling, *Buildings and Projects 1950–1974*, 85.

126. Nikolaus Pevsner, “Architecture in our Time: the Anti-pioneers—II,” *The Listener*, 5 January 1967, 7.

127. Pevsner, “Architecture in our Time,” 7, 9.

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¹²⁵ Stirling, *Buildings and Projects 1950–1974*, 85.

¹²⁶ Nikolaus Pevsner, “Architecture in our Time: the Anti-pioneers—II,” *The Listener*, 5 January 1967, 7.

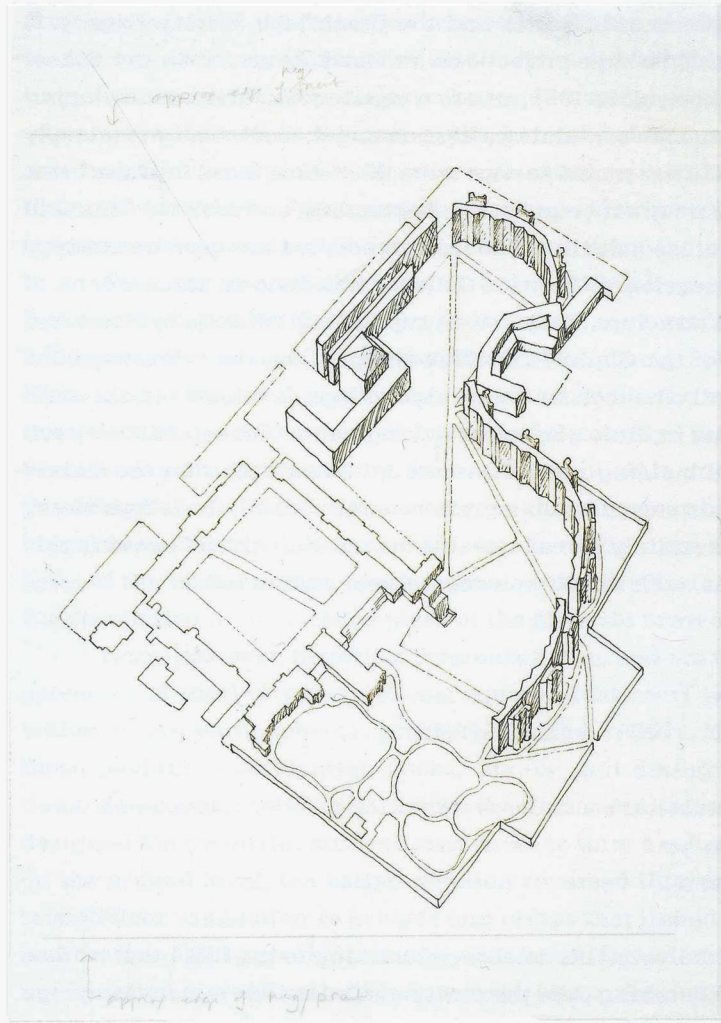
¹²⁷ Pevsner, “Architecture in our Time,” 7, 9.

115. Stirling and Gowan, student apartments for Selwyn College, Cambridge, England: bird's-eye axonometric, 1959 ink and traces of graphite on paper; 29.6 x 20.8 cm (11 5/8 x 8 3/16 in); AP140.S2.SS1.D22.P1

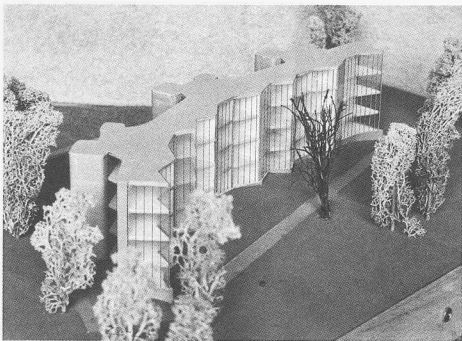
Abandoning the strict "classicism" of their Churchill College scheme, Stirling and Gowan conceived of the new housing for Selwyn College as a linked chain of glass-fronted pavilions, delicately threaded through the gardens as a transparent and mobile boundary. Perhaps this project, and others that follow, at once look to the tradition of British greenhouses and to the more avant-garde traditions of Bruno Taut's "Glass Chain" in Germany (1919-20) and to the Russian Constructivists after 1918.

116-118. Stirling and Gowan, Selwyn College, Cambridge: views of model, 1959 gelatin silver print; 11.1 x 14.7 cm (4 3/8 x 5 3/16 in) / 13.6 x 9.3 cm (5 3/8 x 3 11/16 in) / 12.1 x 20.1 cm (4 3/4 x 7 15/16 in); AP140.S2.SS1.D22.P3.2 / P3.1 / P3.3

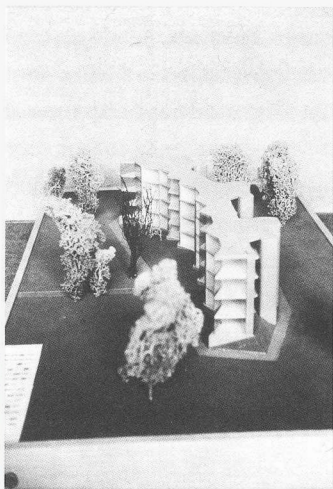
The model shows the glass front and the castellated, solid rear of the housing, a theme that reappears in the Florey Building at Oxford.



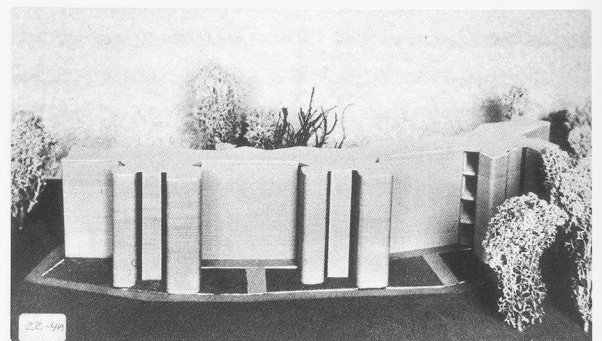
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Banham, by contrast, saw the building as “world-class,” “one of the very few” that Britain had produced since the war. Yes, it suggested its antecedents in the Werkbund, or in Futurism, and “in some obtuse way of its own regained a good deal of the bloody-minded élan and sheer zing of the pioneer Modernism of the early Twenties,” but its originality transcended these echoes, and it stood on its own “as a natural machine-age architecture.”¹²⁸ Built out of the cheapest industrial materials, mostly left “as found,” its relaxed and unpretentious composition simply manifested “the style for the job,” as Banham quoted Gowan.

In the event, discussions over the “style” or “styles” of Stirling and Gowan’s work at Ham Common or Leicester obscure the fact that all the elements of a mature architectural manner were already formed: from the regionalist sensibility came the “fortification” podiums and their ramps, the contrasting use of glass, steel and brick, the reflection of vernacular forms; from the arsenal of modern architecture came the “constructivist” display of functional components, most notably the stacked lecture halls in the façade of Sheffield and the projecting and winding stairs in the library of Churchill College. More importantly, these elements—formed as it were as “found”—already possessed a three-dimensional compositional technique: that of the binding together of the whole through a process of volumetric experiment. As Gowan later noted, this technique had been a part of the partners’ “conversations through drawing” from the beginning, and had been explored through the “House Studies” of 1956, and elaborated in the House at Woolton, the House in the Chilterns, and in the interiors of Ham Common. This formal “welding together” of preconceived elements would become a hallmark of Stirling’s developed design strategies for the rest of his career.

The topic of the partnership has necessarily evoked the critically vexed question of the “contribution” of each partner to the process—a question that was to be exacerbated by the evidently irritable relations between the partners after the break-up. But while certain art-historical approaches might trace back such contributions from a study of the later work of each partner—certain critics have noted the verticality of Gowan’s later houses, and Gowan himself has clarified the design process through interviews—with respect to the overall analysis of the work such speculation is largely irrelevant. Perhaps the most salient of Gowan’s reminiscences of that moment is that the two partners “learned from each other,” and that the discussion was conducted through drawing rather than cerebral speculation. The image depicted by Michael Wilford, the partners seated on either side of him as he passed notes and drawings from one to the other, is on the one hand an amusing insight into a non-verbal relationship, but on the other testifies to a way of working that will become Stirling’s own, as he increasingly relies on the repeated iteration of a design in drawn form in order to clarify the ideas embedded in the scheme.

128. Reyner Banham, “The Style for the Job,” *New Statesman*, 14 February 1964, 261.