

All roof, no wall: Peter Boston, A-frames, and the Primitive Hut in twentieth-century British architecture c. 1890-1970

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Even today Europe's over-civilized sons, when they wander in the primeval forests of America, build themselves log cabins. Gottfried Semper, 1860

Joseph Rykwert in his seminal essay *On Adam's House in Paradise: the Idea of the Primitive Hut in Architectural History* (1971) included this quotation from Semper as an illustration of the strand of thought which linked American rural utopianism, as espoused by figures such as Thoreau and Frank Lloyd Wright, with primitivism in early twentieth-century European culture.¹ Semper was one of those, along with John Ruskin and Viollet-le-Duc, who expounded the idea of the vernacular as the purest architectural expression of region, lifestyle and local practices. Ruskin had written that the English cottage and the Swiss chalet were prime examples of such authentic buildings which embodied national characteristics.² This article will explore both chalets and cottages through their position as the ur-structures in the architectural creation story which is 'the primitive hut'. It will explore the formulation of a vernacular version of the primitive cabin in British architecture from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century while also placing it within a larger transnational identity of northern European vernacularism which informed both architectural design and

historiography. Barry Bergdoll comments that post-Semper and Ruskin: ‘for the next century it might be said that the vernacular would continually oscillate between its role as modernism’s other and its foundation myth.’³

Rykwert’s volume on the primitive hut was produced as the second in a series of occasional papers by the Museum of Modern Art, New York - the first being Robert Venturi’s *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (1966) - commissioned by Arthur Drexler to explore the relationship between modern architecture and architectural history. Rykwert sought to show how the idea of a ‘first’ house had been an animating principle in modern architecture, despite its propagandists adherence to a notion of conceptual purity. This article will similarly seek to explore the connections between a very particular type of modern house in Britain - A-frames of the 1950s and 1960s - and their emergence from a much longer history of British and Scandinavian-German primitivism centred on the cruck-frame. The focus will be on a small number of architect-designed individual examples and will include an introduction to one of its main proponents, Peter Boston (1918-99). The tension between the A-frame’s familiarity as a universal dwelling type and its adoption as a signifier of modernity will be a central theme. Rykwert’s study was primarily concerned with the classical notion of the primitive hut, as exemplified by Laugier. However, as he acknowledged the appeal of the primitive differed from place to place. This article will also argue that in the British twentieth-century context it

included a strong vernacular element and that the new A-frames which formed part of the ‘timber revival’ of the 1950s and 1960s were informed by a long-standing interest in the history of cruck-framed construction from the Arts and Crafts onwards, which in turn was part of a wider pan-North European building culture.

The Foundations of the Vernacular ‘Primitive Hut’

There has been a great deal of scholarship in recent years on the eclectic sources for British art and design both pre- and post-1945 and the intermingling of native traditions with international modern movement ideas to produce not one but a range of modernisms.⁴ Explorations of Britishness and the continuation of national narratives from the 1920s to 1950s has become a mainstay of British cultural history in the past fifteen years or so. There has been a particular emphasis on the impact of classicism on modern design, as exemplified by the interest in the legacy of the eighteenth-century in the realms of town planning, landscape design and the domestic house and terrace.⁵ One aspect of the return to the indigenous which has been less explored is the contribution of notions of the vernacular to modernist discourse; with the notable exception of J. M. Richards’s ‘Functional Tradition’, which will be discussed later. The roots of historical interest in British vernacular building traditions, as Julian Holder has shown, can be found in a group of architects and historians centred on Sheffield in the late nineteenth century whose pioneering works continued to be used as

standard texts in architecture schools well into the post-Second World War period.⁶ Foremost among what has been described as this ‘Hallamshire’ group were Sidney O. Addy and Charles Frederick Innocent both of whom produced classic accounts; respectively *The Evolution of the English House* (1898) and *The development of English Building Construction* (1916).⁷ Due to the county’s remoteness many examples of half-timber buildings survived in turn-of-the-century South Yorkshire, including charcoal burners’s huts. Another of the group, Thomas Winder, associated these with the original ‘primitive hut’ quoting Viollet-le-Duc’s description of the first settlers in France living in the woods in conical timber-framed structures covered with branches.⁸ Winder’s work was picked up by Axel Nilsson, the Curator of the Skansen museum, Sweden, the first open-air museum of vernacular buildings, who wrote that his description of the charcoal burners hut ‘almost exactly tallies with what we know of the cone-shaped charcoal burners’ huts used in other parts of Sweden’.⁹ The British-Scandinavian connection, which was to be so important in the immediate post-war period in Britain, was to be the first step in establishing a northern European trajectory for the development of primitive domestic dwellings. Addy drew on Winder’s ideas in the *Evolution of the English House* and used a series of typologies, increasing in complexity, to present a comparative account, in which form-type rather than chronology was the driving force. It followed the evolution from the tent-like round house, such as charcoal burners’s huts or Irish beehive stone houses, progressing through to the

boat-like rectangular timber-framed house which strengthened the primitivist narrative. He wrote that rather than seeking the origin of our common architectural forms in arbitrary designs, ‘we must look for it in the simple hut whose roof was held up by a pair of wooden “forks”’.¹⁰ (**Figs. 1, 2**) By the term ‘forks’ Addy meant crucks and indeed it was he who introduced the term to the *Oxford English Dictionary*. His typological, nationalist approach was influential in reinforcing a sense of vernacular architecture as a timeless phenomenon organically growing out of the very soil on which it was built, rather than as a socially and historically-constructed phenomenon.

Innocent drew on Addy’s and Winder’s work and he in turn was in contact with Bernhard Olsen of the Danish Folk Museum, Copenhagen who provided expertise on Teutonic and Slav building methods. Innocent’s main innovations were, in the first place, to bring the narrative up to the present day, including the use of concrete and steel, which guaranteed a longer shelf-life for his volume. Secondly, rejecting Addy’s introverted account, he placed British practices within a specifically northern European context and brought Scandinavia into the discussion.¹¹ He wrote: ‘The evidence shows broadly, that although our architecture reached us by various routes from the Mediterranean lands, our building construction is of Northern origin’.¹² Innocent’s transnationalism was part of an emerging northern continental and alpine identity which was developing in contradistinction to a southern European, largely classical concept

of 'Mediterraneità', which was also evolving at this time.¹³ Innocent represented an important consolidation of existing trends whereby the origins of architecture in the primitive hut were no longer allied with the abstraction of the classical tradition but rather with the materialism of regional vernacularism. This in turn became part of a wider Whig narrative of historical inevitability in which as he wrote 'these building grew as grows the grass'.¹⁴ In his 'Preface' he stated that he wrote the book because of the paucity of information on everyday buildings and building practices for architecture students. Students from the 1900s until the early 1960s grew up on Innocent and Addy and as late as 1974 it was claimed that Innocent's text was 'still not overtaken'.¹⁵

Historical investigations into the vernacular were given added impetus by its promotion by writers such as Hermann Muthesius, whose work further strengthened the notion of a northern European building culture as well as its significance as a model for contemporary design. In *Das englische Haus* (1904–05) he wrote that in England vernacular domestic buildings were 'now recognised and with it the qualities they had to offer as prototypes for the smaller modern house'.¹⁶ The influence of the cruck-frame type can be seen in numerous examples of English Arts and Crafts architecture. The gable end as a defining feature was widely adopted, for example by Parker and Unwin at Letchworth and other garden cities, which morphed into its frontal position as the totemic half-timbered signifier of the Neo-Tudor in speculative housing

thereafter. Other related features derived from early single-cell timber structures, such as the catslide roof which projects below the eaves, were beloved by architects such as Lutyens in his country houses. For the new wing added to Folly Farm (1912) he deployed a giant roof with swept valleys which almost reaches the ground and which he designated 'cowshed' architecture.¹⁷ It was also used extensively by more purist neo-vernacularists such as the Sapperton group of Gimson and the Barnsleys whose work for S.P.A.B. had created what was termed by Lethaby a 'school of rational building'.¹⁸ In terms of the adoption of the A-frame specifically, with which this article is particularly concerned, one might single out the work of Arnold Mitchell (1863-44) who was an enthusiastic proponent of the cruciform gabled-plan, as seen at Trevelloe, Lamorna, Cornwall, 1911. The 'high pitch gable' was deemed 'peculiarly English' in character by the historian of the English Renaissance, J. A. Gotch demonstrating that the iconic significance of the gable and pitched roof was recognised beyond vernacular building studies.¹⁹ Mitchell used the same intersecting gables at 274 Norwich Road, Ipswich, 1912 where they ran through all three storeys.²⁰ **(Fig. 3)** This house was the winning entry in the Daily Mail £500 Ideal Villa competition of that year and utilised a two-storey A-frame structure on a square base to provide a compellingly original take on the theme of the potentialities of cruck construction. It prefigures the configuration, if not the detailing, of subsequent post-1945 experiments with the type.

From Addy to Richards: Teapot Hall and the 'Functional Tradition'

The idea of the cruck-frame house as the foundational building type is exemplified in the treatment of what was to become an iconic building in twentieth-century British architectural culture: Teapot Hall, Scrivelsby near Horncastle, Lincolnshire. In both Addy's and Innocent's texts it provided one of the paradigmatic examples of the development of cruck construction drawing on a measured survey by Ernest Skill, another of the Sheffield Group. (**Figs. 1, 2**)

It was thought to be a primitive early medieval structure formed of five pairs of inclined timbers supporting a ridge-pole; as a rhyme had it - 'Tea-Pot Hall/All roof, no wall'.²¹ In Innocent's account this frame-construction first originated in German shepherd huts, 'schapkoven', which then spread throughout northern Europe. The charcoal burners' huts of Southern England were deemed to be the indigenous version, which he thought might even be of continental origin via Saxon and Danish invaders.²² In the later development of the cruck-frame the walls and roof became separate elements but the power of the conceptual simplicity of the Teapot Hall-type, with its unified structure of nineteen feet in all three dimensions, caught the public and architectural imagination. It became a well-known symbol of structural primitivism; even though it is now thought that the building dated from the nineteenth century. It remained an object of fascination and was frequently illustrated, for example by Patrick Geddes at his 'Cities and Town Planning' exhibition Crosby Hall, London in 1911.

Interest in the vernacular in the inter-war period was sustained by a new edition of Addy's book in 1933 as well as by the publication of synthesising works such as Nathaniel Lloyd's *A History of the English House* in 1931.²³ The revised edition of Addy was edited by John Summerson and featured a foreword by Clough Williams-Ellis. In preparation for the task Summerson put out a request in the *RIBA Journal* in November 1932 for information on 'cruch' structures (as they were commonly termed at the time) and received letters from enthusiastic architects across the country, including references to Teapot Hall.²⁴ In his unpublished autobiography Summerson subsequently panned Addy's 'wholly indefensible theories' but at the time he swallowed them whole and as he admitted Teapot Hall, despite being a fraud, became a 'classic text book example' reproduced time and time again.²⁵ In 1934 Summerson and Williams-Ellis continued their written collaborations- with *Architecture Here and Now* in which the influence of the Sheffield group is clear:

Vernacular buildings can show us all the most important things in architecture in their simplest forms. In fact, much of it, of whatever date, is thoroughly "Modern" in a sense, for it takes pleasure in Simplicity, Purpose and Structure. A person who cannot enjoy a well-built barn or shed, or a fine piece of stone-walling, is not likely to get very far in the understanding of more elaborate architecture.²⁶

This approach to domestic design as rooted in primitive archetypes was later picked up by J. M. Richards who, along with Summerson, was a founder member of both the Georgian and the MARS Groups in the 1930s.

Participation in both these societies is often cited as exemplifying the close association between the Georgian and the modern in British architectural culture. However, what is far less well known is that Summerson was also a founder of the Vernacular Architecture Group in 1954 and it was the intersection of the interests of historians of the everyday with contemporary design circles, which was to give an additional impetus to primitivism in the post-war era.²⁷ Tea Pot Hall continued to exert its magnetic attraction throughout this period. At the end of the Second World War there was correspondence in the architectural press regarding the dilapidated state of the building and fund raising began in order that it might be handed over to the SPAB or preserved locally.²⁸ These efforts sadly came to naught as in June 1945 Teapot Hall was burnt down in some overly-exuberant celebrations of D-Day, although its influence through the writings of Addy, Innocent and Lloyd remained strong.²⁹

It was J. M. Richards above all, as Erdem Erten and Jessica Kelly have forensically examined, who expounded the virtues of the vernacular throughout his long editorship of the *Architectural Review* from 1937 to 1971 and in

publications such as *Castles on the Ground* (1946) and *The Functional Tradition in Early Industrial Buildings* (1958).³⁰ Richards used the journal to promote the relevance of his approved version of anonymous architecture as a ‘guiding principle’ in modern urbanism.³¹ Echoing the Victorians’s notion of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ design there was also a contrasting ‘peasant’ vernacular which he deemed unacceptable. The *Architectural Review* continued to publish the ‘The Functional Tradition’ series throughout the 1950s and 1960s with a wider audience being reached through the publication of the book in 1958, in which Eric de Maré’s evocative photographs played a major part. The interest in vernacular structures was boosted through the development of cultural anthropology in which studies of ‘primitive’ cultures by the pioneers of the subject such as Margaret Mead and Franz Boaz, and the rising French structuralist school led by Claude Lévi-Strauss, were making a huge impact.³² Alan Houghton Broderick, an anthropologist, published an article in the *Architectural Review* in 1954 entitled, *Grass Roots: Huts, Igloos, Wigwams and other sources of the Functional Tradition*.³³ The ‘Foreword’- written, Erden suggests, by the scientifically sceptical H. de C. Hastings - drily pointed out that ‘the primitive builder is a useful fiction ... like his brother the noble savage’. Broderick’s argument was underpinned by the structuralist notion that it was not simply the primitive hut which might form a source for modern design but that, with the addition of new cultural anthropological perspectives, primitive societies more broadly might provide a means of understanding comparative

social structures.³⁴ The article concluded ‘it is realized at last that only by returning to simplicity in house construction can the full benefits of technology be reaped’.³⁵ Although the nationalism of the earlier nineteenth century is absent in Richards’ agenda, like Innocent, he was promoting the same image of ‘authentic’ pre-industrial practices and forms to legitimate contemporary concerns.

The Revival of the Timber House in Britain Post-1945

A renewed interest in timber houses began to emerge among élite architects just prior to the War, as demonstrated by works such as Serge Chermayeff’s Bentley Wood, East Sussex (1938) described as ‘the most celebrated example of a perfect balance between Modernism and the English tradition of rapport with nature’.³⁶ Chermayeff was not English of course but part of the North European diaspora, as was Gropius, who during his sojourn in Britain produced The Wood House, Shipbourne, Kent (1936-7). This design reprised the theme if not the details of a timber house designed by him and Aldof Meyer in 1920-2 and built as the first collective work of the Bahaus. **(Fig. 4)** Rykwert used this log cabin as an exemplar of his theme which he claimed highlighted the difficulties of accommodating a primitive structure within existing narratives of German inter-war architecture. It was built for the Sommerfeld family and called a ‘blockhouse’ which means ‘log cabin’, its name suggesting, as with ‘The Wood House’, its archetypal identity. Rykwert wrote that the Sommerfeld House ‘has

always inspired special pleading' but in his account it is the use of timber above all and 'the return to an archaic form of construction' which is historiographically problematic.³⁷ The shift away from monolithic conceptions of modernism that Rykwert was addressing had already been underway in Britain since the 1950s, most prominently in the work of the Smithsons and Reyner Banham. In the latter's series 'History Under Review' in the *Architectural Review*, beginning in February 1960, Banham presented his groundbreaking, anti-Pevsnerian account of modern architecture which was subsequently published that May as *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age*. He too described Sommerfeld as 'an outstandingly difficult case' - given that Gropius designed the new Bauhaus buildings only a few years later - referring to it as possibly 'a moment of almost psychotic aberration'.³⁸ Banham then went on to argue that in fact there is a continuity between 'the log-cabin aesthetic and modern architecture as commonly understood' through its comparability of overall form with other contemporaneous houses, particularly in its horizontal rectangularity. But above all, he claimed, it could be interpreted as part of a medievalising strand in the Expressionist movement in Germany which included other non-canonical works such as Mendelsohn's Einstein Tower.³⁹ Bruno Taut, another in this grouping, published *Alpine Architektur* in 1918 which set out a utopian vision of a Tyrolean building culture (albeit in glass!), including northern Italy and France, thus adding further elements to the idea of a northern European alliance, in contradistinction

to the 'classical' Mediterranean. This regionalist approach continued to be developed throughout the inter- and post-war periods, including by James Stirling in 1950s Britain.⁴⁰ Banham meanwhile argued from his technologist standpoint that the first form of human protection was clothing, not building, but nevertheless he still identified the 'the cave or primitive hut' as the next step in the evolution of shelter and as the first built structure.⁴¹ The persisting appeal of this mythology can be seen by Banham's convening of a day-long 'Primitive Hut Seminar' in 1970 (just prior to the publication of Rykwert's book) which included as speakers Paul Oliver, Helen Rosenau and John Summerson, along with Rodney Mace on 'The primitive hut and architectural teaching today' and Banham himself on 'Back to the primal grove'.⁴²

In the late 1950s and 1960s there was a new intellectual climate in which an expanded notion of what constituted modern architecture developed both in terms of its history and in relation to contemporary design. Increasing material diversity formed part of this broader realignment and democratization of modernism. It was no longer something just for the élite, or bestowed by them on the working classes, but for the middle classes as well.⁴³ The shift post-Festival of Britain to a gentler modernism, the so-called New Humanism or Empiricism, with its combination of romantic and radical elements and motifs was perfect for the growing middle-class market.⁴⁴ This timber, Scandinavian-influenced style was suited above all to the domestic and its adoption in the

United Kingdom played on its associations with the elemental features of shelter, hearth and structure, as exemplified in the primitive hut. The timber-frame dwelling or chalet became a much publicised means of envisaging a new way of living which at the same time had its genesis in primeval building traditions.

The major impetus for the adoption of wood as a construction material post-1945 was the requirement for austerity and utility which intensified the move away from concrete as the sole signifier of modernity. The growing popularity of wood can be seen in a wide range of contemporary literature from domestically-orientated magazines such as *House and Garden*, to the Sunday newspaper supplements and perhaps above all the Daily Mail Ideal Home Exhibition and its associated publications, which helped to popularise and democratise design for the modern world.⁴⁵ The *Daily Mail Ideal Home House Plans*, an annual publication of the 1950s, reveals in its pages the hybridity of form types and etymologies through its ‘Village of Ideal Homes’ which included: the cottage bungalow style; the Anglo-American style; the chalet bungalow; the modern Elizabethan house; the Caravan House; the New Unity House; and the Canada Trend house. The latter was included in the Ideal Home Exhibition of 1957 and an architectural competition was launched to design an equivalent model for the British context, continuing in the early twentieth-century tradition of its 1912 predecessor.⁴⁶ **(Fig. 3)** As the list above suggests

Ideal Home featured both bespoke timber architect-designed houses and factory-produced models such as Scandinavian kit houses by Annebergs-Hus, a Swedish firm, and British ones by Timber Structure (Oxford) Ltd. In a special section on ‘System Building’ in 1964 it reported that all the parts for a typical bungalow could fit on one large lorry with an average house taking six weeks to complete with six men on the job. It was noted that: ‘surprisingly there is less prejudice among the buying public and conservative Building Societies against timber houses than there is against steel-and-glass or concrete’.⁴⁷ Wooden structures were quicker and cheaper to build, as they did away for the need for wet processes, at least in the interior, and could be constructed with untrained labour if necessary. They were also lauded for their: superior heat insulation as compared to masonry construction; the range of possible finishes for both exterior and interior; and flexibility in footprint and section, including the possibility of the new vogue for open planning.⁴⁸

Perhaps the best known of the A-frame chalets of the time was the ‘K-D Holiday Home’ designed by John A. Findlay which featured in the *Daily Mail Ideal Home Exhibition* of 1962. It consisted of pre-cut timber pre-drilled for bolted connections which it was claimed could be assembled in a week.⁴⁹ The holiday home was titled ‘Britain’s first packaged weekend house’ in *House and Garden* and the unfamiliarity of the type is made evident by the caption accompanying the illustration by David Gentleman.⁵⁰ **(Fig. 5)** The article

formed part of a special issue on ‘cottages’ thus linking the unfamiliar ‘chalet’ – Ruskin’s Swiss archetype - with its much more familiar British counterpart. Fiona Fisher has shown how Kenneth Wood’s timber-frame houses were also situated within a national history of domestic architectural development as a way of countering resistance to architectural experimentation in wood.⁵¹ The subsequent book on cottages arising from the *House and Garden* articles included American A-frames; one a summer holiday cabin in Washington by Paul Thiry and the other a skiing lodge in Vermont by Bruce Graham.⁵² In the popular design press it was the contemporary north American version of the A-frame timber lodge, along with Scandinavian models, which were presented as embodying new ways of living, while at the same time referencing the warmth and security of traditional wooden cottages.

The Post-War Experimental Timber-frame House

In the post-war years the small private house, even in an age dominated by public state-sponsored architecture, became an important site for innovation.⁵³ Up until 1954, when building was limited by licensing, it formed one of the few areas in which young architects could make their mark as houses up to 1,000 square feet were permitted, which was increased to 1,500 from 1948.⁵⁴ Despite the restrictions and a lack of money as Powers writes: ‘the 1950s and 1960s begin to appear like a golden age of individual experimentation in domestic architecture’.⁵⁵ One of the typologies which young architects began to explore,

inspired by their new enthusiasm for timber, were cabin-like holiday homes, often built for themselves in the primitivist mode. At Bosham, Sussex two rural bohemian retreats were erected, both by the Architects' Co-Partnership.⁵⁶

These lightweight timber structures comprised one of 1957 by Kenneth Capon for himself and the other of 1959 (extended 1965) for George Scott and family by Peter Foggo and David Thomas. These were not A-frames but in both instances they were firmly in the essentialist idiom with their elevation of single-storey cabins on stilts articulated by their wooden structures. The simplicity of their design and their diminutive scale led to *Ideal Home and Gardening* calling the 1959 example a 'Chalet among the trees'.⁵⁷ **(Fig. 6)**

It has been generally accepted to date that the Teapot Hall-style primitive hut only inspired two architect-designed A-frames in the 1950s and 1960s: one by Philip Dowson and one by Peter Boston.⁵⁸ However, as this article will show the latter did in fact design a second example and there was also an intermediate house by Leslie Gooday which helped to transform the single volume A-frame into more complex forms.

'Ancestry with modernism': Peter Boston and the A-frame

Peter Boston (1918-99) is a relatively little-known figure so it will be necessary to begin with a brief introduction to his career. He featured in the 20th Century Society's pioneering volume on modern British domestic architecture, *Post-War Houses: Twentieth Century Architecture 4* (2000) with three entries under the

name of the firm James & Bywaters.⁵⁹ Lack of subsequent research may have been hindered by the fact that his work is obscured by the several changes in the name of this practice. It was briefly Saunders, Boston and Brock in 1964-66 (with a branch opening in Liverpool in 1962) and then from 1966 to the present it has been known as Saunders Boston, based in London and from 1968 in Cambridge.⁶⁰ Boston began his architectural training in the 1930s at King's College, Cambridge where he had switched from engineering. His education was disrupted by the War and was completed at Liverpool in the 1940s.⁶¹ The latter was then under the headship of Lionel Budden (1933-52) who had developed a position of 'modernism with ancestry', whereby the Beaux-Arts curriculum of C. H. Reilly's glory days pre-war still had an influence but in combination with a new Bahaus-style approach.⁶² After graduation Boston first joined Pite, Son and Fairweather and then James & Bywaters as a partner in 1956 subsequent to the death of its leading designer C. H. James (1893-1953). The latter was a very successful Neo-Georgian architect and in the 1950s the practice's work 'stood on a post-war edge between Neo-Georgian tradition and polite modernism'.⁶³ Like most of his generation, however, James's instincts were firmly rooted in his Arts and Crafts training at the turn of the century. A feel for constructional detail and materials was something also held dear by Peter Boston, increased in his case by his engineering background.⁶⁴ Such a materially-orientated approach, stimulated by the shortages after the War, was given added impetus in the 1950s by a new interest in the honesty of the

materials and what the Smithsons called ‘ordinariness’.⁶⁵ We will now turn to examples from Peter Boston’s and a few other architects’s work which experimented with materiality in the form of the A-frame house and while they may have been influenced by the example of everyday buildings the results were far from ordinary.

The ‘Hansel and Gretel house’: Peter Boston, The Studio, Hemingford Grey, 1959

The Studio, which was originally named The Thorpe, Hemingford Grey (1959), previously in Cambridgeshire and now in Huntingdonshire, is the most acclaimed of Boston’s domestic oeuvre.⁶⁶ The house is also known for its artistic and literary associations, including featuring as the centrepiece of the novel *Ghostwalk* by Rebecca Stott.⁶⁷ It was designed for the artist Elisabeth Vellacott (1905-2002), a friend of Boston’s mother, the children’s author Lucy Boston, whose books Peter illustrated. The interplay between the house and its woodland setting became a powerful motif in Vellacott’s paintings.⁶⁸ The Studio introduces key themes in Boston’s output which he was to develop further in his subsequent career, particularly in his domestic works. These comprised an organic, materially-orientated approach to modern design which embraced tradition and history, where appropriate, and merged the two into a radical whole.

The Studio was situated just along the River Ouse from Lucy Boston's home, The Manor, Hemingford Grey. Here Vellacott commissioned Peter to build her a combined house and studio on a very tight budget. He provided maximum space at minimum cost by using the Teapot Hall model in which the walls and roof structure are combined. He managed to avoid lapsing into Richards's dreaded 'peasant' vernacular but rather as *House and Garden* commented he had achieved 'a truly traditional structure with traditional materials but without recourse to cottagey trimmings'.⁶⁹ In its original orchard setting this created an archetypical primitive forest hut; 'a Hansel and Gretel house in a wood' as its owner described it.⁷⁰ Reviews of the house make Boston's sources clear with references to cruck-frame construction and the 'all roof/no wall' concept. C. H. Reilly, Head of the Liverpool School until 1933, was listed among the subscribers to Lloyd's *A History of the English House* in 1931 and it safe to assume that texts such as this and Innocent's would have been standard fare during Boston's time there in the 1940s. At the same time the modernity of The Studio is announced through dramatic large areas of glazing, particularly the sloping glass wall by the entrance door and the prominent double-height window. **(Fig. 7)** The house is nearly a square, its longer side being thirty four feet, and the larger volume, compared to Teapot Hall, enabled a central chimneystack round which the plan revolves; 'a tree trunk on which the whole house hangs' in Vellacott's words.⁷¹ Behind the stack are the service areas while in front is the traditional layout of a double-height artist's studio with gallery

bedroom above. The interior is animated by the diagonal staircase wall clad in pine panelling which creates a dramatic ‘bat’s wing’ against the white brick of the stack and the plasterboard walls. The wood, in particular, provides a warm and welcoming feel of domesticity counter-balancing the soaring spaces and geometry of the structure so that, ‘the space combines grandeur and intimacy’.⁷²

(Fig. 8) This stripped back décor drew on the contemporary vogue for Swedish-style interiors which Boston used throughout his domestic work. Further Scandinavian influences can be found at Mulberry Close, 1962, a housing development in Cambridge, where Boston drew on Danish precedents, and at his own later home The Mill, Ashwell, Hertfordshire (1969-79) where the distinctive roof dormers seem to be inspired by Jacobsen.⁷³ Like many young architects the James & Bywaters partners went on study tours to Scandinavia in the 1950s and 1960s. Frederick Gibberd is also known to have taken trips to Europe at this time, visiting Sweden in 1957 and Norway in 1960, where he took photographs of large timber A-frame industrial riverine structures.⁷⁴

The timeless quality of The Studio was enhanced by Vellacott’s dramatic use of antique furniture such as the *chaise longue* in front of the double-height window and the display of ceramics in the kitchen. Her careful arrangement of objects throughout the house, echoed that of her friend Jim Ede at Kettle’s Yard, where she had an exhibition in her 90th year and was also a feature of Lucy Boston’s décor at The Manor.⁷⁵ *House and Garden* commented in 1962 that Boston had

formed: 'a contemporary setting in which Miss Vellacott's collection of old country furniture, china and artists's paraphernalia looks completely at home'.⁷⁶

(Fig. 9) This conjunction of the historical and the modern has been much discussed as common in artistic circles in the inter-war period among figures such as the Pipers and Peggy Angus, who was briefly married to Richards.⁷⁷ It was also commonly espoused in the post-war publications aimed at the more affluent, such as *Country Life*. The magazine returned to its roots in this period as a journal for the aspirant middle classes keen to acquire knowledge of the latest architectural and 'lifestyle' trends; a term which came into common usage in the post-war period.⁷⁸ Just as with the envelope of the building the predominant approach was one which sought harmony between the contemporary and the traditional. Elaine Denby one of the regular contributors to the 'Looking at Design' Series, which was inaugurated in *Country Life* in 1963, wrote: 'In our time there has been war between traditionalists and functionalists in the various fields of design. Now, in the 1960s, a long enough period has passed for the extremes of revolution to have been assimilated ... for the new ideas to have revived certain elements in the traditional approach'.⁷⁹ Peter Boston himself adopted this eclectic approach to interior design. In 1959, besides The Studio, he was building his own house in Highgate, north London.⁸⁰ The interior was largely filled with antiques for as he wrote: 'I consider that it is as intellectually stultifying to restrict oneself entirely to one period in furniture

as it is in music or literature. Good furniture of any period should feel perfectly at home in a setting of good architecture'.⁸¹

In terms of 'ancestral' influences Boston had his mother's Norman house The Manor, Hemingford Grey to hand, which was restored by the architect Hugh Hughes in the 1930s. Hughes had also worked on The Mill at Granchester and was chairman of the Cambridge Cottage Improvement Society which rescued derelict old buildings. Peter had helped with repairs at The Manor while studying at Cambridge and it was he who crucially revealed its Norman origins when he uncovered three twelfth-century window arches much obscured by later additions.⁸² The house was the setting for Lucy's Carnegie-winning series, in which it became well-known to generations of children as Green Knowe. It is constructed around a central chimney stack which rises up to a large dual height room on the upper floor with an attic story above with a prominent roof. The gable end to the north side, which was refaced in the eighteenth century, produces a strong geometric profile not unlike that at Boston's later work in Oxford and is further evidence of the ubiquity of the gable in all periods of British architecture, including those dominated by classicism. (**Figs. 10, 15**) Despite the differences in age, materials and feel both the Hemingford Grey houses are rooted in their surroundings and provide one dramatic large space surrounded by smaller ones linked vertically by a central chimney-stairs arrangement.

The tension between the traditional, elemental aspects of The Studio and its undeniably modern aesthetic is reflected in the reception given to the project.

House and Garden termed the building a ‘cottage’ while pronouncing that ‘the cottage life can be lived as easily in brand new buildings as those centuries old’.⁸³ The house provided not just ‘the cottage life’ but artistic and spiritual nourishment, in the contemplative tradition of the primitive hut as retreat.

Powers writes: ‘there are few contemporary house forms that give much dignity to the idea of living on one’s own. From this point of view, the Velacott studio might suggest a rewarding way of life where the mind has private physical space in which to expand’.⁸⁴

The ‘loft on the ground’: Philip Dowson in association with Steane, Shipman & Cantacuzino, Second Pits, Monk’s Eleigh, Suffolk, 1959

The second A-frame already known to scholarship was also an East Anglian example dating from 1959. It too was a studio house designed by Philip Dowson for Mr and Mrs Zander at Second Pits, Monk’s Eleigh, Suffolk in 1959.⁸⁵ (**Fig. 11**) The plan and profile are once more remarkably similar to Tea Pot Hall consisting of a single volume triangular space supported by a series of A-frames at two-foot centres with a rectangular floor plan of c. fifty x twenty five feet. The roof was hung with clay tiles, which are typical of the region, and the *Architectural Review* described its massive form with painted weatherboarded ends as a ‘local tradition’.⁸⁶ In a similar way Dowson

vernacularized a slightly later Suffolk retreat, Long Wall (1965) which has a Miesian plan but is constructed of brick and wood.⁸⁷ At Second Pits, whose name derived from its location on the edge of an old sandpit, careful consideration was given to the meeting of the structure and the dell in which it sits with the roof resting on a ‘dwarf’ wall surrounded by brick paving to form an external terrace. The stack projects to one side of the roof, as at Tea Pot Hall, where it rises assymmetrically from a centrally located chimney place with surrounding brickwork in the main room. In common with The Studio the stack forms the lynchpin to the whole house dividing the studio area at the front from the service areas behind, as well as providing a sculptural focal point which animates the room. Elaine Denby in an article on ‘Keeping the Home Fires Burning’ commented on the persistence of the open hearth as a nostalgic reference in centrally heated homes: ‘As the traditional focus of the family home the hearthstone may be a little out of date, but it is interesting to note that in spite of the growing concentration on labour-saving devices the open fireplace still persists in the majority of individually designed new homes’.⁸⁸

(Fig. 12) The house was described by *Architect and Building News* as a ‘loft on the ground’.⁸⁹ It was designed for a low budget and was praised throughout Dowson’s career as representing a synthesis of the modern and the vernacular ‘altogether more human than the mechanistic perfection the practice has achieved’.⁹⁰

J. M. Richards had written in one of his *The Functional Tradition* articles that: ‘The rib idea applied to structure is as old as the first wicker basket or as new as an aircraft fuselage, and one of the best media for emphasising pattern in structure combined with minimum use of material and maximum enclosure of space’.⁹¹ Both *Second Pits* and *The Studio* fulfilled Richards’s call for a pared-down elemental structure which combined the two. More complex configurations of the A-frame form had been developed particularly in European and American holiday homes. At Long Island and Martha’s Vinyard Andrew Geller had been creating daring wooden beach houses beginning with the single-space shingle-roofed A-frame Reese House in 1955 and increasing in complexity to include diamond shapes and tilting or rotating geometric structures throughout the 1960s.⁹² Like their British counterparts these holiday homes were built for the progressive middle-classes looking for cheap but aesthically satisfying retreats with a rustic, primitive vibe. In Europe meanwhile the northern European chalet tradition was being reinterpreted by architects such as Carlo Mollino who established the Instituto di Architettura Montana in 1953.⁹³ His designs for alpine resort architecture, such as the Lago Nero ski station (1947), manipulated the single volume frame-type to its limits. This was most dramatically seen at the Casa Cattaneo, also known as Villa K2 (1953), which placed a concrete base below a wooden A-frame chalet. The new leisure buildings of the post-Second World War era built in the mountains and beaches throughout the Western world provided another arena for re-interpreting and

developing the primitive hut which were to extend it beyond the scale of the cottage or studio.

The 'Two-Wall House': Leslie Gooday, Wheatcroft, Kingswood, Surrey, 1958-

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This trend for increasing experimentation can also be seen in Britain at Wheatcroft, Surrey, 1960 by Leslie Gooday who designed a significant number of innovative houses in the affluent commuter-belt of Surrey and south-west London. Its construction was supported by the Timber Development Association and its approach essentially blew apart the assymetric butterfly roof, which Gooday had used elsewhere, and took it in new directions. The house was designed from the inside out in order to meet the family's living requirements which resulted in two assymetric 'cheese-shaped' wedges set at right angles to each other.⁹⁴ As with an A-frame the resulting structure consisted primarily of timber walls-cum-roofs brought down to ground level which enveloped the two wings of the house. The brief from the owners, industrial designer Richard and his wife Pamela Negus, requested a low maintenance rural home somewhere 'between a period cottage and a lighthouse' set within a wooded landscape. *Ideal Home* felt that the 'cottage tradition' was captured by the large pitched roofs with their timber-boarding and the use of second-hand bricks 'heavily tarred' to 'avoid the brashness of new houses'. There were also rustic features such as a stable-type front door which opened

into the living room. The decoration and furniture were intentionally ‘sparse and practical’ with many of the fittings specially designed in a robust carpentry style with easily repairable features. ‘Wheatcroft’ was described as the ‘Two-Wall House’ and was hailed by *Ideal Home* as ‘the boldest break-away of the year’. It praised Gooday’s rethinking of the family home, particularly in its daring planning and use of materials and structure which created a ‘rugged character’.⁹⁵ **(Fig. 13)**

The ‘loft in the air’: Peter Boston, 3 Mere Road, Wolvercote, Oxford, 1963-64

Wheatcroft had run into difficulties with the planners and the insurance companies and Boston stated that despite The Studio’s success he was unable to replicate its A-frame structure elsewhere due to planning restrictions: ‘I had a string of bitterly frustrated clients in Sweden, Switzerland, France and at home all refused on planning grounds’.⁹⁶ He was keen on promoting the A-frame for mass-produced as well as bespoke structures seeing it as a cheap and efficient way of providing new housing. The nearest the firm came to achieving this was at Spital Road, Bebington, The Wirral (1959-63), one of the many private housing developments that they carried out.⁹⁷ The scheme included three streets of chalet-style houses which reprised the cruck theme of The Studio with a super-sized upper-storey gable but this time planted on a brick base. The A-frame effect was accentuated by the prominent chimneys, lateral dormers and a single large upper-floor window. **(Fig. 14)** The garages were used as a linking

feature between the houses to help unify the design and avoid the dreaded ‘gap-toothed’ void between properties. The cumulative effect, with the repetition along the street, is striking. The elevation of the A-frame above ground level here was to provide the genesis for the Peter Boston’s next essay on the theme but returning to the individual private dwelling.

This was at 3 Mere Road, Wolvercote, a village on the edge of Oxford where in 1963 Boston had an opportunity to translate the ethos of The Studio into a larger family dwelling. Although there was no architecture department at Oxford University, and no equivalent of what has been called ‘The Cambridge School’, this does not mean that there was no parallel process of academic commissioning.⁹⁸ The arrival of St Catherine’s College (1960) by Arne Jacobson, gave a strong boost to modern architecture in the city inspiring a number of young academics to commission new houses as an alternative to the tall, Victorian edifices of North Oxford.⁹⁹ Among others the physicist, Professor Hans Motz, having failed to engage Jacobson successfully turned to Goldfinger, on the recommendation of the art critic John Berger, for a design in East Oxford in 1964.¹⁰⁰ Howard Colvin designed his own house in Jericho in 1969 while the historians John and Menna Prestwich were part of a group who employed ABK to build them five houses at 10-18 Dunstan Road, Headington in 1966.¹⁰¹ All these sites were in the suburbs where small plots were available on the city fringes.

When the church in Wolvercote put up a plot for sale in 1963 it was eagerly acquired by Mike and Esther Cullen, another two academics looking to build a modern home.¹⁰² The Cullens were part of the famous Animal Behaviour Research Group (ABRG) at Oxford University, led by the Nobel Prize winner Niko Tinbergen, who were pioneers in the new field of ethology. Other members included Desmond Morris and later Richard Dawkins, who credited Mike as his unofficial doctoral supervisor and the intellectual powerhouse of the ABRG at the time.¹⁰³ It seems that the commissioning of Boston derived from family contacts of Mike's in Hemingford Grey and that the example of the Vellacott house was firmly in the couple's minds.¹⁰⁴ The issue, as with Wheatcroft, was how to translate the single-person artist's studio into a family home including for two children. According to a later owner of the house there was much discussion over how to expand The Studio's envelope to achieve the necessary accommodation.¹⁰⁵ The possibility of two A-frames side by side with an M-shaped roof was considered; subsequently used by Andrew Borges at Nodrog Farmhouse, Essex in 1976 where three A-frame bays were placed together.¹⁰⁶ The use of two intersecting A-frames may also have been considered which allows for increased internal space and great flexibility in what can be an overly-deterministic plan form, as had been used at the 1912 Daily Mail house and also in contemporary ski lodges.¹⁰⁷ (**Fig. 3**)

The solution eventually adopted was that of raising the frame off the ground, with a single-storey structure below, as is common in much of Europe. **(Fig. 15)** Esther Cullen, who was the driving force in the project, was Swiss and wanted a chalet-like building.¹⁰⁸ The house received planning permission in September 1963 with a revised design submitted in August 1964.¹⁰⁹ Boston made full use of the generous width of the site to produce a perfectly square plan of thirty two feet square surmounted by what is almost an equilateral triangle. **(Figs. 16, 17)** This produced a strongly geometric form reinforced by the ratios between the internal and external dimensions; for example the final trio of first-floor windows to the front were two foot square giving a ratio of one to sixteen between their individual dimensions and the ground plan. His use of proportional systems here shows a simultaneous knowledge of the vernacular and the classical, which was not surprising in a generation well-versed in both throughout their education. The strong contemporary interest in Palladian villas, transmitted via Rudolf Wittkower's *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism* (1949), and the discussion of his ideas by Banham and Rowe in the *Architectural Review* held particular sway until the early 1960s and Wittkowan formalism had been particularly favoured at Liverpool.¹¹⁰ While studying there Boston won the Pilkington Travelling Scholarship enabling him to undertake a 'Grand Tour' of the continent to study the canonical sites first-hand. He was also of the generation who received a classical education at school, where he took Greek and Latin A-Level, as well as being very musical; the parallels

between harmonics in the two art forms being a key part of Wittkower's argument.¹¹¹ In 1960 following *The Studio* Boston produced a highly accomplished essay on the Palladian villa consisting of a square cube with a play of expertly modulated tripartite bay and window arrangements across its facades.¹¹² The complex inter-relationships between vernacular and classical elements in British twentieth-century architecture have still to be fully revealed. Boston's life-long interest in proportionality shows that an interest in Wittkower and Palladianism was not limited to the New Brutalists but perhaps simply most effectively and loudly propagandized by them; amplified further by the attention given to the movement by subsequent historians.¹¹³

In common with *The Studio* Mere Road's design hinges around the towering chimney stack and staircase. The stairwell itself is relatively narrow, in order to maximise room to each side, and thus once more recalls the Norman staircase at *The Manor*, Hemingford Grey. To light the stairs Boston used the same solution, as at the latter, of placing small unevenly spaced windows in the masonry, although in this instance they are of coloured glass à la Ronchamp, which provide intriguing visual vignettes into the rooms below.¹¹⁴ The combination of a brick ground-storey with a timber-framed structure above was common in architect-designed houses of the period such as: 3 Clarkson Road, Cambridge (1957) by Trevor Dannatt or Peter Moro's own house in Blackheath of the same date.¹¹⁵ However, the use of the A-frame on a base was far more

unusual, if not unique. Despite Boston's enthusiasm for the type this did not result in a puritanical approach to its construction. At Wolvercote the A-frame sits on a concrete and steel ring above the ground floor brickwork. Steel joists were used to bolster it, both for the gables themselves and running laterally between them, which are visible internally. Purity of geometry was evidently more important than purity of construction and the 'fiction' of the timber-framing is evident at various points where wooden beams are left unfinished or hanging. This is most evident in the main living room, where the 'gallows' forms a prominent feature. **(Fig. 18)** It was put to good effect initially to support a fashionable hanging chair while in the 1970s it supported an equally modish cheese plant.¹¹⁶ The structural ambiguities were increased further by the external 'flying buttresses' in the form of iron ties running down to concrete posts which go to the same depth as the concrete footings and anchor the building to the ground. They do appear on the first plans, where they are annotated by Boston as being 'not structural'. Allegedly these were insisted upon by the City Council which shows that there was some apprehension about the design, even though it did receive planning permission.¹¹⁷ The idea may have come from Gooday's Wheatcroft whose rafters were also terminated by four external concrete blocks.

At Wolvercote the placement of the main rooms on the first floor maximises the house's elevated position and provides an interesting transition between the

suburban street front and the rural landscape to the rear. Boston was an assured landscaper designer and both his large-scale and individual housing designs demonstrate a great sensitivity to the existing site and nature. This may have stemmed from his training at Liverpool, which was described as being a tradition in which ‘architecture and planning and landscape were really one’.¹¹⁸

There was a much greater use of modern products in the Oxford house which reflects both a much larger budget plus the five year gap between his two A-frames. With his engineering background Boston was always interested in testing new technologies and he even managed to incorporate Richards’s desire for aeronautical features within a timber-frame structure. The windows were sliding aluminium ones made by Auster, the aircraft manufacturer, whose products were more generally used for transport vehicles. He was also an early adopter of velux windows and experimental forms of heating and insulation, such as electric heating panels. Subsequently at his own house The Mill, Ashwell (1969-79) he combined the latter with asbestos-cement tiles in the ceilings for insulation.¹¹⁹ Mere Road was heated by a ducted hot air system while the water pipes and electricity cables were exposed throughout the house running down the beams. Such devices reinforced the sense of the timber frame as a central structuring and distribution system creating a technological as well as an organic symbolism. **(Fig. 19)**

The width of the site was used by Boston to bring light in on all four sides of the Wolvercote house to create the dynamic atmospherics which he had initially experimented with in his Highgate home. He had first used the open plan there, partly as a way of increasing light penetration through the building, and he wrote enthusiastically of the resulting effects of:

the spaciousness ... [and] the feel of the room constantly changes as sunlight moves from window to window and floor to floor ... One is in fact very conscious of the sky and the weather generally, which is a delightful change from our previous 'normal' house, in which January and July looked much the same.¹²⁰

These natural qualities were further enhanced by the interior wood panelling which lights up in the day and glows in the artificial light of the evening or winter months as well as the minimalist approach to interior décor. This was another feature he had first trialled at Highgate using simple white walls, insulation board ceiling (which avoided plaster-board cracking) and pine panelling chosen to be 'simple and easily renewed or altered'.¹²¹ The impetus for this approach was not simply aesthetic but was part of a trend to reduce the costs of repairs associated with traditional houses and high maintenance finishes

and to minimise household chores. In 1963 *Ideal Home* asked were ‘Houses That Look After Themselves’ an unattainable ideal or a reality?¹²² Primitive huts with primitive finishes were ideal for this purpose.

In Wolvercote the main living area is dominated by the soaring chimney stack which provides the lynchpin of the building structurally, functionally and metaphorically. **(Fig. 18)** The assymetric corner cantilevered fireplace, a recurring Boston theme, nicely disrupts the main vertical thrust here; revealing an influence from Frank Lloyd Wright as another factor in Boston’s organic approach. In terms of playing with traditional motifs at Mere Road the outsized scale of the roof and exterior protruding chimney simultaneously emphasises and subverts that very familiarity. Indeed, as Venturi later wrote of his ‘Mother’s House’: ‘the front, in its conventional combinations of door, windows, chimney and gable, creates an almost symbolic image of a house’.¹²³ Boston’s two A-frames take these archetypical vernacular elements from the Teapot Hall tradition and use them to craft something similar. In Venturian terms they are: both large and small; both open and closed; both symmetrical and assymetrical; and above all both simple and complex. This is not to argue that the two houses are proto-postmodern; that was a much later phase in Boston’s work, notably at the Mong Building, Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge, 1998. Mere Road followed *The Studio* and *Second Pits* in channelling the traditional notions of the psychology of shelter that the

primitive timber hut offered while at the same time introducing a capacity for new spatial, technological and symbolic ways of being.

Postscript - The 'Green House': Cedric and Margaret Green, Delta, Charsfield, Suffolk, 1974

The 1970s saw a new association between timber buildings and the emerging green movement seen at Charsfield, Suffolk, 1974 where the Greens designed three houses for low energy consumption.¹²⁴ Typologically Delta, which was for their own use, sits half-way between the Teapot Hall model and the expanded 'loft' in terms of its form. It comprised a two-storey timber structure with a raised A-frame above a ground floor rectangular brick core containing the kitchen, WC and services.¹²⁵ **(Fig. 20)** The building also included a flash gap marking the independence between the ground floor and the timber upper floor but on the two gable ends only. The interior features and fittings took the wooden aesthetic pioneered in previous decades and used the pine panelling as an almost all-encompassing internal second skin.

The impetus behind the structure was to produce a passive house relying on solar energy without the aid of what the aptly named Greens called 'technological subsystems'. This interest in green energy took the A-frame in a new direction. The two-storey south-facing conservatory visually reads like an updated version of the 'cat-slide' glass window at The Studio, although its primary purpose was to draw sun into the house and increase solar gain. The

review in *Building Design* noted that such steeply sloping glazed walls ‘will become a common feature of housing in the 80s’.¹²⁶ In this way the organic aspects of the primitive hut took on a new life in which natural elements were drawn literally into the very being of the house giving it a dynamic new impetus.

Conclusion

The search for the ‘primitive’ in late nineteenth and twentieth-century architecture was not just a British phenomenon but formed part of a ubiquitous north European regionalism. The particular ‘Teapot Hall’ strand traced here was informed by an essentialist approach to the vernacular which isolated its structural, rather than decorative elements, but used these to produce a new iconography for modern architecture in which tradition and innovation were fused in the language of wood.

However, the small number of bespoke A-frames built in the period in Britain and the planning authorities reluctance to approve them speak to an ambiguity in attitudes towards the type. This probably arose from the A-frame’s simultaneous association with far more downmarket holiday homes, the generic ‘chalets’, which Betjeman defined as a caravan without wheels.¹²⁷ The chalet was and still remains one of the least accepted modern housing types in Britain both by the general public and the cognoscenti, at least in its full A-frame articulation. Despite its popularity in Europe and North America, and its image

as an icon of modern, unstuffy living for the post-war world, the chalet never took off as a mainstream form in this country. Most of the individual timber houses that were built in the period, such as the Bosham examples, eschewed the A-frame. In speculatively-built private estates the pitched and butterfly roof became popular and chalet-bungalows were widespread. However, such houses rarely used their essential structure as their articulating principle and where it was evident there might be very particular circumstances. As for example at a lock keeper's house on the Avon, in which the body of the house sat suspended above the river on wooden piers.¹²⁸

The architect-designed A-frames of the 1950s and 1960s in Britain therefore encapsulate Bergdoll's characterisation of them as both modernism's 'other' and its foundation myth. Despite resistance to the type they were not an aberration which came out of nowhere but rather developed out of a history of primitivism fundamental to both architectural practice and history stretching back to the late nineteenth century, that elevated the cruck-frame to a genesis type. This version of the primitive hut myth was instrumental to a British as well as a north European and Scandinavian transnational identity stretching from the Baltic to the Alps. Northern vernacularism has, as Sabatino writes, emerged and vanished throughout the twentieth century: 'like an underground river that meanders through the crevices of the bedrock, only to surface occasionally and disappear once again'.¹²⁹ Today the river, which diminished

after its 1970s green revival, seems to be re-emerging once more with a renewed interest in timber housing and the architecture of the everyday. The vernacular stream it would seem continues its meandering passage and has as yet to run its course.

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² *Ibid.*, p. 33.

³ Barry Bergdoll, 'Foreword' in *Modern Architecture and the Mediterranean: Vernacular Dialogues and Contested Identities*, eds. Jean-Francois Lejeune & Michelangelo Sabatino (London, 2009), p. xviii.

⁴ Alan Powers, *Britain: modern architectures in history* (London, 2007); Elizabeth Darling, *Re-forming Britain; narratives of modernity before reconstruction* (London, 2007); William Whyte, 'The Englishness of English Architecture: Modernism and the Making of a National International Style, 1927-1958', *Journal of British Studies*, 48 (2009), pp. 441-56; Alexandra Harris, *Romantic Moderns* (London, 2010).

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⁶ Julian Holder, “‘A race of native architects’; the architects of Sheffield and South Yorkshire, 1880-1940’, (doctoral thesis University of Sheffield 2005), Chp. 8.

⁷ Robert de Zouche Hall, ‘The Origins of the Vernacular Architecture Group’, *Vernacular Architecture*, 5:1 (1974), pp. 3-6. See also Julian Holder, ‘From Sheffield to Skansen; ‘Strange materials and curious methods’ in Charles Frederick Innocent’s ‘The development of English Building Construction,’ unpublished conference paper for, “New Light on Vernacular Architecture; studies in Britain, Ireland and the Isle of Man”, Centre for Manx Studies, University of Liverpool, June 22-25, 2011.

⁸ Holder thesis, pp. 332-33. Thomas Winder, ‘Half-timbered buildings in Hallamshire’, *The Builders' Journal and Architectural Engineer* (18 February /25 February, 1896), pp. 24-26, 40-42.

⁹ Holder thesis, p. 337.

¹⁰ Sydney Oldall Addy, *The Evolution of the English House* (London, 1933), rev. ed. John Summerson, ‘Author’s Preface’, pp. 21-22.

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- ¹³ Lejeune & Sabatino, *Modern Architecture and the Mediterranean*.
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- ¹⁵ de Zouche Hall, 'Origins', p. 3.
- ¹⁶ Hermann Muthesius, *The English House*, Dennis Sharp (ed.) (New York, 1987), pp. 15-16. Originally published as *Das englische Haus: Entwicklung, Bedingungen, Anlage, Aufbau, Einrichtung und Innenraum* 3 Vols., (Berlin, 1904–05).
- ¹⁷ Gavin Stamp, *Edwin Lutyens: Country Houses from the Archives of Country Life* (London & New York, 2011), pp. 130-32.
- ¹⁸ W. R. Lethaby, *Ernest Gimson: his life and work* (Stratford-upon-Avon, London, Oxford, 1924), p. 4.
- ¹⁹ J. A. Gotch, *The Architecture of the Renaissance in England* (London, 1891), p. xiii.
- ²⁰ Clare Sherriff, 'Arnold Mitchell (1863-1944): "Fecundity" and "Versatility" in an Early Twentieth-Century Architect', *Architectural History*, 55 (2012), pp. 199-235 (pp. 214-16).
- ²¹ As quoted in Nathaniel Lloyd, *A History of the English House* (London, 1931), p. 11.
- ²² Innocent, *English Building Construction*, pp. 26-7.

²³ Addy, *The Evolution of the English House*; Lloyd, *English House*, p. 10.

²⁴ RIBA SuJ 14/2 The letters included one from the Rector of Scrivelsby who confirmed that the building was still inhabited and that it had many visitors.

²⁵ John Summerson autobiography (JSA), private collection, Chp. V pp. 20-22.

²⁶ Clough Williams-Ellis & John Summerson, *Architecture Here and Now* (London, 1934), p. 65.

²⁷ de Zouche Hall, 'Origins', pp. 3-6. Summerson is listed as a founder member in the VAG records held at the Borthwick Institute, University of York, see VAG A/1-8 Membership Lists. Summerson remained a member until 1990, a fact confirmed by Nat Alcock.

²⁸ *Architect and Building News*, (29 Oct. 1943), p. 430; *Country Life*, (8 Sept. 1944), p. 430; *Architects' Journal*, (15 March 1945), p. 203; *Architects' Journal*, (3 May 1945), p. 330.

²⁹ http://www.pastscape.org.uk/hob.aspx?hob_id=1489449&sort=4&search=all&criteria=Dalderby&rational=q&recordsperpage=10 (accessed on 15 June 2018).

³⁰ Erdem Erten, 'The Hollow Victory of Modern Architecture and the Quest for the Vernacular: J. M. Richards and "the Functional Tradition"' in *Built from Below: British Architecture and the Vernacular*, ed. Peter Guillery (London & New York, 2011), pp. 145-68; Jessica Kelly, "'To Fan the Ardour of the Layman': *The Architectural Review*, The MARS Group and the Cultivation of the Middle Class Audiences of Modernism in Britain, 1933-40', *Journal of*

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³¹ 'The Functional Tradition', *Architectural Review*, January 1950, pp. 1-66.

³² Erten, 'Hollow Victory', pp.157-58.

³³ Alan Houghton Broderick, 'Grass Roots: Huts, Igloos, Wigwams and other source of the Functional Tradition', *Architectural Review*, (Feb.1954), pp. 101-11.

³⁴ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* (1958), trans. Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf, (New York, 1963).

³⁵ Broderick, 'Grass Roots', p. 111.

³⁶ Powers, *Britain:modern architectures*, pp. 45, 70. For illustrations of these and other examples, see Alan Powers, *Modern: Modern Movement in Britain* (London, 2005).

³⁷ Rykwert, *Adam's House*, pp. 23, 26-7.

³⁸ Reyner Banham, 'History and Psychiatry', *Architectural Review*, (May 1960), pp. 325-32 (p. 330).

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 330-31.

⁴⁰ James Stirling, 'Regionalism and Modern Architecture', *Architects' Year Book 7*, (1957), pp. 62-8;

⁴¹ Reyner Banham, 'tradition and technology', *Architectural Review*, (Feb. 1960), pp. 93-100 (pp. 93-4).

⁴²RIBA SuJ 7/4 The event was at the Bartlett, UCL 23 March 1970.

⁴³ David Jeremiah, *Architecture and Design for the Family in Britain, 1900-70* (Manchester, 2000), Chps. 4, 5.

⁴⁴ Robert Gregory, 'Heroism versus empiricism: Festival of Britain 1951', *Architectural Review*, 1235 (2000), pp. 68-73; Banham, 'Revenge of the Picturesque'.

⁴⁵ Deborah Ryan, *The Ideal Home Through the Twentieth Century: the Daily Mail Ideal Home Exhibition* (London, 1997).

⁴⁶ Fiona Fisher, 'Kenneth Wood: Modern Surrey Houses of the 1950s and 1960s' in *Houses: Regional Practice and Local Character, Twentieth Century Architecture 12*, eds. Elain Harwood & Alan Powers (London, Twentieth Century Society, 2015), pp. 156-71 (pp. 161-62).

⁴⁷ *Ideal Home*, (Jan. 1964), p. 49.

⁴⁸ *Architect and Building News*, (March 14), 1957, p. 339.

⁴⁹ *Daily Mail Ideal Home House Plans*, (1962), p. 112.

⁵⁰ *House and Garden* (April 1962), pp. 82-3.

⁵¹ Fisher, 'Kenneth Wood', pp. 161-63.

⁵² *House and Garden Book of Modern Houses* (1966), pp. 128-29, 186-87.

⁵³ Elain Harwood, *Space, Hope and Brutalism* (New Haven & London, 2015), p. 117.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 119-20.

⁵⁵ Alan Powers, 6 Bacon's Lane, Highgate, London, *Country Life* (Jan. 25 2001), pp. 54-9

⁵⁶ For the Capon house see: Henry Dalton Clifford, *New Houses for Moderate Means* (London, 1957), p. 52. For the Scott House see: 'Chalet among the trees', *Ideal Home and Gardening*, (Sept. 1964), p. 61; Elain Harwood, *Guide to Post-War Listed Buildings* (London, 2003), p. 444; Harwood, *Space, Hope and Brutalism*, pp. 140, 145.

⁵⁷ 'Chalet among the trees', p. 61.

⁵⁸ Alan Powers, 'Obituary: Peter Boston', *The Independent* (1 Dec 1999).

⁵⁹ *Post-War Houses: Twentieth Century Architecture 4* (London, 2000), p. 80.

⁶⁰ Information on the practice from Saunders Boston Archive (SBA). On the invisibility of certain types of practice see, Timothy Brittain-Catlin, *Bleak Houses: Disappointment and Failure in Architecture* (Cambridge, 2014), p. 115.

⁶¹ SBA; Powers, 'Obituary: Boston'. For additional information on Boston's life and career I am grateful to Diana Boston, Jon Blair, Bob Bowman and Colin Holmes. He served in the 4th Divisional Royal Engineers in North Africa and in Italy. In the latter campaign he personally directed the bridging of the Rapido river at Cassino in May 1944, for which he won the Military Cross.

⁶² Powers, 'Obituary: Boston'; Jack Dunne & Peter Richmond, *The world in one school: the history and influence of the Liverpool School of Architecture 1894-2008* (Liverpool, 2008), p. 54.

⁶³ Powers, 'Obituary: Boston'; Nick Chapple, 'C. H. James (1893-1953)', (Thesis for Postgraduate Diploma in the Conservation of Historic Buildings, Architectural Association, 2011).

⁶⁴ For other examples see: Neil Bingham, 'The houses of Patrick Gwynne' and Louise Campbell, 'Against the grain: the domestic architecture of Robert Harvey' both in *Post-War Houses: Twentieth Century Architecture 4*, pp. 29-44, 51-60.

⁶⁵ Harwood, *Space, Hope and Brutalism*, p. 124.

⁶⁶ Alan Powers, *The Twentieth Century House in Britain: from the Archives of Country Life* (London, 2004), pp. 119-23.

⁶⁷ Rebecca Stott, *Ghostwalk* (London, 2007).

⁶⁸ Ian Collins, 'Obituary: Elisabeth Vellacott', *The Guardian* (4 June 2002).

⁶⁹ 'An artist's cottage', *House and Garden*, (April 1962), pp. 80-1.

⁷⁰ Alan Powers, 'At Home with her Art', *Country Life* (Sept. 12 2002), pp. 160-63.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 162.

⁷³ Mulberry Close website: <https://mulberryclose.wordpress.com/history/> (accessed on 2 December 2015). A Jacobsen house was included in Harting's *Book of Cottages*, pp. 120-2 which also featured The Studio.

⁷⁴ Christine Hui Lan Manley, *Frederick Gibberd* (Swindon, 2017), p. 22; Gibberd Archive, The Gibberd Garden, Harlow: 1960 box file of Gibberd's diary. I am grateful to Isabel Whitfield for this reference.

⁷⁵ Collins, 'Obituary: Vellacott'.

⁷⁶ 'An artist's cottage', *House and Garden*, (April 1962), pp. 80-1; Harting *Book of Cottages*, pp. 90-1.

⁷⁷ On the widespread incorporation of traditional forms within British modernism see: Harris, *Romantic Moderns*; Kelly, 'Vulgar Modernism', pp. 229-59.

⁷⁸ *Oxford English Dictionary*, although the first recorded use is 1915.

⁷⁹ Elaine Denby, 'Tradition in Modern Furniture', *Country Life*, (June 20 1963), pp. 1496-97.

⁸⁰ 79a Shepherd's Hill survives today sandwiched between two large apartment blocks. It is untouched in layout and massing but with a postmodern veneer added in the 1980s by a developer. On the New Empiricism see, Reyner Banham, 'Revenge of the Picturesque: English architectural polemics, 1945-65' in *Concerning Architecture: essays on architectural writing presented to Nikolaus Pevsner*, ed. John Summerson (London, 1968), pp. 265-73.

⁸¹ ‘Architects’ own houses. Peter Boston: A Plan without a site is an idle dream’, *Ideal Home*, (May 1959), pp. 89-91 (p. 91).

⁸² Lucy M. Boston, *Memories* (Hemingford Grey, 1992); Jeremy Musson, ‘The Manor, Hemingford Grey, Cambridgeshire’, *Country Life* (19/26 December, 1996), pp. 32-35.

⁸³ Harting, *Book of Cottages*, p. 12.

⁸⁴ Powers, ‘At Home with her Art’, p. 163.

⁸⁵ James Bettley & Nikolaus Pevsner, *Buildings of England: Suffolk, West* (New Haven & London, 2015), p. 413. It is often wrongly claimed that Dowson designed the house for himself see: Charles McKean, *Architectural Guide to Cambridge and East Anglia Since 1920* (Edinburgh, 1982), p. 106; with thanks to James Bettley for additional information.

⁸⁶ ‘House at Monks Eleigh’, Suffolk, *Architectural Review*, (Feb. 1960), pp. 133-34.

⁸⁷ Bettley & Pevsner, *Suffolk, West*, p. 399.

⁸⁸ Elaine Denby, ‘Looking at Design. Keeping the Home Fires Burning’, *Country Life*, (Sept. 17 1964), pp. 726-27 (p. 726).

⁸⁹ *The Architect and Building News* (2 March 1960), pp. 281-85 (p. 281).

⁹⁰ McKean, *East Anglia*, p. 106.

⁹¹ *Architectural Review*, (January 1950), p. 30.

⁹² Alastair Gordon, *Beach Houses: Andrew Geller* (New York, 2003).

⁹³ Giovanni Brine, *Carlo Mollino: Architecture as Autobiography* (London, 2005), p. 43.

⁹⁴ ‘Two-wall house’, *Ideal Home* (March 1960), pp. 63-70 (p. 66). *Architect & Building News* (31 January 1962), p. 161.

⁹⁵ *Ideal Home* (March 1960), p. 66.

⁹⁶ Powers, ‘At Home with her Art’, p. 163; Also see: Powers, *Archives of Country Life*, pp. 119-23; Powers, ‘Obituary: Boston’.

⁹⁷ Wirral Borough Archives: WA 1/1/S2766;1/1/S2984; 1/0/2450.

The design was first drawn up in the London office and features contributions from both Peter Boston and David Brock. From 1962 onwards with the opening of the Liverpool office it is clear that the latter was principal partner and designer for the project.

⁹⁸ Harwood, *Space, Hope and Brutalism*, pp. 139-45.

⁹⁹ Roger Ainsworth & Clare Howell, *St Catherine’s Oxford: A Pen Portrait* (London, 2012).

¹⁰⁰ Nigel Warburton, *Erno Goldfinger – the life of an architect* (London & New York, 2004), pp. 172-73. Howard Colvin related that Jacobsen was willing but was blocked by Allan Bullock, the Master of St Catherine’s from doing so.

(~~Private~~ Personal communication from Malcom Airs)

¹⁰¹ Richard Hewlings, ‘A Scholar’s Lair’, *Country Life*, (22 Oct. 2008), pp. 60-3;

Kenneth Powell, *Ahrends, Burton and Kolarek* (London, 2012), pp. 57-8;

Buildings of England: Oxfordshire (New Haven & London, 1974), p. 339.

¹⁰² According to Lionel Wilde, who assisted on the project, the builders were Black and Wilson and the contract was for c. £20,000, a very large sum.

¹⁰³ John Krebs & Richard Dawkins, ‘Obituary: Mike Cullen’, *The Guardian* (23 March 2001); Richard Dawkins, *An Appetite for Wonder: the Making of a Scientist*, (London, 2013), pp. 171-74.

¹⁰⁴ Lucy Boston was friends with a Mrs Cullen in the village for whom Peter also carried out work (information from Diana Boston). These commissions also feature in the practice job lists in the Saunders Boston Archive. Sadly the majority of the archive was destroyed with the exception of a few drawings and photographs, mainly for the better-known projects.

¹⁰⁵ Conversation with Henry Bennet-Clark, resident of 3 Mere Road in the 1970s.

¹⁰⁶ See McKean, *East Anglia*, p. 132.

¹⁰⁷ See, ‘A skier’s holiday house of logical triangles in the Vermont countryside’, *House and Garden Book of Modern Houses* (1966), pp. 186-87.

¹⁰⁸ Indeed so attached to it was Esther Cullen that following a move to Australia she went on to build a similar smaller A-frame house on stilts in the Daintree Forest, Queensland in the 1980s. See Marian Stamp Dawkins in *Leaders in*

Animal Behaviour: The Second Generation, eds. Lee Drickamer & Donald Dewsbury (Cambridge, 2010), p. 170.

¹⁰⁹ Oxford City Archives [OCA]: City of Oxford Planning Committee Minute Book, 22 Oct 1963, p. 141; 13 Oct 1964, p. 272. OCA/FF4.32/ OCA HH4.33.

¹¹⁰ Reyner Banham, 'The New Brutalism', *Architectural Review* 108 (1955), pp. 355-61; Colin Rowe, 'The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa', *Architectural Review* 51 (1947), pp. 101-04.

¹¹¹ At the Mong Building for Sidney Sussex College, 1998 the panelling was allegedly said to derive from the rhythms of the iambic pentameter (Information from SBA via Luke Jacob).

¹¹² This was at the eponymous Boston House, Harpenden, Herts for the industrialist John T. Rusling. See, 'The Boston Tea Party in a Hertfordshire sitting-room', *Ideal Home*, (June 1960), pp. 56-59.

¹¹³ Henry A Millon, 'Rudolf Wittkower , "Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism": Its Influence on the Development and Interpretation of Modern Architecture', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 31 (1972), pp. 83-89; Alina Payne, 'Rudolf Wittkower and Architectural Principals in the Age of Modernism', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 53 (1994), pp. 322-42.

¹¹⁴ Similar fenestration was used at Elbury Hall, Devon, 1962, see Jon Wright, 'Houses and Housing in South Devon by Meryn Seal', in *Regional Practice*, eds. Harwood & Powers, pp. 174-89 (p. 186).

¹¹⁵ Powers, *Archives of Country Life*, pp. 99, 117-19.

¹¹⁶ Elisabeth Vellacott also adopted the trend for internal greenery with an 'indoor garden' shown by the large glass window next to her work area in early views. See, 'An artist's cottage', pp. 80-1.

¹¹⁷ Information from Liz Leaske and Henry Bennet-Clark. It is impossible to verify this as Oxford City Council's Planning Department cannot locate the relevant files which may have been destroyed.

¹¹⁸ Harwood, *Space, Hope and Brutalism*, p. 18.

¹¹⁹ 'Home at the Mill', *Building*, (11 May 1979), pp. 51-6; 'Turning a dilapidated mill into a home: Ashwell, Herts., England', *International Asbestos-Cement Review*, (July 1978), pp. 22-7.

¹²⁰ 'Peter Boston ... idle dream', p. 90.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

¹²² 'Houses That Look After Themselves', *Ideal Home and Gardening*, (March 1963), pp. 41-7.

¹²³ Robert Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, 2nd edn. (London, 1977), p. 118.

¹²⁴ Nikolaus Pevsner & James Bettley, *Buildings of England: Suffolk, East* (New Haven & London, 2015), p. 171.

¹²⁵ McKean, *East Anglia*, p. 100; <http://www.greenart.info/> (accessed on 2 August 2016)

¹²⁶ *Building Design* (May 12 1978), p. 19.

¹²⁷ *Ideal Home and Gardening*, (Sept 1964), p. 1.

¹²⁸ *Daily Mail Ideal Home House Plans*, (London, 1975), pp. 68-9.

¹²⁹ Michelangelo Sabatino, *Pride In Modesty. Modernist Architecture and the Vernacular Tradition in Italy* (Toronto, 2010), p. 196.