

Phoenix steel frame temporary bungalows

Peter Lobner, 15 June 2020

The Phoenix was one of the temporary prefabricated house designs to qualify under the UK's Emergency Factory Made (EFM) housing program. This prefabricated house was developed and built by Laing (today John Laing Group) and also built by partners McAlpine and Boot. The intended life of the house was 10 years.

Basic construction is welded steel frame with painted asbestos cement panel exterior walls with internal timber lining. The house has a shallow-pitched, tubular steel pole roof structure covered with corrugated asbestos cement panels. Internal walls and floors are timber. The house has timber windows with metal opening casements and toplights, A curved metal porch canopy above the front door is a characteristic feature of most Phoenix houses.



*A Phoenix prefab with a simple flat canopy above the front door.
Source: Manchester Evening News archive.*

The basic dimensions the Phoenix bungalow are the same as the Portal prototype exhibited at the Tate gallery in 1944: 616 ft² (57.2 m²) of floor space with a 32'4" by 21'3" (9.8 x 6.5 m) footprint.

The Phoenix has a central front door opening into an entry hall, a living room, two bedrooms, a fully-equipped kitchen with refrigerator and washing machine, a bathroom, and a separate toilet. The kitchen and bathroom are arranged back-to-back to meet the Ministry of Work's guidance for a "service unit" that could be assembled together and fitted as a single unit. The living room has fitted shelving. The master bedroom (at the rear) has fitted wardrobes.

Historic England reports that a total of 2,428 Phoenix homes were built as part of the Temporary Housing Program. Typical unit cost was about £1,200 (\$4,836 US @ \$4.03 USD/£ in 1947). With more insulation for the colder climate on the Hebrides Islands off the north coast of Scotland, the unit cost increased to about £2,000 (\$8,060 US in 1947).



A Phoenix prefab with the characteristic narrow arched canopy above the front door. Source: Gethin Thomas, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/speedtree/16167824860/>



Grade II listed Phoenix prefab at 423 Wake Green Road.
Source: Richard law via <https://www.geograph.org.uk/photo/5794413>



The lounge in a Phoenix prefab home on Wake Green Road.
Source: <https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/midlands-news/experts-look-preserve-brums-rare-13632959>

An estate of Phoenix bungalows was built in 1945 on Wake Green Road, Moseley, Birmingham, where 16 of the 17 houses were listed in 1998 as Grade II properties (nationally important and of special interest). This is the largest group of Grade II prefabs in the UK. Some of the Wake Green Road homes have fallen into disrepair and the Birmingham Conservation Trust is hoping to raise enough money to restore them.



Two of the Grade II-listed Phoenix prefabs on Wake Green Road.
<https://www.spectator.com.au/2014/10/prefab-homes-by-elisabeth-blanchet-review/>

For more information, see the following resources:

- New Futures for Birmingham’s Historic Buildings – The Wake Green Road Prefabs,” Birmingham Conservation Trust:
<http://www.birminghamconservationtrust.org/current/the-wake-green-road-prefabs/>
- Andy Richards, “Experts look to preserve Brum's rare prefab houses,” Birmingham Live, 18 Sep 2017:
<https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/midlands-news/experts-look-preserve-brums-rare-13632959>

- “423, Wake Green Road - A Grade II Listed Building in Springfield, Birmingham,” British Listed Buildings:
<https://britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/101022584-423-wake-green-road-springfield-ward#.Xt8rtC2ZMvp>

Video:

- “Charity steps in to save Birmingham's post-WW2 prefabs” (0:43 minutes), BBC, 1 September 2017:
<https://www.bbc.com/news/av/uk-england-birmingham-41127744/charity-steps-in-to-save-birmingham-s-post-ww2-prefabs>