

**ANDREA WATSON** looks at our love affair with this charming style of home...

**J**OAN COLLINS did no favours to the image of bungalows when she quipped they were like her lover Bill Wiggins – “Not a lot upstairs but plenty down below.”

Bungalows seem tailor-made for ridicule, but were looked on very differently before dreary colonies like Peacehaven sprang up and they became associated with the curtain-twitching lower middle classes.

Indeed, the first British bungalows were built not as cheap homes for conformists, but for the opposite type of person. In the words of author HG Wells, the Bungalow Town at Shoreham-on-Sea was “fruit of the reaction of artistic-minded and carelessly-living people against the costly and uncomfortable social stiffness of the more formal seaside resorts”.

Such bungalow developments, mainly on the Kent and Sussex coasts, were part of a turn-of-the-century rebellion against convention. They were places where people could escape the straitlaced conventions of Victorian society by bathing, going for long walks on the cliffs and taking picnics in the open air, all daring and modern by the standards of the day.

The building style was also a return to the native-hut style of India, where a “bangla” (in Hindi language) was a small, one-storey house or cottage, sometimes with a “veranda” (another Hindi word).

An exponent of the style was Arts and Crafts architect Robert Alexander Briggs, nicknamed “Bungalow Briggs”, who invented the chalet style. His one-level mansions were not created for conformists nor the working classes but for London’s elite.

In the 1890s, another Arts and Crafts architect, John Seddon, created a colony of large, ornate bungalows at Birchington on Sea in Kent that boasted servants’ quarters. Seddon, who was also a businessman, had a huge circle of arty friends, including the Pre-Raphaelite painter Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

Rossetti, who smoked opium and lived the Bohemian lifestyle to the full, enjoyed regular trips down to the seaside bungalows at Birchington.

One doctor, Sir Erasmus Wilson, claimed that in 24 hours “a person would consume twice as much air at Birchington as he would given the same time in London”.

Seddon was an early property speculator, and when he heard that a new railway station was to be built at Birchington, he bought plots of land and drew up plans for a “Cliff Estate”.

Inaccessible from the road and protected from the “riff raff” who had begun visiting places like Margate, it is recorded that in Birchington there were “no German bands in the gardens, no distressing minstrels on the sands, no revolting donkey drivers”.

When bungalows spread from the seaside to the countryside in the 1920s, it was a complete role-reversal. As much as anything, they now became cheap homes, giving the working classes access to the countryside.

East Enders fled polluted London in the interwar years and went to Essex where the famed “Plotlands” community sprang up.

The gentry, meanwhile, soon changed its tune about such developments, and a movement began to halt bungalow-building.

When the Society for the Preservation of Rural England was founded, one of its first stated aims was to prevent the spread of this “rash of bungalows”.

In the US, the bungalow took another direction, becoming an icon of the American dream. With its own plot of land and parking space, it became the symbol of independence for the average man and woman, while on the West Coast, especially

# Plenty down below with a bungalow



**INVESTMENT:** Three-bed bungalows in St Breock, Cornwall, priced at £430,000 (far right). Chalet bungalow in Birchington, Kent, on the market (right).



**IDEAL:** This fine example (above) in Tankerton, Kent, dating from 1900, is on the market for £360,000. Joan Collins with “Bungalow Bill” Wiggins (left).

in California, it morphed into a ranch-style palace.

Many major film stars enjoyed living in bling-style bungalow palaces, with plenty of similar designs crossing to the UK in time.

Today, bungalows are in decline, a fact that continues to boost their value. One-level living is popular and convenient, but the “footprints” of most bungalows are considerably larger than that of the average multi-storey house.

Planning consent for bungalows is hard to obtain, compounded by a new phenomenon – “bungalow bashers”.

Tim Dansie, of Ipswich-based estate agents Jackson-Stops & Staff, explained: “Unattractive old bungalows in rural areas often have quite sizeable plots so are ideal for knocking down and redeveloping.

“It’s difficult to get planning permission on a greenfield site, but in such cases you may be able to double the accommodation with a two-storey structure.”

So just as we are losing them, people are beginning to come back to bungalows.

Living on a single level is convenient for retired people, especially the housebound,

and can be ideal for families. Bungalows are simpler to run with young children in tow, than living in a multi-storey house. And they often come with large gardens.

Add the fact that escape in the event of a fire is easier if you only have to climb out of a ground-floor window to land on firm ground, and the appeal is self-evident.

#### INFORMATION:

- *St Breock, Cornwall – Hustyns bungalows from £430,000. Details from CLC Country Homes: 0208 358 4113/ www.clccountryhomes.com*
- *Birchington on Sea, Kent – New chalet bungalow by Thanet Developments. Details: 0800 0270 364/ www.thanethomes.biz/*
- *10 Ham Shades Lane, Tankerton, Whitstable, Kent – Victorian bungalow priced at £360,000, on market with Kent Estate Agencies. Details: 01227 272 302/ www.kent-estate-agencies.co.uk*

#### FURTHER READING:

*The Bungalow: The Production of a Global Culture by Anthony D King*

## Low-rise homes are in demand

BUNGALOWS are rare as far as new-build is concerned, but Bryant has brought them back in at least two of its developments in response to demand. Regional sales manager Bev Russell said: “They appeal to everyone from young couples to families, empty-nesters and those in the retirement market. Buyers like the low heating bills and reduced maintenance costs, and if you buy new, you don’t have the hassle of refurbishing.”

● At Kings Chase in Coulby Newham, near the North York Moors National Park, two-bedroom bungalows are priced from £169,950. Kings Chase is close to local shops, with larger stores in nearby Middlesbrough and at Teesside Retail Park.

● Bryant’s Barford Burrows development near Stratford-upon-Avon in the West Midlands includes three bungalows priced from £225,000. The developer worked with local residents on the design aspects.

#### INFORMATION:

- Bryant Homes Barford Burrows: 01926 624 425/ www.bryant.co.uk/westmidlands/barfordburrows
- Kings Chase: 0113 232 1400/ www.bryant.co.uk/yorkshirenortheast.