**Homes**

1920s and 1930s Houses, and the Art Deco Movement

The 1920s and 1930s were a very busy time if you were a builder

Lots of people needed new houses, and in just twenty years, 4 million new homes were built, many in the countryside.  Trains were still very important for travel, so many new towns sprang up along the routes of the new railway lines.

Instead of terraces, lots of houses were built in pairs or as we call them, semi–detached. To make the most of their space, people started having balconies and flat roofs where they could enjoy the latest trend, sunbathing!  A new addition to houses was the garage, and when some people designed their house all on one level, the bungalow had arrived!

In the middle of the 1920s, the Art Deco style arrived.  This was a style that used modern materials like plastic and glass in bold colours and with very decorative shapes.

**Fun Facts about Art Deco**



The word “Art Deco comes from a French phrase “Art Decoratif”.  It was an extremely popular style Paris, and if you go there today, you’ll still see loads of buildings in this style.

In the 1920s, the radio began to appear as a regular household accessory. Families would gather around their radio sets to listen to music shows and news broadcasts.  There were though a lot less stations to choose from than there are today, and no Fun Kids!

During the twenties, car ownership increased considerably and houses started to have garages.  But you’d struggle to get today’s cars in them – because as cars were smaller then, garages were much narrower!

**Classic 1920s and 1930s features?**

The typical 1920s house was slightly smaller than those of previous decades and craftsmanship gave way to the mass-produced.  In the 1930s, again properties were still smaller than preceding years, concrete walls were more commonly used in building. Sunbathing was the very latest thing, and many families built flat roofs, pergolas and balconies as sun traps.

The outside – houses were usually a mix of red brick, pebbledash and half timbering with red clay tile roofs, and the new addition was often the garage. There was also the emergence of the new bungalow with all its rooms on a single level. By the 1930s, the bay window had progressed to angled sides, or was half-round. And the 1930s also saw a significant increase in the number of flats erected across the country.

Windows – lots of houses had etched or frosted windows, because this gave the owners more privacy and they thought it looked nice. Some people had stained glassed designs above their doors, perhaps with a bright design of the sun bursting with flames.



Walls – were rather plain and free from decorative plasterwork, but a shimmering or light-reflective paint or wallpaper would have been used – use a soft sheen paint or wallpaper with a similar effect.

Colour – many chose bold colours including black, white and silver, but softer shades in ice cream colours – pink, peach and pistachio, buff, pale blue, coffee and beige – were also popular.

Floors – plain polished parquet was popular although linoleum in abstract designs or black and white chequerboard vinyl tiles were also typical.  Living area floors were often overlaid with a large rug in geometric patterns. An imposing circular one was often chosen as the centrepiece of a room.

Lights – a classic lamp featured female figures holding the ball of the lamp.

Fireplaces – mainly rectangular with plain tiles. Downstairs, coal fireplaces would be fitted with a tiled surround, often in brown or green with a speckled effect and with a stepped profile typical of art deco.

Furniture – lots of furniture was made out of glass and chrome in strong and streamlined designs.

**Schools**

Where I was living with my grandparents in the late 1930s and early 1940s, my school was a typical village school. The village was West Wratting in rural Cambridgeshire, and the school catered for 4½ to 14 year olds with just two teachers. It probably hadn't changed much since Victorian times.

[to top of page](http://www.1900s.org.uk/1900s-40s-village-school.htm#pagetop)

The school building and site

There was just one large class room divided by a partition which folded back. The little children were in one half and the older ones in the other.

There was a dark cloakroom (little more than a corridor really) where we were banished for any misdemeanours. I was often out there for not knowing my tables.

The lavatories were in an outbuilding.

There was a tarmac playground but no playing field. For sports we used a farmer's meadow.

[to top of page](http://www.1900s.org.uk/1900s-40s-village-school.htm#pagetop)

We sat in rows of [two-person desks](http://www.1900s.org.uk/1900s-schools-classrooms.htm) facing the teacher and the blackboard. Her desk was near the stove! Youngest children were at the front, oldest at the back. A great deal was learnt by rote. We had slates until we could write properly and progressed to books with pencil and then pen and ink.

The vicar played an active part in our school life; he took us for religious education and heard us singing.

### *How we learnt writing*

I attended a local old fashioned school house where about 15 children of all ages were taught by one teacher and in one room. Writing was on framed [slate](http://www.1900s.org.uk/1900s-writing.htm#slates) and using the slate equivalent of a pencil; a damp cloth removed anything written; most economical.

*Albert Smith*

eating in the school

There was a large round tortoise-cast iron stove in each half with a big iron guard round. It was particularly handy for drying clothes and shoes in bad weather, as a lot of the children walked long distances and their families were too poor to buy waterproof clothing. My best friend, for example, was one of ten children and her father was a shepherd.

[to top of page](http://www.1900s.org.uk/1900s-40s-village-school.htm#pagetop)

chool milk and food supplements

School milk came in third of a pint bottles and we had it free every morning at playtime.

*If you can add anything to this page or provide a photo, I would be pleased to hear from you.*

[*Pat Cryer, webmaster*](http://www.1900s.org.uk/contact.htm)

I think that why my generation are generally healthy is that our childhood food was fresh and unprocessed. We were rationed so we didn't overeat, and as hygiene was basic, we certainly ate our 'peck of dirt'. On the hygiene front, we were all given cod liver oil and malt each morning at school. We were lined up for our spoonful - ONE spoon for all - no cleaning in between each child! Oh great days!

[to top of page](http://www.1900s.org.uk/1900s-40s-village-school.htm#pagetop)

## Seasonal out-of-school activities in the open air

Once we village children were free in the afternoons, we had to amuse ourselves. We were out off doors in most weathers.

We had the usual [games](http://www.1900s.org.uk/1900s-streetgames.htm) in their season - skipping, ball games, hoops, marbles, conkers.

Opposite the school was an embankment with huge old chestnut trees. Lots of roots were exposed down the bank where we played 'houses' and 'shops'. The dips and holes were cooking places or cupboards. Our 'food' was conkers, acorns, seeds and 'hips & haws' (hawthorn).

We ate the young leaves of the hawthorn, made pipes with elder twigs, crushed elderberries for drinks or just ate them as they came off the tree.

We picked wild flowers in the Spring - primroses and violets.

In the Autumn we collected rose hips for the Government to make Rose Hip Syrup (for vital Vitamin C). The Autumn harvest was another great time - watching the binders and the corn being stooked, with the men chasing the rabbits and the women gleaning for chicken feed.