

Newsletter #2

PREFAB HOUSES

Prefab houses were meant to be a quick solution to the housing shortage in Britain (and across Europe) after the War. They were constructed in factories from metal, stone blocks, and wood and transported in pieces to be put together. As Heather Scobie (below) remembers, all of those constructed through the Housing Act came pre-decorated in magnolia, with gloss-green on all additional wood, including the door and skirting boards. They were meant to be temporary but were so well constructed that some have survived to this day!

I remember the prefabs just through the bridge past Carrick Knowe Saughton Mains. There were a lot there before they built the flats that are there now. They must have been there until the early sixties at least but they

are still around in East Calder, [and] Kirkliston. Across the road there are around ten of them. Most have had brick outer walls made, some have put in tiled roofs, some still have the felt roofs. Although the ones I remember at Saughton Mains had metal roofs. They were always cream coloured. Like a wee house that had been built with pop rivets all bolted together. The ones in East Calder Waverley Terrace have had tiled roofs and concrete panels up the side of the walls and of course double glazed windows. I remember the Broomhall houses in Corstorphine and the Forrester Park flats



The Rentons family in 1946 in the garden of their prefab house at Gilmerton. Lizzie is holding the tea tray with Billy on the far right, Dolly at the front, Billy Nelson (perhaps a neighbour or friend) to her right, Isa, Jessie and Chrissie with Charles sitting on the swing. In 1946 the corrugated metal structure had undoubtedly been an Anderson shelter, built in case of air raids, and after the war ended, many of these served as coal sheds.

having [metal] frame windows which seemed to be a [common] window in the early sixties which caused condensation in colder weather.'

Heather Scobie

•

'I loved the prefab. We lived in it for 12 years until I was sixteen and then it was demolished. I have fond memories of our time in our prefab (apart from the ice inside the windows in the winter).'

Jan Fairbairn

•

'My parents and three of my older siblings moved to a prefab at Sighthill after the war. They then moved to the new houses which were built at Clermiston where both myself and my little sister were born.'

Fiona Morag Grahame

•

'Loved our prefab in Loanhead. We lived there from 1955-1968 when they were demolished.'

Jean Imrie

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'Before they built the prefabs at the Calders, they built one street of houses in Sighthill, where they built 5 different house types to see which used the ground best and would house most people. Well, our prefab was the first one built in Scotland, on that street. We have a picture of the Housing Minister sitting in the living room. It had a coke stove in the kitchen which heated the water and that was it for the whole house. My parents bought a three-bar electric fire for the living room. The walls ran with condensation in the Spring and Autumn and that froze during the Winter. That said, we were luckier than most families, with a three-bedroom detached house with an inside bathroom and its own garden. As Monty Python said, LOOXURY!'

Willie Wallace



Pennywell prefabs, 1959

Gordon Munro is the baby in his Grannie's arms in the back garden at Pennywell Road with his two cousins standing beside her. Families often lived close to each other with Grannies playing a central role in family life.



'The Oxgangs Gang', 1951

Back row (L-R) - Gladys McLean, Douglas Ghent, Maureen Jones, David Jones.

Front row (L-R) - Ian Alvis, Kathleen Jones.

The children are standing in the garden of a prefab in Oxgangs Grove. The fields in the background were owned and farmed by the Harwells.



Two Sisters And Friend In Back Green, 1978

(L-R) - Hazel Muir, Laura Muir, Chris Bell.

'As you can see, [we lived in] a sort of post-war house of a prefabricated nature, with a flat roof. We were the upstairs flat — three bedrooms, kitchen and living room, coal house, and coat cupboard in the hallway. [The entrance was] through a glass door at top of stone stairs. The main door was at the side.

The group is standing in the drying green. Further up was a huge stretch of land, good for football, etc. A hedge divided our [garden] from the downstairs [garden]. The house is no longer there — the Council pulled them down. We had a great view over the Forth to the front.'

Evelyn Muir (née Mobbs)

'My grandparents lived at 13 Pennywell Path. I was there very regularly. My grandad was a great gardener and the front and back gardens were beautiful. There was an old corrugated shed in the garden that had been an old air raid shelter. The prefabs were all kitted out with a fitted kitchen and included a gas fridge. The only thing was they

were prone to condensation and had asbestos tiles on the roof. I remember a prefab a few doors along caught fire. The roof tiles were exploding off. It burned down pretty quickly. I don't recall anyone being killed thankfully.'

Doug Belam

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'Prefabs had these [shelters] as storage, different from Anderson shelters... they were partially buried. Some people put soil and grew vegetables on the top.'

Eunice M Thomson

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'The houses in Sighthill had shelters and there were few left by the time I was growing up, because we roamed the back gardens looking for apple trees and we knew who had them and who didn't. They were all dug into the ground and earthed and grassed over. There wasn't one in our garden, but a suspicious hollow under some overhanging willows my dad had planted, which looked like where the shelter may have been at one time.'

Willie Wallace

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'I lived in Pennywell Grove in a prefab that had wooden cupboards and wardrobes and interior doors as opposed to my aunties' prefab which had metal cupboard doors. We called hers a tin prefab. All our prefabs had built-in cookers and fridges. We had a separate toilet and bathroom, a front door, a kitchen door and a door in the living room that opened out to our back garden.'

Sheila Ross ■

Interested in reading more about prefabs? Please follow this link¹ to browse an online Prefab Museum or this one² for an archive photo essay from The Scotsman..

1 <https://www.prefabmuseum.uk/>

2 <https://www.scotsman.com/heritage-and-retro/heritage/rememering-prefab-houses-scotland-1414625>

What's on

AT THE WEE MUSEUM OF MEMORY

We are open again! It feels so good to see people face to face again — even with a half covered face! You are welcome to pop in for a chat.

Thelma's podcasts from August 2020 to enjoy at any-time

Forgotten songs from the broom cupboard #35: Bob Crosby to Patti Page and George Price.

Life Story: Jackie Dennis - Scotland's First Pop Star

Leith Lives: Leith and World War One with Andrew Grant.

Available at <https://podcast.livingmemory.org.uk>

We produce our podcasts on CDs. If you would prefer to listen to them in this way, please contact us.

Thelma Newsletter, issue 2—Published August 2020 by The Living Memory Association.

Edited by Abigail Cunningham and designed by Delphine Tirole.

Special Thanks— Doug Belam, Jan Fairbairn, Fiona Morag Grahame, Jean Imrie, Joyce Miller, Sheila Ross, Heather Scobie, Eunice M Thomson, Willie Wallace, Evelyn Whitfield

Image credits—Thelma

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SEPTEMBER 2020: GALA DAYS

Do you have memories, stories or photos you'd like to share? We would love it if you have time to send them to us. Please do get in touch.

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