



Jane Apperley, Birmingham

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Wake Green Road, Birmingham

Interview with Jane Apperley

Interviewed by Elisabeth Blanchet

Transcribed by Sonia Zhuravlyova

Elisabeth: Can you introduce yourself?

My name is Jane, and I was born in 1959 and I was taken home to live in a prefab.

In 1959, so it was you, your mum. Can you explain the situation?

In 1953 my family had been living in Alum Rock, in a small terrace house and they had been offered a prefab, I don't know why they moved, but I think the opportunity to move to the countryside, and to have your own garden and to be very modern and so I think they jumped at the chance. So there was my nan and granddad and my aunt and my mum then my mum had me, so then there was me.

And your grandparents were working still?

Yes so my granddad worked in a factory, he was a tool fitter and my nan was a cleaner, my mum was a car delivery driver and my aunt worked in factories at the SU carburettors and then she went to work in an office, so she got a better job.

So all of you were living in that small prefab, till when did you live there?

I think probably about 1963 or 1964. Then we moved to a house then just up the road. They lived in east Birmingham, in Pickfield Road, and at the back of those was a big tip, a big rubbish tip. And even when I was at school I can remember this big tip and the all then prefabs were knocked down, tip was filled in and they built modern houses.

Have you got memories of living in the prefab?

Not so much when I lived there, but we used to go back and visit other residents, so my nan and granddad had a friend Renee (last name) she had multiple sclerosis, I didn't know then but she was in a wheelchair. She used to sit in her



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Jane Apperley, Birmingham

front room, she used to make boxes so they would come flat she would fold up the boxes, hundreds and hundreds of boxes, and if you went round there you could help her make the boxes and I liked doing that. One day I went into the back garden, there was the coal house out there in the back garden, and it was newly painted but someone had left a tin of black paint, I was about four or five, so I painted the door so they came out, and there I'd painted (name not heard) coal house door, that is my memory. So I can remember going back to visit people.

Do you remember being told off?

Told off a bit for painting (name?) coal house door. But I can remember her prefab when I went in, it was very pristine and she looked after it and she'd got a ramp or something up to the steps, some little raised bit because of her wheel chair, so I can remember that. But my mum and aunt's story - they had a manhole cover in the front garden, and spiders used to come up, and my aunt was very scared of spiders, and one day hundreds of spiders came up and then they were in the prefab, they used to get earwigs and silverfish and things like that in the prefab.

Spiders...

Yes spiders in the prefab. But, so it was quit cramped, but I think they did like it, but again it got a bit small, and it allowed them to move to a house and they had happy memories of living there, they had a nice garden, it was in the countryside, you walked down the road and you were in the country. So it was very semi-rural really and now it is in the middle of a town.

And you said you were thinking of a poor area earlier?

Yeah, I would have said it was white working-class people, they all looked after the prefabs carefully, but they'd have been working-class people, local people. Who kept in touch even when they moved away you would have said, oh I lived in a prefab, oh I lived in a prefab, that's how you'd be connected to people. Even though they moved they didn't move far, so they got a house they just moved round the corner, still went to the same pub, still went to the same club as where the people they meet all lived around there. I think if you were from east Birmingham you kind of stayed at that time.

So they left in 1959...

About '63...

And then they were knocked down, those prefabs were knocked down, when I was about 11 or 12, they'd gone then and they built modern houses.

Were they happy to where they were moved?



Jane Apperley, Birmingham

Yes, because it was a house, and as I say because it was a thousand yards away, not even a kilometre away, it is just up the road. So they were happy they stayed in the area.

And you?

We stayed in east Birmingham, and then I moved to King's Heath now, so I've gone up in the world. We considered moving to this side of the city, that was the posher.... side.

Would you live in a prefab now?

Bit small I would have thought! No! But I can see in those days I can see the beauty of those fitted things, the fitted kitchen, as I was saying an inside bathroom was massive, a bathroom was a massive thing and having an inside toilet, which they never had. I know that it was an outside toilet and a yard and here, they had a garden the inside things.

But was there growing vegetables outside in the garden?

No, flowers definitely, but they had a nice garden, my nan and granddad looked after their gardens.

Was there big sense of community?

Definitely, so as I say, if you would have said I lived in a prefab, oh yeah I live in a prefab, which one did you live in? oh I lived in that one.

Like you did earlier with the lady....

Straight away: where did you go to school? yeah very much. And kept in touch with each other afterwards. Went to the Macadown pub, which was just up the road. The Malt which was just down the road. The pubs were important as well, that is the social side.

No pubs in a prefab?

No we did, we had I did remember we had a big radio gram in there I can remember that, it had a radio and we lifted it up and it was a turntable it was a massive thing so I had that in the front room. I can't remember what colour the walls would have been. I can't remember, and if it was wall paper I'll ask them about those and what it might have looked like. But I know it meant a lot to them, and it meant a lot. So even though when my mum and aunt went back to Isle or Rock, they used to say, ah look its changed, I said but you left in 1953, you were glad to leave, it changed then you went you didn't say leave me in Alum Rock,



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Jane Apperley, Birmingham

you oh I'll go to Lea village I'll go to Tile Cross and have a better life, they definitely thought they're having better life because they moved.

(New interviewee – Robert Apperley, Jane's brother in law)

Elisabeth: Till when did you live in a prefab?

I never lived in a prefab, I lived opposite.

Who is in the picture?

Obviously that is Allen on the right hand side, that's Mel brother Allen, there is Paul he's Jane's husband; my sister Susan and me crawling in the front when I was three months old. So that would've been taken in 1968. And the couple who lived in that house was Ernie and Mary. Very old-fashioned names. And they had a massive Alsatian, who was the softest thing in the whole wide world. That side, that is the person who took all the photographs, George.

Did he like taking photos?

Yeah, he was a frustrated photographer.

Nice garden...

Yeah, they were fantastic gardens, that what they did.

Can you remember the other gardens?

Most of them were, mostly older people looked after properly, people did look after their gardens then. Nice thing to see.

So what year is that?

1968.

When did they start knocking them down?

1985/6, which I helped knock them down as well. I had a Saturday job knocking them down.

Did you?

Yeah, me and Simon did, for a tenner a day.

What can you remember when you went in, what did you see?



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Jane Apperley, Birmingham

Just come in the smell, there was always as sort of damp smell, not very good drainage. And we used them as our second homes. When we were in the park playing, if we needed a drink of water, we didn't bother going across the road we just went into one of their houses get a drink of water or lemonade. Sent back out again without making a mess. All the old people knew us, we used run in and out of the houses. Kicked a ball in their garden, they didn't care less. Really nice thing to see.

And you living in a big house, did you sometimes look down on the people living in the prefabs?

As I said they all treated us so well, I don't think working-class people thought like that. I didn't know any better, I didn't know posh people, they were just people that we knew. If my parents liked them, we tended to like them. There was always people, oh he is a bit more grumpy than everybody else. They loved us all as kids. Must have been four or five families with kids, up and down we all went running in the houses, they didn't mind at all. Playing sports, kicking a ball on a fence, they didn't mind, no one ever tell you off, because they knew who you were. If you done anything wrong they knew to tell our parents, that was very rare occasions.

I don't think anyone looked down on you if you lived in a prefab, it was just another sort of house. You only wanted another house if you needed more room or something.

People looked after themselves.