

THE PREFAB POST

June 2017

Issue 5 Tarran Prefabs Special

Free

June Kapitan's prefab memories, Ipswich, Suffolk



June, her husband and their son Jaroslav moved into a Tarran prefab in Ipswich in 1955 when Jaroslav was just four months old. They lived there until 1964 and moved out after Jaroslav's sister was born. In 2010, June came back to live on the estate where there are still 142 prefabs standing. She moved into a prefab that is very close to her original home. In 2013 Ipswich's post-war prefabs were threatened with demolition but their residents voted to save them, the council gave them a new lease of life by re-doing the roofs, installing new kitchens and bathrooms and improving insulation. They remain very popular with many tenants who like their bungalow layout – and the large gardens that come with them. June and Jaroslav tell us more:

June: I was on my own [when I came back to the estate], I don't think I'd get a council house with two bedrooms now. They're cosy, you know?

Jaroslav: They're easy to maintain and everything is convenient. The prefab is warm, it's pretty economical to run. It's an area that's quiet – there are no problems here. You've got a nice plot of land for sitting out – which makes it very attractive.

June: It's just what you were offered in the 1950s, there wasn't really a choice. I thought it was like a rabbit hutch when I first saw it. But now they've made them really lovely.

Jaroslav: The big difference was that nearly everyone was young back then, with children. But now it's the older generation using them. I said they can't last forever, but they have done so far.

June: It was lovely having a fire. It was the odd horse and cart back then that brought the coal.

Jaroslav: It used to get so damn cold, we had a galvanised tin bath and sometimes we'd have a bath in front of the fire – it was the only way to keep warm. But growing up here was wonderful. There were so many children here, in those

days parents didn't really know where you were; you just left in the morning and turned up for meals. It was an idyll really. But of course I knew nothing else – I didn't know there were any other places to live – all my friends lived in prefabs. You were in an out of other people's prefabs all the time. But that doesn't really happen anymore, life has changed. There was much more of a community spirit – the whole place was much more community-minded in that era.

June: When we came here the first time, there was a fridge, a copper and a sink – great for washing nappies, we didn't have disposable ones then, you know? There was a big lawn, we were almost self-sufficient really, we grew lots of veggies. And we had lots of parties, when the children were young.

Jaroslav: In those days, family was important and the number of people that mum and dad entertained in the prefab, about 20 at a time... but they did it! To be honest, life was so different then – we never thought about how we lived, in those days it just wasn't an issue, at least not that I recall. It was all about your personality, and not where or how you lived.



Prefabs in Chesterfield

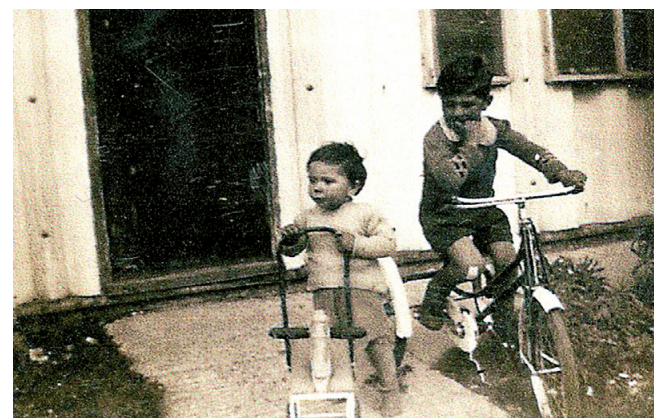
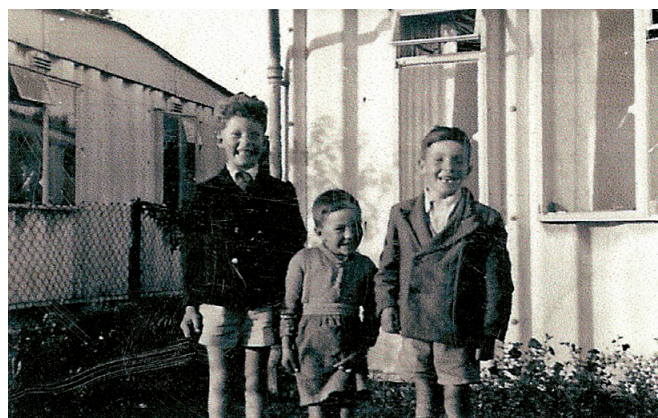
Elisabeth Blanchet on the successful regeneration of prefabs in North Derbyshire

In 2005, I was contacted by a prefab enthusiast, Graham Burton, who lived in a prefab in North Wingfield, North Derbyshire. Passionate about the prefab he had bought in the 1990s, he had collected lots of information about prefabs, their history and their locations. He invited me to his prefab and suggested a little prefab road trip around North Wingfield and Chesterfield. I was over the moon.

I had never been to that part of the UK and was excited to discover “new” prefabs of a type I had never seen before: the Tarrans. Mr Tarran’s company was in Hull and most of his 19,000 prefabs were erected in the north of the UK. I remember it as a sunny summer day. After visiting Graham and his wife Maureen’s lovely prefab, we went to his neighbour Margaret’s prefab too.



We then embarked on a lovely trip to places where Graham had spotted prefabs: in and around Chesterfield and North Wingfield. There were plenty. When we could, we talked to the residents. Some invited us in and we were offered the usual and inevitable tea and biscuits. Everyone we talked to was attached to their prefab. I came back enchanted, with lots of film I couldn’t wait to process – yes, it was still the era of film! – and I was very happy with the result and the effect of a blue Derbyshire sky on the lovely prefabs.



Graham and I kept on exchanging information, photos and discoveries. He is a natural prefab scout and regularly updated me on his finds. About five years ago he mentioned to me a few prefab estates were to be regenerated and gave me the name of the housing company in charge, Rykneld Homes. I was curious to find out what their plans were.

I met with them a few times and went with them to meet some lovely residents. They made it much easier for me to record and film residents and I could also see how they were dealing with the issue of rehousing. Their approach was to replace the Tarrans with similar brick bungalows that would cost them less to maintain. What they did, which I found really interesting and humane, is spend a lot of time and energy talking to the prefab residents and asking their opinion on the layout of their future bungalow, on the size of the garden, on the neighbours they would like to be close to... And what they managed to achieve is impressive: residents were not forced to move out of the estates. They stayed in their prefabs until the end and moved into their new bungalows as soon as they were ready.



Photo credit top row left: Graham Burton in front of his prefab, North Wingfield 2005. Top row right: Tarran prefab in Chesterfield, 2005 (© Elisabeth Blanchet)

The photos in the middle row come from Graham Burton’s Chesterfield prefabs archive.

Bottom row left and middle: regeneration of Tarran prefabs in Eckington, North Derbyshire, 2015 (© Elisabeth Blanchet)

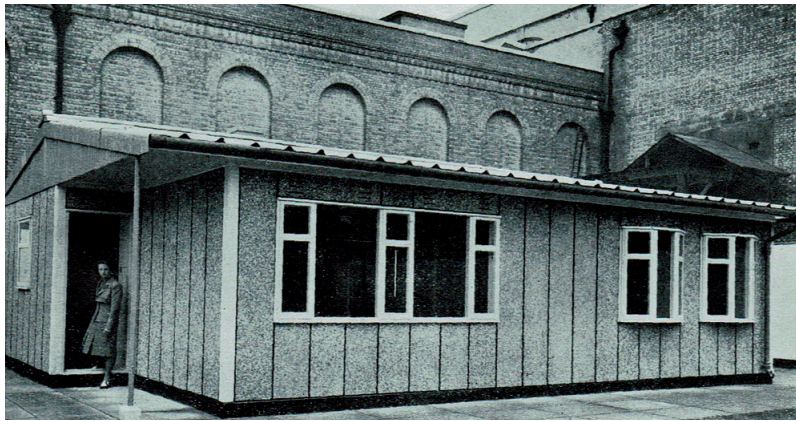
Bottom row right: Peggy Pickford at the door of her brand-new bungalow, Eckington, North Derbyshire, 2015 (© Elisabeth Blanchet)

What's the story?

The Tarran was designed by the building firm of Robert Greenwood Tarran of Hull. It was built of precast concrete panels on a wooden frame. More than 19,000 Tarrans were erected under the Temporary Housing Act, but one- and two-storey variants were built in some numbers afterwards. Robert Tarran, who had started life as an apprentice joiner, built up his successful building company in Hull. He was an early prefab enthusiast – his prefabricated panels were used in the construction of Quarry Hill Flats in Leeds in the mid-1930s, which was the largest public housing project in Europe at that time.



Tarran also produced parabolic prefabricated huts for the war effort and worked hard to promote his temporary prefabs, which were eventually included in the Temporary Housing Programme, despite weighing 14 tons, which was much heavier than the other models. Robert Tarran served as sheriff of Hull and chief air raid warden during the war. He later wrote:



“During the war, the men, women and children of this city have been subjected to the enemy’s most venomous and brutal attacks from the air, although in view of our importance as a target to the enemy, it was expected that we would have to suffer. The fortitude shown, not only by all the civil defence workers but by the ordinary folk, is something which has inspired the hearts and minds of all those who have come among us.”

Photo on the right: Tarrans in Bants Crescent Nottingham 1949, sent to us by Eunice Goude
Photo on the left: Prototype Tarran bungalow exhibited at the Tate Gallery, London 1944

Where can you see a Tarran prefab?

Tarran prefab bungalows constitute most of the prefabs still lived in today, mainly in the East, North East of England and Scotland. These sturdy bungalows were built to last!

You can find them on our map www.prefabmuseum.uk/map.



The large estate in Ipswich, Suffolk, was refurbished in 2015 after a campaign by residents, supported by local councillors. We contacted Alasdair Ross, Rushmere Ward councillor, after reading about it in a local newspaper. This is what he said:

“These great homes were built just after the war and their initial lifespan was believed to be between 10 and 20 years, but they have lasted much longer mainly due to the loving care they have been shown by the residents. Whenever one becomes vacant it is not long till a new resident moves in. We call them prefabs but to residents of Inverness Road, Humber Doucy Lane and Sidegate Lane these are just homes – much-loved homes.”



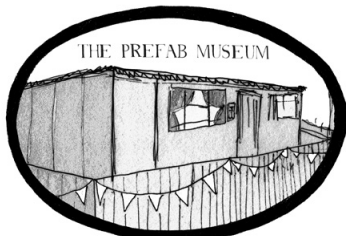
Alasdair put us in touch with Ipswich council housing office and subsequently we were contacted by Jaroslav Kapitan, whose family features on our front page.

Gentoo in Springwell, Sutherland, recently refurbished 100 Tarrans with external-wall insulation and double glazing, at a total cost of £900,000 – that’s £9,000 per Tarran.

There are also two examples that we know of in museums: Eden Camp Modern History Theme Museum in Malton, North Yorkshire, and Sandtoft Trolley Bus Museum in Epworth, near Doncaster.



Photo left interior of the Eden Camp Tarran prefab (© Jonny Pye)
Photo right top: Sandtoft Trolleybus Museum prefab, 2016 (© Charles Horsey)
Photo right bottom: Eden Camp Tarran prefab (© Jonny Pye)



What is new for The Prefab Museum in 2017



As we move into the final stage of our project, which ends in December 2017, we would like to thank all the participating museums and organisations that have welcomed and will welcome the Moving Prefab to their venues. By the time the project finishes we will have travelled more than 3000 miles taking our prefabs knowledge and enthusiasm to reach more than 1000 people across the UK.

With the help of UCL students we began cataloguing our archive in March. We continue to receive valuable contributions from former and current prefab residents – please keep them coming.

We made a site visit to St Fagans National History Museum in Cardiff and will bring our Moving Prefab to the museum on Saturday 23rd September. If you are in the area please come along to this fascinating museum – and visit us and the AIROH prefab of course!

In May we took a party from Lee Green WI on a guided walk of Brockley and Nunhead. Sadly, John De'Ath, who lived in his Brockley prefab since 1947, passed away on 22nd May. We were privileged to meet John last year and learn about his early life in Deptford and later in the prefab.

We also gave a talk and had a stall at the Friends of the Island History Trust in mid-May on the Isle of Dogs. More than 200 people attended the event.

We had very productive meetings with the Rural Life Centre and with the Birmingham Conservation Trust/20th Century Society West Midlands regarding the next steps for the archive and the future of the Wake Green Road prefabs.

On 24th June, we will hold a joint event at St Marks Hall on the Excalibur Estate, Catford, London with Architects 4 Social Housing/Open Gardens Estates. The event is called Estates of Memory and is part of the London Festival of Architecture 2017.

In 2017 we will be visiting several new and some familiar venues across the UK.

1st July

10:00 – 17:00. Eden Camp Modern History Theme Museum.
Museum entry fee applies. Malton, North Yorkshire YO17 6RT

16th July

10:00 – 17:00. Rural Life Centre. Museum entry fee applies.
Reeds Road, Tilford, Farnham, Surrey GU10 2DL

7th August

15:00 – 16:00. Redbridge Pensioners Forum.
Please contact the forum for details.
Ilford Library, 152 Clements Road, Ilford IG1

Early September/ Date TBA

Wake Green Road listed prefabs.
Please check our Facebook page and updates.
Wake Green Road, Moseley, Birmingham B13 0BJ

23rd September

11:00 – 16:00. St Fagans National History Museum
Free entry. Cardiff CF5 6XB

3rd October

14:30 – 17:00. Talk at Silver End Heritage Society.
Please contact the society for details.
Silver End, Witham, Essex CM8 3QF

14th October

11:00 – 16:30. Friends of Broomhill/Friends of Medway Archives
Venue TBA. Strood, Kent

2nd December

13:00 – 17:00. End of project archive tea party.
St Johns Community Centre Glengall Grove, London, E14

www.prefabmuseum.uk

www.facebook.com/PalacesForThePeople

www.twitter.com/Prefabs_UK

THE PREFAB POST

With thanks to June and Jaroslav Kapitan, Graham and Maureen Burton, Peggy Pickford, Alasdair Ross, Rykneld Homes, Eunice Goude, Jonny Pye, Charles Horsey, Keara Stewart, Selim Korycki, Sonia Zhuravlyova.
The Prefab Post is printed with the help of the Heritage Lottery Fund.

THE PREFAB MUSEUM

The Prefab Museum is co-curated by Elisabeth Blanchet and Jane Hearn. We both love prefabs, especially the post-war ones. They were built to last 10 to 15 years in 1946 but are still standing today!

Contact: www.prefabmuseum.uk prefabmuseum@gmail.com
www.facebook.com/PalacesForThePeople