

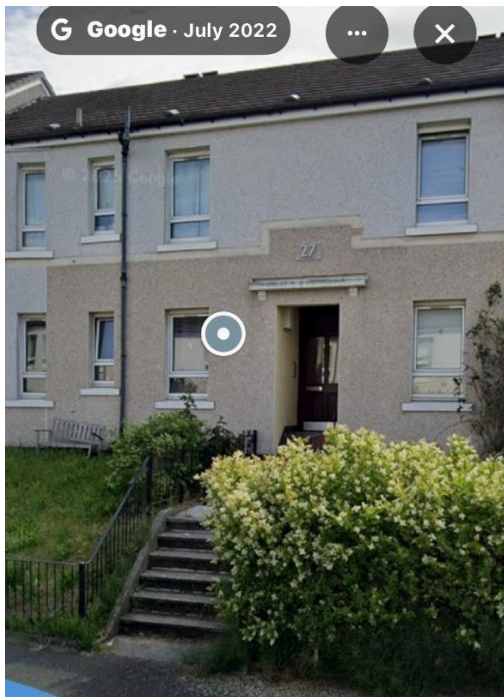
# Next Move

*Below is a synoptic account of the various houses I have lived in since birth.*

*I was prompted to do this as a record for my family, particularly my five grandsons who have always lived in spacious, well-heated houses free of dirt, dust, soot and the stink of smoke from cigarettes and pipe tobacco. And overflowing ashtrays. Ugh!*

## Carnwadric

I was born in my grandparents' two-bedroomed council flat at 27 Drumpark Street, Carnwadric.<sup>i</sup>



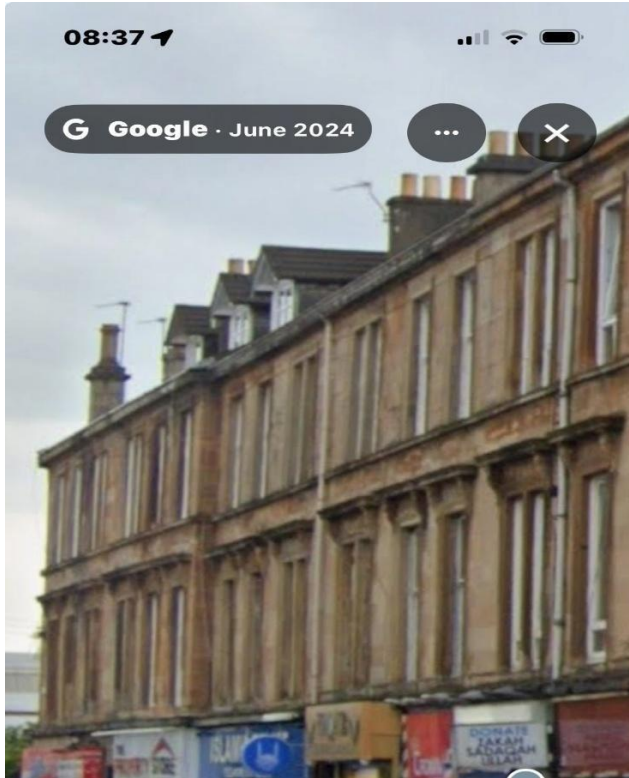
This is how the house looks nowadays.

Granny Bonthron was an unregistered midwife who delivered over a hundred babies. In 1947 the NHS was not yet in full operation and I was one of her last home births. My mother's family doctor (Dr Granet) visited to inspect mother and child and approved of what he saw.

# Next Move

## Pollokshields

My parents were living in an attic room somewhere in Forth Street, off Albert Road, a ten-minute walk from Granny Bremner's house at 19 Govanhill Street.



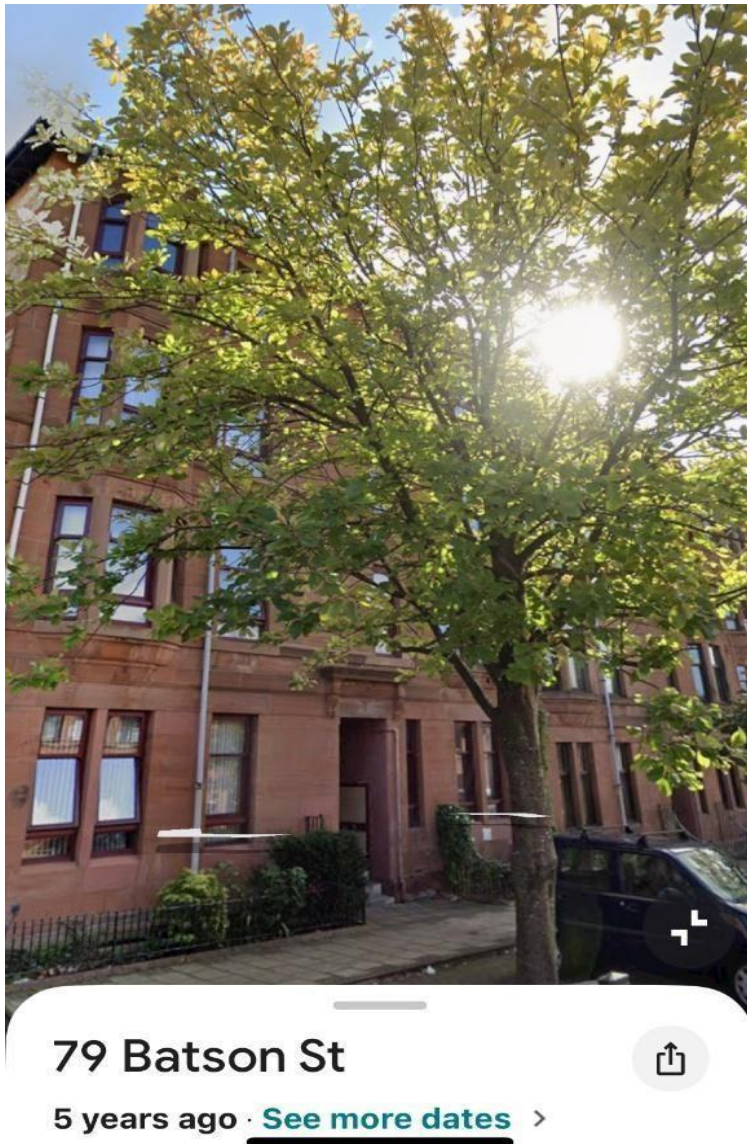
My mother Betty was her youngest child of six surviving children. Bettina Bremner was so named because Granny had read somewhere that the Aga Khan's wife was called Bettina.<sup>ii</sup>

## Batson Street, Govanhill

My first real memories are associated with a ground floor house <sup>iii</sup> where we were lodgers occupying a bedroom which also served as our living space. It was directly opposite Hollybrook Street School, attended by disadvantaged and handicapped children.

According to later information from my parents, our widowed landlady Mrs Sprunt <sup>iv</sup> was a tyrant. In my memory, she was short, stout, grey-haired and always scolding my mother. I think most of my days were spent either at a nursery or with Granny Bremner who lived a few streets away.

## Next Move



We were on the ground floor. Mrs Sprunt was a tyrant.

My mother worked part-time in a small SCWS grocery shop in Calder Street, just a few minutes from Batson Street. In previous years she had been a counter hand in a bigger, SCWS store, starting straight from school aged fourteen and working there until a few months before I was born. Our SCWS Share Number, (still embedded) was 86259.

All around us we were surrounded by the Bremner clan and my mother seemed to know everyone in Govanhill. My grandfather Donald Bremner had been a slater and was one of the local chimney sweeps.

## Next Move

Grampa Donald died of a heart attack when my mother (Bettina - Betty) was seven years old. Granny Bremner struggled to bring up the family on the income from her older children.

Granny Bremner and Aunt Marie (unmarried) lived in a room and kitchen with an inside WC (no washbasin) at 19 Govanhill Street. Aunt Edith and Uncle Malcolm were at 27 Govanhill Street. Uncle Jimmy and Aunt Dorothy lived in Preston Street (one street away) while Aunt Ella (Helen) and Uncle Willie Duncan in Calder Street, a five minute walk from Granny's house. Unlike us at Batson Street, each of these families were tenants with their own front door.

Mum's eldest brother Uncle Dan (Donald) and his wife Aunt Lilly (Lilias) lived in a posh red sandstone flat in Tantallon Road, in Shawlands, a vast step up the social ladder from Govanhill, in those far off times. In my childhood memory their home was a vast apartment with a large dining kitchen, two large bedrooms, a posh front room and a long thin bathroom all accessed from a large square hallway.

Uncle Billy (Jimmy's twin) lived in Rutherglen with Aunt Agnes in a room and kitchen, I think. It was ordinary, not as smart as the Govanhill and a world away from Tantallon Road.

## Pollokshaws

I was probably about three years old (circa 1950) when we moved to a "single end" at 84 Greenview Street, where I lived for around six years. I still have strong memories from that time and when I close my eyes I can visual the most important details. The buildings were swept away about a decade later when Pollokshaws was redeveloped.

*As an aside, the general ambience of Glasgow at that time has been wonderfully captured in the film, "From Scotland with Love".* ♥

Our new home was part of two adjoining blocks, each with eight 'single ends', four on the ground floor and floor above. Gentrified, it could be described as a 'mews property', pre-dating the red sandstone four-storey building which fronted onto Greenview Street and hid us from public view.



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From today's perspective, our single end could be fairly described as a *hovel* but at last, after about four years of marriage, my parents were able to close their own front door free of the indignities and compromises of cohabiting with others.

*(I have no firm record of when these sixteen single ends were built but in one of my stories I dubbed them 'dye-workers cottages'.<sup>vi</sup> In a modified format our single end features in a few of these stories.<sup>vii</sup>)*

In the 1950s, Greenview Street was a busy place with a tramline running about a further mile to a tram depot in Shawlands. There was a tram turning point directly opposite No 84.



(This image does **not** depict the area around 84 Greenview Street)

Looking across from the tram stop towards No 84, on the left of the close was *Frasers Funeral Directors*. Most days there were two large black Rolls Royce vehicles parked outside, one a large passenger car for the principal mourners, the second a hearse. Left of *Frasers'* at the corner of Pollokshaws Road and Greenview Street, was a public house called *The Pollock Bar* which had a Ladies Parlour and an off-licence counter which sold soda water using rechargeable syphons. Directly across the street at the junction of Pollokshaws Road and Haggs Road, there was a second public house called *The Old Swan Inn*, which still exists under the name *Eala Bahn* (which translates from Gaelic as *The White Swan*).

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Looking across from the tram stop towards the close at No 84, on the right was a low rise building with a fish and chip shop and a few single ends above, these accessed by open stairways from the rear (no railings).

Approaching the Dye-Workers' Cottages through the close at No. 84, meant our 'mews' development was concealed behind the four-storey red sandstone fronted building. With commercial enterprises on either side of this close, there were no ground floor tenants, just a winding poorly lit stairway to the three tenanted storeys of flats above. Being on a corner, it was a dark close and stairway, illuminated only by a rooflight.

This micro-housing development of sixteen single ends probably dated from the mid-1800s making them about a hundred years old when we moved in. The original construction was shoddy and the fabric had not been maintained. As a result our single end was poorly insulated, suffered from rising damp and had damaged chimney flues.

The rear of the close led to a shared back yard. Directly ahead was our left-hand block comprising four ground floor 'single ends' with another four directly above. On the right, this backyard was partly hidden by a high dividing wall behind which was a mirror imaged semi-detached block of eight single ends.

Hard against this dividing wall were dustbin shelters (known as "midgies") and lean-to coal cellars hard against the dividing wall. Our mirror image neighbours behind this wall were a mystery to me, except for their cats which patrolled the top of the wall, staring down at us imperiously and occasionally sleeping, stretched along the top, basking in the sun.

To the left side of our private back court, there was a second high dividing wall behind which there was a long row of tenement closes on four levels, (ground and three upper landings) also hidden from us. These tenements fronted onto Pollokshaws Road.

As a result our enclosed private back yard or 'back court' was bounded by the tenements at 84 Greenview Street and these two dividing walls.

Our 'behind the right-hand wall neighbours' gained access to their homes from Greenview Street through a pend (a high, wide alleyway) which served a much, much larger back yard cum communal drying green area overlooked by the rear facades of many other tenements and lower rise buildings located on adjacent streets. This pend was a major thoroughfare used by the cleansing department bin lorry and the occasional rag and bone

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man with his horse and cart and supply of nicknack toys, balloons and a large tank of goldfish to exchange for old clothes, 'jeely jaur's' and the like.

This large open area seemed vast to me and as an active three-year-old, the small corner near our window became my playground, digging with old spoons to make holes to fill with water and make mud pies. I have no memory of other children living in our eight single ends or of any in the red sandstone block which enclosed us.

The only natural light was from a small sash window above the jawbox sink. This window looked out onto the large back yard described earlier.

Looking out to the left we saw only the high dividing wall which continued for about seven metres or so where it joined an iron paling fence with many uprights missing.

It was in this sheltered corner outside her window my mother had her washing line for drying hand-washed clothes although most of our laundry was done at Pollokshaws Public Wash House (our local Steamie), five minutes' walk away. <sup>viii</sup>

Fairly soon after we moved to Pollokshaws, I was befriended by a family comprising around ten children plus a dog called Rusty. <sup>ix</sup> This chaotic family lived in the tenements behind the green paling fence in a more modern ground floor council tenement house which fronted onto Pollokshaws Road. <sup>x</sup>

This family was of Irish descent and lived in noisy, argumentative shambles. My vague memory of the inside of the flat suggests it was probably only a two-bedroomed house, with a small living room, a kitchenette and a compact bathroom.

My Mum told me repeatedly not to enter (she was afraid of head lice and fleas) but I know I did traipse in as part of their 'gang'. If it was at mealtimes, I was fed with the others. They were nice people, rough and ready but hapless and poorer than us by far.

We, the Bonthrons, (Mum, Dad and me) lived on the ground floor.

As mentioned, for the first time in their married lives, my parents had their own front door. My father fitted a Yale lock and for much of each day, there was a key in the lock to allow callers to knock and enter. We had a family whistle, used to alert occupants that someone known to us was about to enter.

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There was a narrow corridor (our close) with four doors, one to each apartment. Ours was the second door on the left at 'the back' end. Unusually, we had only two neighbours, not three. Living directly opposite us we had an elderly gentlemen Dunky (Duncan) Morrison who lived alone while at the 'front end' was Mrs Maquire, a widow lady who had tenancy of two single ends, one on each side of the entry to our close.

In our single end close, the corridor was always dull during the day because at our 'back end', the door to the communal back green was normally kept closed, secured by a sliding bolt to prevent trespassers using our corridor as a shortcut through to the trams and shops on Greenview Street and Pollokshaws Road. At night a gas mantle was lit at dusk by a peripatetic leerie, the Scots word for lamplighter.

The four upstairs single ends which sat above ours were accessed by a simple stone stairway (no handrails) whose upper landing provided a canopy above the entrance to our ground floor corridor or close.

The eight single ends on our side of the wall shared two outside WC cubicles, no washbasins. My father put a Yale lock on the right-hand one and my Mum kept it spotless. The upstairs four single ends shared the left hand cubicle. Its door was usually wide open and it was smelly, seldom cleaned. As a family, we had little to do with the upstairs tenants.

My Mum 'kept a kindly eye' on Dunky Morrison, helped him with shopping and laundry. Dad did odd jobs for him when needed. Mum was on good terms with Mrs McGuire who lived on the front end of our close on the left side, back to back with us. Mum told me years later that Mrs McGuire also held the tenancy for the right hand single end directly opposite her door, a room where she stored furniture and family heirlooms. I remember Mrs McGuire as posh, someone who smoked with a cigarette holder. Dunky however was rough and ready, prone to spitting in our close, which drove my Mum mad. She immediately mopped the spit away with disinfectant in the water.

The layout of the internal layout of our single end remains 'fresh'. This is the first home I can remember and when I close my eyes, I can reimagine this small crowded space clearly and vividly, even seven decades later.

So, here goes - this is what I can 'see', as if I was standing in our threshold.



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Our front door opened inwards. To the right there was a central window with a jaw box sink and a cold water swan neck brass tap (cold water only) over an ancient well-chipped wally (ceramic) sink. There was a wooden draining board come worktop to the right of the sink and open shelving underneath. <sup>xi</sup>

In the far right corner there was a two-burner gas hob with a grill below it, not unlike the camping hobs of nowadays.

In our single end, we were lucky to have a gas supply (town's gas, generated from coal at the local gas works.) This gas was available to us through a pre-paid coin operated meter located directly above the entrance door. Mrs McGuire and Dunky did not have gas and used oil lamps. Mum told me years later she had lived with the constant dread that either of them might accidentally cause a fire which would kill us all.

Viewed from the front door, on the facing wall to the left of the gas hob there was a cast iron coal-fired range, black with shiny brass handles and levers. Above the range was a narrow mantle shelf and above that a gas lamp with an incandescent mantle. On the mantel shelf there was a wind-up alarm clock which my mother always kept at ten minutes 'fast' to give her extra time, a 'Bremner habit' which persisted for the rest of her life.

The range had a hotplate for cooking and keeping pots hot, plus a side oven for baking. It also had a water boiler filled from a kettle of cold water and drained off from a tap on the front. In winter it was usually 'banked up' overnight with dross to keep the house warm.

The chimney was unreliable making it difficult to get the fire going from cold. I remember several occasions when the flue caught fire and 'roared' loudly as the accumulated soot and tar residues burned off. Scary. Eventually it 'burnt itself out' without the need for the fire service.

Electricity for our ancient hand-me-down wooden fronted radio was provided by a battery (we called it an 'accumulator'). It was a huge heavy beast exchanged periodically at a charging shop on Pollokshaws Road. My Mum was a radio fanatic and the battery exchange trek was always a struggle for her if my father was unavailable. As I got older, I was occasionally sent on this mission and I remember stopping to rest and standing in

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the queue for my turn, handing over my purse with the fee in it. Tick (credit) was not available and, when my Mum was skint, there was no radio.

A few years later, my Uncle Billy Macintyre <sup>xii</sup> installed electric lighting, providing an overhead filament lamp and a single 5 Amp wall socket used to power our replacement AC powered radio. This was also a hand-me-down with manual tuning and strange continental stations: Hilversum <sup>xiii</sup> sticks in my mind.

Moving round anticlockwise from the range, the left hand wall (separating us from Mrs McGuire) had two bed recesses, each about 2 m deep. My parents bed was in the right-hand recess with their headboard against the wall dividing the two recesses and their feet pointing at the external wall, giving them a clear view of the range and mantel shelf with the luminous face of our alarm clock.

Their bed was set on a raised wooden platform created by my father. This under-the-bed void provided a roomy storage space for cases containing our better clothes and several trunks for bed linen and such like plus the general paraphernalia such as the ironing board. This meant a climb up into the bed, the edge of which provided additional seating for me and for visiting cousins with our legs dangling.

The void was also home to the large potty used to avoid nocturnal visits to the external WC to 'do a stream'. The contents of this potty were emptied into the sink and rinsed and disinfected immediately after each use.

The left-hand recess was where I slept and played. In the early years I was alone but was later joined by two brothers, five and seven years my junior. When my third brother was born, Douglas shared my bed and the new baby slept I in a high-sided cot beside us.

my bed and later, when brother number two came along he was in a high-sided cot alongside us.

*An aside:*

*By this stage I was at Sir John Maxwell School <sup>xiv</sup> for P1 and P2 under the stern Miss Walker (Infant Mistress). Aged seven, I moved to P3 at what we called Pollok Annexe <sup>xv</sup> with Miss Campbell (the smaller, friendly one, not the taller, more strict Miss Campbell)*

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*For P4, P5 and P6 I had Mrs Shearer, the most influential teacher in my early life. (She deserves a separate story!)*

*In P7 I had Mr Loch, who lived locally in a posh terrace house in Haggs Road, only five minutes from 84 Greenview Street but a world away in social status. He was very dapper, always dressed in a dark pinstriped suit. He had a small moustache and spoke posh English like an army officer. He was a fiend for grammar and arithmetic which he pounded into us relentlessly.*

*Back again to our single end:*

Located on the close wall to the left of our entry door, just inside my bed recess, we had a nearly new second-hand Kitchen Cabinet (a narrow upright storage unit), my mother's most prized possession at that time, our only piece of modern furniture, much admired by visitors.

It was a pale lemon-yellow colour with red knob handles made of *Bakelite*. There was a drop shelf with an inner work surface of *Formica*. In working class households of that time, *Formica* was considered the height of modernity.

The lower cupboard had twin doors and shallow internal shelves used to store food items, mainly tinned goods and larger dishes. The smaller upper cupboard above the drop down shelf also had twin doors with opaque glass inserts. These shelves were for tea cups, saucers and side plates. With the shelf in the horizontal position held by hinged side brackets, its internal shelves were for daily use food items such as bread, *Stork* margarine, jams and milk.

When even only moderate force was applied to the drop down work shelf, the Kitchen Cabinet was prone to topple forwards onto the user. My father fixed it to the wall to make it secure.

There was no refrigeration and in warm weather, to prevent milk turning sour, the bottle was draped with a damp tea towel and placed in a bowl of water near the window which was 'edged' to provide a cooling draught.

Moving left, located near to the entry door, we had a narrow tallboy of shiny dark mahogany with a deep bottom drawer and three medium depth drawers, used for clothes storage. The shallow top drawer contained a utensil tray for cutlery and kitchen knives

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and a vegetable scraper. It was also the place where my mother stored her purse, cigarettes and household paperwork.

For my parents, we had two compact upright fireside chairs set on either side of the coal fire range. In the centre of the room there was a small, double leaf drop-leg table and four battered kitchen chairs of different origin. Later, a high chair was added.

Our wooden floor was covered with linoleum, no carpets. The underfloor area of this entire building was unventilated with no damp-proofing, resulting in rising dampness causing rot in parts of the wooden joists and flooring. The area under my parents bed was the worst affected and my father repaired this on several occasions during the six or so years of our occupancy, each time causing a major upheaval.

*My life in Pollokshaws was formative. Here are some highlights.*

I have fond memories of my period in Pollokshaws. I was influenced by three of the boys from the Irish family mentioned earlier. They were called Cessi (Francis?) and Sonny (Alphonse?) and Josie (Joseph) who were probably two, three and four years older than me. These streetwise boys soon sussed that my Mum as a soft mark and a good source of jammy pieces, passed to them from our kitchen window. During my Pollokshaws years they were a constant factor in my life.

Even before starting primary school, my life ran to a timetable.

Early on Wednesday evenings, with my cousins Ann, Moira and Billy Blakely who lived five minutes away in Riverford Road, I was a regular attendee at children's Gospel Meetings at the Salvation Army Citadel in Christian Street.

On Friday evenings, I went with them to Greenvue Church (an evangelical Open Brethren fellowship), to attend their 'Band of Hope' (a temperance youth organization promoting total abstinence from alcohol).

On Sunday afternoons I was back at Greenvue Hall with a larger group of cousins including Rae and Billy Macintyre to attend a happy-clappy Sunday School. This occupied me from around 2:30 to 4:30 pm, no doubt a welcome relief for my parents who moved the table and chairs to one side to create a small dance floor, swirling around to the radio, my father singing along in his secure baritone voice.

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Most Saturday mornings I went with my cousins to Pollok Picture House, our local cinema (often referred to as a 'fleapit') for the Kid's Club Matinee to watch featured serials like Zorro and Flash Gordon, Tom and Jerry cartoons, newsreels, and one or two feature films, often Westerns or jungle adventures, with genres like crime fiction and espionage also being popular for serials starring John Wayne and Alan Ladd. <sup>xvi</sup>

I had a three-wheeled trike and later, for my fifth birthday I inherited a child-sized two-wheeler from my cousin Kenneth (son of Aunt Ella and Uncle Willie Duncan). This bike made me a very popular boy with the Irish family.

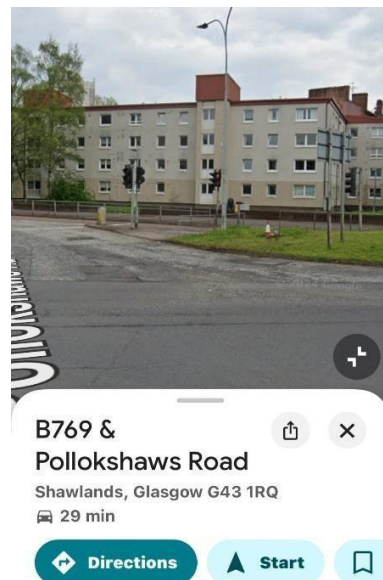
My father was registered with Glasgow Corporation, hoping for a council house.

In late 1955 we received an offer of a house in Arden, around five miles from Pollokshaws.

My mother was fearful and reluctant but deep down she knew we must accept. The single end at 84 Greenview Street was far too small for five of us.

My father signed the agreement and we moved in February 1956. All around us was an active building site. My next birthday would be in June when I would become nine.

With this move, my life changed completely.





## ***Next Move***

Above are some modern images of the area where the long gone mews Dye Workers Cottages stood. These sixteen single ends were located behind the modern block shown on the right. To the left is Pollokshaws Road and to the right is Greenview Street. T

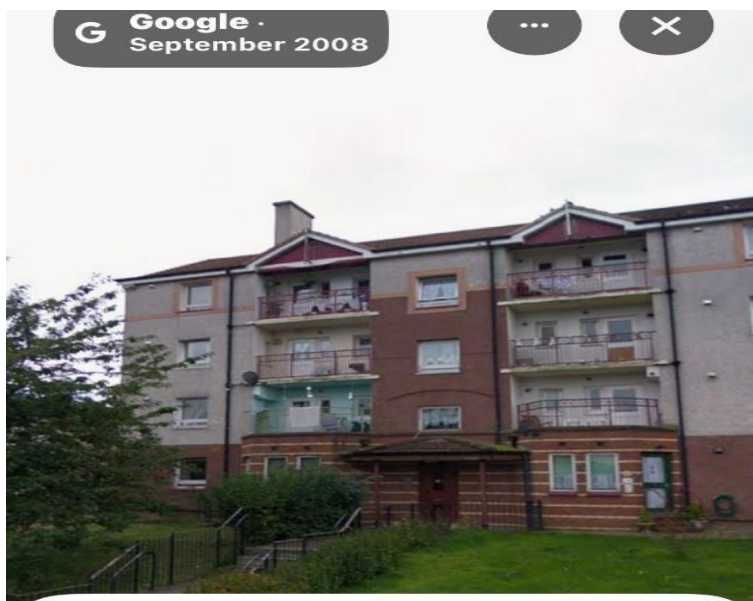
This the corner where the Pollok Bar stood with a red sandstone tenement above it and Frasers' Funeral Directors to the right, then No 84 and then the fish and chip shop.

# Next Move

## Arden

The Arden housing 'scheme' was built by the SSHA (Scottish Special Housing Association) a government body which was used to 'drive' the creation of new homes and to facilitate 'slum-clearance' in Glasgow and other Scottish cities during the 1950s.

Near to us (within two miles or so) there was an older well-established Glasgow Corporation housing estate called Nitshill. Adjacent to Nitshill there were newer ongoing developments at Priesthill and Pollok. All three of these housing estates were much larger than Arden but built to traditional pre-war designs of brick and pebble-dashed cement render with timber framed windows and (fire insulated) wooden floors between storeys.



(No 22 Kilvaxter Drive no longer exists. This is a modern image of a much upgraded version with overclad insulation and double glazing and enclosed verandas on the ground floor. )

The SSHA design for Arden and elsewhere is differed from these older estates'. The external double-skin cavity walls were built using re-usable steel shutters and 'no fines' concrete then rendered with pebble dash as a rainproofing measure. The floors

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throughout were solid concrete and icy cold underfoot, especially for ground floor apartments. Our windows were single glazed with galvanised metal frames, prone to heavy condensation in winter.

A novel feature of the design was the provision of a small veranda with access from the kitchenette. Of necessity, these verandas were often used to store bikes and other bulky objects and, in the early days, to hang out washing until eventually the drying green area was completed.

This SSHA design was used to build houses quickly and cheaply but it had many flaws.

When we arrived in February 1955, Arden was about fifty-percent completed in terms of houses but there were no amenities, no schools, no shops, churches, no medical services. The nearest shops were in Thornliebank and Carnwadric, a thirty minute walk each way. During our first few years no one in our street had a car. Everyone used bikes, Shank's pony and tramcars. Most families had at least one bike. Like us, some households had three or more.

Travelling sales vans brought groceries, meat, vegetables and coal. These were daily visitors except on Sundays.

During those first months in Arden my memory is of bitterly cold, wet and windy weather. We lived in the Living Room, huddled around our coal fire. Our neighbours were strangers and most were better off than us with nice furniture and carpets and proper curtains. A few had TVs.

My mother was miserable, isolated from everything she knew. She wanted back to Pollokshaws and its close-knit community with shops all around and easy trams back to Govanhill and her home turf.

However, I fared better, travelling to school in Pollokshaws using my free travel pass on the tram in company with others from my own close and others nearby. Mum enrolled me in Life Boys at Carnwadric Church of Scotland (part of the 46<sup>th</sup> Glasgow Boys Brigade company) and sent me to their Sunday School and later to their Bible Class. This added a further group of friends and my memory of the officers is that they were friendly and encouraging. The church was newish, (built early 1950s?) and we cleared the sanctuary of chairs on a Friday night for marching drills, PT and floor football, played sliding about on our backsides.

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On Sunday afternoons I also went to the Sunday School at Thorntree Hall in Thornliebank, run as an outreach mission by people I knew from the Greenview Hall Open Brethren assembly in Pollokshaws. It is interesting to note that both of these Brethren groups still seem to thrive while other churches have closed or merged.

One unpleasant duty was soon established on my weekly rota. On Saturday mornings I was sent to a grocery shop in Pollokshaws where my mother was allowed 'tick'. I had a purse (which sometimes contained money but often not) and a long message list and three empty shopping bags. I dreaded the weeks when it was just the shopping list and no money.

This meant I missed out on the regular weekend trips with other kids in our close to the cinemas in Pollokshaws or Thornliebank. On the rare occasions I was allowed to join them but I always had my two little brother in tow.

If I had unused slots on my free travel pass Mum told me to try to use them. This travel pass was a five day pass for weekdays only. Although this ploy usually worked but sometimes the conductress would demand payment. The tension this 'cheating' caused in me was horrible.

Usually the grocery shop I visited was always busy with a long line of talkative (paying) customers and I was sent through to the kitchen living area where the shop owner lived. This room was warm and smelled of the fish scraps laid out in a bowl for the large hairy cat which slept on a chair near me. I was nervous about this cat and it seemed to know this. I would listen to the gossip through the partially open door, mostly about people who meant nothing to me but very occasionally I would tune in to lurid gossip about mothers of my classmates at Sir John Maxwell school.

I would often have to wait for an hour or more until I was called through to an empty shop when I my mother's shopping list would be returned with some items crossed out and the amount of the current money due for the items being provided with the running total now outstanding.

Mostly the woman would say nothing but every so often she would complain to me:

*"Johnny, Betty I've crossed out the cigarettes again and the biscuits and a few other things. Tell her my credit is only available for necessary food items. And*

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*tell her she is at her limit so don't come back until you have money in your purse to pay me. Tell Betty I was asking for her. Your mother is a lady and you're a good boy. Now, off you go and watch you don't break any eggs. And here's a bar of chocolate toffee for you."*

What follows is brief description of 22 Kilvaxter Drive in Arden, part of a row of tenement closes which no longer exists, replaced decades later by more energy efficient housing.

In each tenement close housed eight families, two per landing on the ground and on each of three upper floors, a 'modern' version of traditional Glasgow tenements but the ceilings were lower making these four level buildings more squat, part of a long terrace of similar closes.

No. 22 was located on the left of a row of about twenty closes with its left hand side forming a gable end with a gap before a further row of similar closes. The even numbers on our side of the street were overlooked by identical odd numbered houses on the other side of Kilvaxter Drive. These even numbered houses were built on higher ground. Likewise, our odd numbered houses overlooked the rear of a similar row of tenements in the parallel street below us at the foot of a steep hill.

Viewing No 22 from the street, the right-hand houses had two bedrooms whereas the left-hand houses on the upper floors had three bedrooms, allotted to larger or mixed families with older girls and boys. These left-hand houses were 'gable enders' (which made them much colder). Our right-hand houses had neighbours through our adjoining walls. The sound deadening between these internal houses and those in the next close and above us was poor to non-existent.

In our ground floor flat we had two small bedrooms, a small living room, a narrow kitchenette and a narrow bathroom. These five rooms were connected by a narrow corridor which also served an internal coal bunker, more of which later. Everything was crammed in.

Heating was an important issue and buying coal a big part of our budget, with coal costing more than in Pollokshaws.

Our living room had an open coal fire, the only room provided with heating.



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Research suggests that the effectiveness of open coal fires is less than 30% with more than 70% of the heat released from the fuel disappearing 'up the Lum', making it expensive to heat. My own theory is that open coal fires in ground floor apartments are least efficient as their longer flues produce more 'draw' which pulls more hot air from the room.

In addition, flats on upper floors benefit from the flues on the chimney walls from the of lower flats. Suffice to say, we used coal sparingly, often reverting to a portable 2 kW electric heater, the type with a single spiral element glowing red hot. Oddly, as a result of the thermodynamics of generating electricity from coal, in terms of overall fuel efficiency in our situation, the cost of electricity versus coal heating was probably equal or perhaps even slightly in favour of heating by electricity.

*(Apologies, my engineering background is driving this focus.)*

The hot water to our kitchenette and bathroom came from an uninsulated copper cylinder located in an airing cupboard in my parents' bedroom. The water was heated by a back boiler behind the coal fire in the living room adjacent to this bedroom. An auxiliary electrical immerser was intended for summer but many people avoided it as it was thought to be exorbitantly costly although, given my comments on the efficiency of our coal fire this widely held belief was probably a fallacy.

This (slightly) larger bedroom was used by my parents. My two brothers and I slept in the second bedroom, sharing two three-quarter width beds. (Did my father make them or were they also hand-me-downs?) Later, when my third brother arrived (Brian is ten years younger), he and I shared a bed.

I estimate our bedroom was around 5 m by 5 m. I think we had a small wardrobe and maybe the tallboy chest of drawers from Pollokshaws.

Our small galley kitchenette was about 3.5 m wide and 4 m long from the corridor to the veranda. It was ridiculously small for a family of five which soon became six. My father had served in Submarines during WW2 and commented on the similarities.

The kitchenette door opened inwards. On the left there was a dining 'nook' about 2 m long and 2 m wide. Initially we used a single leaf of our Pollokshaws drop leg table until my father made a home-made hinged version attached to the wall. We must have used

## Next Move

stools to suit the space available. I do remember we were very crammed in at mealtimes and the rest of us often ate before my father arrived home.

Beyond the dining area on the left there was a miniscule larder against the external wall, ventilated with a mesh grille high in the wall onto the veranda. I doubt anyone in Arden had a refrigerator back then. Refrigerators were seen only in films.

To the right of the entry door there was a four-ring gas cooker and a good sized oven with an under the hob grill pan (a real boon for making toasted cheese). (This cooker was a vast step up from our two-ring gas hob and range oven in Pollokshaws.)

We had a clothes-washer boiler heated by gas. When lit, the fumes and steam filled the room requiring the door to the veranda to be kept open, even in winter.

There were two sinks side by side, the left one a standard sink and a deeper one to its right, complete with a heavy removable wooden lid. This deeper sink was used only on clothes-washing days. Between the sinks there was a fixed galvanised bracket for a demountable hand operated wringer (we called it a 'mangle') normally stored under the deeper sink.

Clothes were boiled and agitated by hand with wooden tongs. When deemed clean, the dripping clothes were transferred to the deep sink, rinsed with cold water then mangled into the shallow sink.

On laundry days my mother, normally fairly even tempered, would become 'snappy' and evening meals would often be 'cold concoctions'. How she would have loved to return to the convenience and camaraderie of the Steamie in Pollokshaws.

At the external wall end, a door to the small veranda opened inwards, an unnecessary inconvenience. To the right of this door there was a small side window just above the worktop of the smaller sink.

The veranda overlooked our front garden. (In Pollokshaws, Dad had an allotment and had become adept at growing vegetables, winning prizes for his huge onions.) However, this garden at No. 22 was too small for anything other than a handkerchief sized front lawn and a few rose bushes.

I remember him clearing out builder's rubble, taking away barrowloads to dump - but where? Probably the nearest farmer's field! At great expense he bought proper lawn

## Next Move

grass seed which he spread and bedded-in with a home-made roller formed of concrete cast in a drum. Disappointingly this seed was washed away that very same evening in a huge thunderstorm. Eventually, like others, he resorted to using grass turves purloined from nearby fields. It took Dad many years of mowing and weeding to 'tame' this 'wild' cattle-feed grass.

During the first months of occupancy it became obvious that the internal coal bunker was a source of dirt and frustration. It also encroached into the kitchenette, reducing its size significantly.

My father soon built a sturdy external coal bunker with a stout padlock for security then cleaned out the internal bunker which was used for additional internal storage. In the years which followed, other external coal bunkers appeared but we were the first to have one in our immediate area.

Wonderfully, for the first time in their married lives, my parents had a proper bathroom with a WC, a washbasin and a decent sized bath with hot and cold water. However, as the bathroom was unheated this made taking a bath in winter an ordeal, best experienced as quickly as possible.

Now, after using the toilet, we were encouraged to always wash our hands. In Pollokshaws, Mum would always make me wash my hands and the phrase is embedded: "*Johnny, have you washed your hands?*"

The drying green area was on a very steep slope. As mentioned, from our bedrooms we overlooked the rear façade of a similar long row of tenements in a parallel street below us, houses still under construction when we moved in.

As a result our drying green back court was covered in builders rubble and great sods of earth. About a year later, a simple three strand wire fence was added to separate the back courts for each close but during our first year the entire rear area was a building site.

Poles for washing lines were not fitted for months by which time the hillside was knee high in wild grass and dandelions growing through the rubble. Landscaping was not a word in the *SSHA* vocabulary and complaints to the site foreman fell on deaf ears.

## Next Move

My father and a group of willing tenants eventually tamed the area, once again using grass turves purloined from the local fields to create a manageable lawn. No council workers were involved and grass cutting was down to the tenants in each close.

*An aside:*

As a ground floor tenant we had a private lockable external cupboard accessed from the short rear corridor which led to the external stairway down to the dustbin shelter and drying greens. Our external cupboard was one of two, the other for our adjacent ground floor neighbours.

We used our cupboard off the close to store an ancient push lawnmower and a few old gardening tools from Dad's allotment days. It was also a home for our bikes, trikes and bulkier toys.

I imagine these 'bonus' storage cupboards would have been resented by tenants on the upper floors but the reality was these cupboards plus the width of the rear corridor effectively reduced the floor plan of *our* ground floor flat and that of our left-hand ground floor neighbours. The corresponding bedrooms directly above us at first floor level and at higher storeys were noticeably bigger. In effect, we had the smallest internal footprint of the eight apartments and our only compensation was this 'extra' external cupboard.

Our bonus cupboard also provided an overnight home for Dad's trusty bicycle used to travel to work as a peripatetic joiner at construction sites all over the West of Scotland, on occasions making round trips up to fifty miles a day. In the depths of winter these journeys could be brutal and he arrived home frozen to the bone.

In those days, construction workers were paid a travelling time allowance plus a contribution to transport costs. For Dad, this extra money saved by cycling augmented his weekly wage, cash delivered to my mother in a brown envelope with his wage slip as proof of earnings. Mum would then give him his pocket money, (around five shillings at the time of this story). Dad was frugal, using it to buy an ounce of *Condor* sliced tobacco for his pipe and twenty cigarettes to last the week, hoarding the remainder for holidays and to buy us treats like sweets and ice creams from the travelling vans.

*In summary*, the *SSHA* buildings in Arden were low budget housing stock thrown up to a cheap design with poor quality control.

## *Next Move*

The innovation of using 'no fines concrete', a loose aggregate slurry mixed on site and pumped up through hoses into a metal walled shuttering system, was quick and cheap compared with traditional brick build construction. However, from the outset it was apparent to occupants this cement aggregate provided a very poor thermal insulation rating. As a result the houses were generally hard to heat, especially gable top floor and ground floor properties, with rooms bounded by gable end walls being the worst.

As mentioned, at 22 Kilvaxter Drive we were on the ground floor to the right as you entered, thankfully not the left side which were all gable end properties, and much colder as a result. In a drive past visit about thirty years ago everything seemed smaller. Thankfully the remaining original buildings had been treated with overclad insulation and windows replaced with PVC double glazed units. Presumably lofts had been insulated too. Had underfloor insulation been added? I doubt it.

From the outset my Mum complained bitterly about how cold the house was, saying she would much rather be back in our 'cosy single end'.

Due to a sad family circumstance which I prefer not to relate, my parents split in June 1961 a few weeks before my fourteenth birthday. It would be more than three years before we came together again when Dad and I moved to join Mum and my three brothers.



# Next Move

## Govanhill again

In the spring of 1964, Dad and I were back in Govanhill with my mother and three younger brothers, in a tenement close at 39 Jamieson Street (another building which no longer exists). The six of us were in a room and kitchen, three flights up, on the top floor, sharing a basic WC on the half-landing (no washbasin), this small dark room (no lighting), shared with two other top floor tenants.

Dad and I were both travelling to work on bikes and we parked these on the half-landing outside the WC on newspapers to catch the drips.

Mum and Dad were in the kitchen recess bed behind a curtain. My Dad had moved the three-quarter-width beds from Arden and re-arranged them as bunk beds. I was on the lower level, once sharing again with Brian who was approaching seven while I would soon be seventeen.

I joined the local Boys Brigade but soon migrated to the local Youth Fellowship at the Forsyth Memorial Congregational Church in Coplaw Street, a two-minute walk from our close. I suppose the main attraction was that there were girls at the YF.

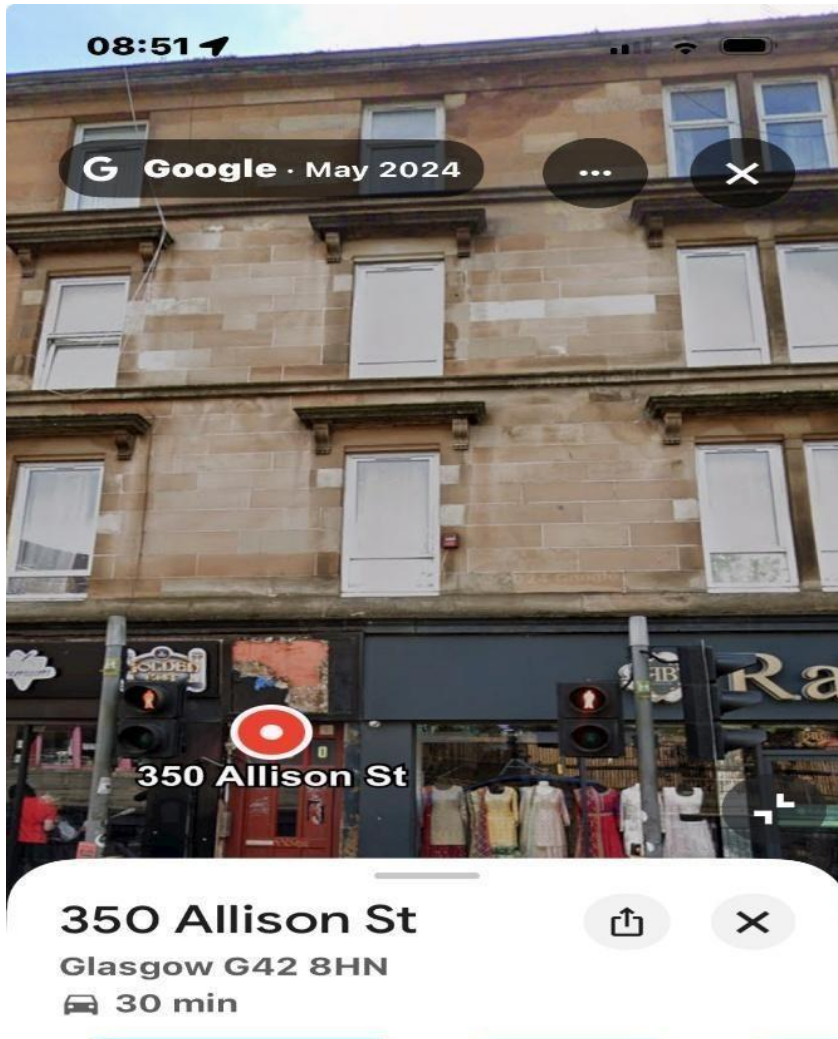
At this time I was on the tools as an apprentice marine plumber at Alexander Stephen and Sons (Shipbuilders and Engineers) at Linthouse. This was about thirty minutes away by bike or forty-five minutes to an hour by two buses.

On Friday evenings I visited Govanhill Baths and rented a bathing cubicle. At this stage in my life I was plagued by blackheads on my face and sometimes used the Turkish Bath steam room to try to sweat them out.

After about a year or so at Jamieson Street, (at around the spring of 1966, I think), my father applied for a special mortgage from Glasgow Corporation and purchased a much larger flat at 350 Allison Street located on the corner of Cathcart Road in sight of the Clydesdale Bank branch where Dad made his mortgage re-payments each Saturday morning.

Taking on this mortgage was a bold move by my father. At that stage, all the other Bonthrons and Bremners were in rented accommodation. Given our history of struggling financially over many years, I imagine they thought we were probably the least likely of any of the family ever to become home owners.

## Next Move



Here is my memory of this flat which still exists albeit the nature of Govanhill of this part of the area has changed greatly over the last five decades.

The ground floor close entrance to No. 350 was bracketed by two shops. One was a TV rental shop which later became an agency for the Scottish Legal Life Insurance company. The other side was a newsagents which also sold sweets and tobaccos and such like.

We were on the top floor with Mr. and Mrs. Riddell directly opposite. In their late fifties, they had no children. They were reserved but always friendly towards us.

I assume the other flats on the upper three floors were copies of ours but over the years I lived there, I was never inside any of them.

## Next Move

*Here is a mini-tour of our flat, starting from the front door.*

From the landing, the door opened directly into a large square hall. Moving anti-clockwise, there was a long thin bathroom, with a WC, washbasin and bath. Ventilation was through a small high level window which opened onto the landing outside our front door. The bathroom had no heating and was miserably cold in winter.

Beyond the bathroom the first door opened into a large bedroom, also unheated. The fireplace had been blocked off. The narrow bunk beds from Jaimison Street were re-arranged side by side with me sharing with Brian as before. In winter we used hot water bottles in winter and heaped extra blankets over ourselves. Yet another cold bedroom with condensation on the single glazed wooden sash windows.

Throughout the flat the rooms had high ceilings (about 3.3 m) with ornate coving in our front bedroom and the Lounge (posher than a Living Room) next door, the two rooms which faced onto Allison Street.

Beyond our boys' bedroom, a door opened into the Lounge where we had a TV and a coal effect electric fire. There was still a grate for a coal fire, although seldom used. It was a cold room with large east facing single glazed sash windows (as for all other rooms). No one in Govanhill had double glazing at that time.

It had been occupied by an elderly Jewish lady who had passed on. The décor was tired and the house was stuffed with old-fashioned furniture. Her son was well-heeled and just wanted shot of the property. As a part of the purchase price we 'inherited' the existing furniture, an old fashioned, ornate dark wood dresser plus a well-worn leather settee and two fireside chairs. Our floors were covered with linoleum with fireside rugs in the Lounge and Kitchen. Heavy curtains were left behind too and they proved vital as the various rooms were cool in summer and frigid in winter.

In winter we watched TV in the Lounge under blankets huddled around the electric heater.

*Back to the entrance hallway, a room full of doors and no windows.*

It was a large square room, perhaps 6 m by 6 m, almost big as our single end in Pollokshaws.

## Next Move

Directly facing the front door, in the corner, to the left of the Lounge door, there was a deep walk-in cupboard where we stored our bikes. Dad rigged a pulley system with two bikes hoisted up above two others stored below.

By this stage I had been promoted from 'the tools' to the Ship Drawing Office as an apprentice draughtsman and now wore smarter clothes to work, necessitating the use of two buses to get to Linthouse. My aging Sun Supalite hung there on this pulley until I reclaimed it many years later.

Back in the Hall, moving anticlockwise, the next door led to a shallower cupboard where bed linen and towels were stored. The next door to the left led into a sizeable kitchen area. The kitchen bed recess was repurposed as a dining area with a newish good sized table and six matching chairs.

We had also inherited a newish gas cooker with a four ring hob top, an oven and a toasting grill. Directly opposite the entry door to the kitchen was a tall sash window with a sink and drainer. Hot and cold water was supplied from a high level cylinder in a corner cupboard. The water was heated by a back boiler served by a coal fire in a modern, tiled grate. Later, a coal effect electric 'fire' replaced this coal fire and we heated water with an immerser.

Initially my Mum reverted to using the Govanhill Steamie then became a patron of a local laundrette.

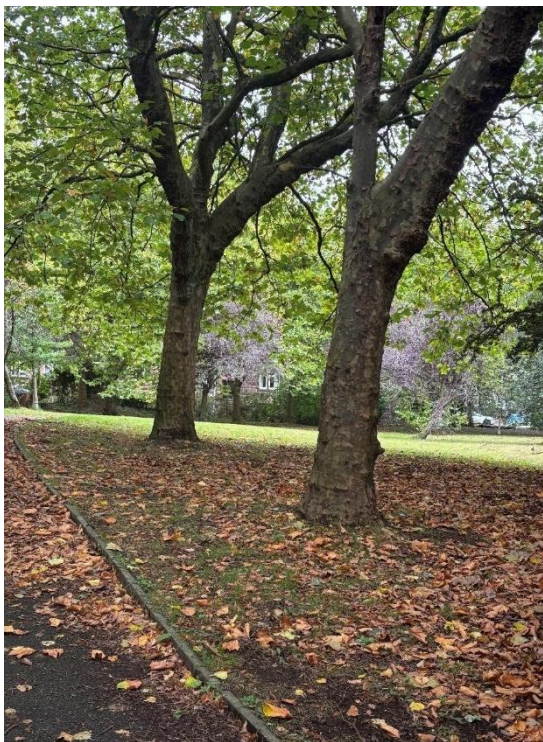
Back in the square hallway, the last door to the left of the kitchen led to my parents' bedroom, a large square room with a sash window and inherited curtains.

In summary, 350 Allison Street was a great success and elevated my father in the eyes of the other Bremners and Bonthrons and gave him a confidence which helped him subdue his recurrent PTSD issues from his six years in submarines during WW2.

## *Next Move*

### *Laurel Place, Thornwood.*

Margaret and I were married on 1 April 1972, Easter Saturday. A few months earlier we bought our first home at No. 15 Laurel Place in a red sandstone tenement building with a tiled close. Our close was on a corner and we were on the second floor on a landing shared with two other flats.



(Modern images, circa September 2025.)

In the sales blurb, this property was described as a two-roomed flat with a kitchenette and bathroom. In fact it was a traditional room and kitchen, see later.

Both rooms were large and we had a good sized square entrance hall and a long thin bathroom with a WC, bath and washbasin.

We used the front room as our bedroom. In the original design it would have been the Parlour. This room overlooked the Cross Park which was full of collared doves, a species



## Next Move

we had seldom seen before. In the far distance, beyond the then new Gartnavel General Hospital, we could see Ben Lomond and the Arrochar Alps.

The room to the left off the hallway faced the rear, overlooking a large rectangular back court bounded by the rear facade of similar red sandstone buildings on adjacent streets. In the original design this would have been a kitchen/living room with a bed recess. It had been remodelled to form a kitchenette on the window wall by the creation of a head height partition, solid to about chest height with an open trellis panel above. It was a clever idea.

This partition created a good effect allowing daylight to enter the room and good visuals and easy chatting through the trellis and providing us with a partially hidden utility area separated from a bright and spacious living room with a dining area in the former bed recess, large enough for a small circular table and four chairs.

At the window end, behind the partition, we had a sink and worktop, small fridge and in the corner, an electric cooker. Above the cooker there was a cupboard containing a HWS cylinder heated by an immerser.

Both rooms had had their coal fires removed and we used electric heaters.

The front bedroom was always bright and cheery with a bay window with the original timber sash frames. This window gave wonderful views out to Campsie Hills and the west end of Glasgow.

*As an aside:*

When we first started looking for a home together, we both favoured a semi-detached house Kelvindale but our Solicitor talked us out of the high mortgage required, persuading us to look for something more modest. More on this later!

During the early months of our time in Thornwood, we had an old Morris Minor which collapsed in a rusting heap when the front suspension gave out on Kelvin Way. After a costly repair, the clutch gave out and we left it parked near my parents' home in Allison Street. I gifted it to one of my brothers who eventually sold it to a dealer for a few pounds.

In the years which followed, we rented cars for holidays and used public transport and Shank's pony.

## Next Move

Laurel Place was within easy walking distance of buses, trains and the Subway at Partick. We could walk easily to Havelock Street (just off Byres Road) to visit Margaret's parents and her Gran. Getting across to Govanhill without a car was more of a trek.

*Another aside:*

One oddity about our Laurel Place house was that around 50 m below us a double track rail tunnel passed under our building. This had been a line (long abandoned) heading to the docks about a mile away. On several occasions I walked through this unlit tunnel, Much later I learned it was blocked off at both ends.

In the autumn of 1973 I started at Strathclyde as a mature student, gaining acceptance to third year with my HNC in Mechanical Engineering and a raft of Highers gained by extra night school classes. Throughout our courtship and beyond, Margaret was my best supporter, seldom complaining about the long hours of study I put in to gain entry qualifications.

Soon after we married I had moved to work for Glasgow Corporation. This was a deliberate ploy because I knew they might be willing to grant me leave of absence without pay while still keeping me on their payroll during holidays (Christmas, Spring and Summer.) This income, with a good grant and Margaret's income as a primary teacher meant we were fairly well off.

Although we were very happy in Laurel Place, I became anxious about the effects of raging house price inflation. In my mind this was a serious issue which grew into a phobia, an obsession. House prices were climbing month on month and it seemed to me that we might end up losing out badly in the housing stakes. In addition, getting a mortgage, especially in our situation, was likely to be tricky.

My Mum solved this problem. Through her friendship with the ladies who worked in the Scottish Legal Life Insurance agency next to 350 Allison Street she was able to arrange for one of their mortgage consultants to come to visit us at 15 Laurel Place.

I explained I worked at Glasgow Corporation, described my earlier career, listed my qualifications without revealing I was also a student at Strathclyde. Two hours later we had a commitment from him to provide a mortgage.

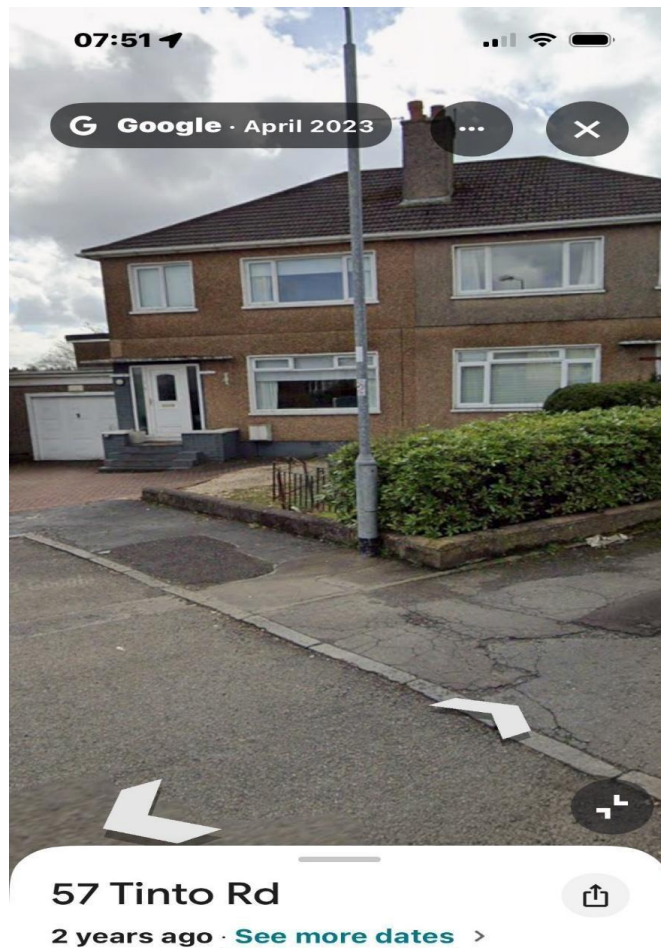
Our views on Kelvindale had changed and we now preferred Jordanhill. In our search, we saw a house we liked, a stone fronted three bed semi but its price was too high.

## ***Next Move***

During my earlier studies I had formed a strong friendship with Douglas Cunninghame, one of my lecturers from my time at Springburn College and David Dale College. By serendipity, his wife Betty was now a colleague of Margaret at Wyndford Primary. During one single evening, ( I remember it as a Thursday) Margaret, Douglas and I visited eight similar houses in Bearsden and chose one we could afford. I phoned later that evening and made an offer which they accepted verbally. Two weeks later, having sold our Laurel Place flat for double what we had paid for it, we made our next move to. . .

## Next Move

*57 Tinto Road, Bearsden.*



About eighteen months after buying Laurel Place we were now settled in Bearsden in good time for me to get my head down and study for my third year exams at Strathclyde.

The building is angled into a corner site with a small front garden and narrow one car drive but the bonus was we had a large rear south facing garden enclosed by hedges on all sides. This was our first garden and we immediately tried growing vegetables, with little success. However, it stirred in Margaret a passion for gardening, a pastime which has continued apace over subsequent years.

There was a basic brick-built garage but we were still car-less.

## Next Move

*Here is a description of the inside of the house.*

The external front door opened directly from outside into a narrow hallway. To the right a door led to a combined lounge/dining area which extended from the front to the rear of the ground floor, a room about 4.5 m by around 7.5 m, heated by electric panel convector heaters and a gas fire.

Directly ahead from the entry door, was narrow galley kitchen with original wooden cupboards painted red and black by the previous owners. It came with an elderly electric cooker. Once again we were obliged to cook with electricity but we were now used to it. There was a washing machine with an integral tumble drying facility. Although old, it worked efficiently. The kitchen was basic but serviceable and during our stay, we did not alter it.

There was a back door from the kitchen to our rear garden. We now lived in a proper house with front and back door! Our parents who had always lived in tenements were impressed.

To the left of the external front door, a stairway led up to a compact bathroom, two medium sized bedrooms, one front, one rear and a third, child's bedroom which I used as my study, my garret.

Focussing on my end of term exams, I got my head down at every opportunity, desperate not to fail.

At the end of term, to my utter amazement, I passed these first hurdles by a comfortable margin and was awarded the third year class prize.

Over the following twelve months I was a dedicated scholar. We acquired a kitten from the Animal Rescue Centre and Susie became my study companion.

All our windows were metal framed with single-glazing and heated was by undersized electric panels. Unlike the other seven houses we had looked at, No 57 had no gas central heating but it did have a gas fire which we replaced with an up-dated model incorporating a back boiler for water heating.

The house was hard to heat but rather than replacing the windows with PVC double glazing, we chose the cheaper option of internal double glazed sliding frame units to the front and rear living/dining windows only. This was only a partial success. Despite our

## *Next Move*

efforts, No. 57 was still cool to cold in winter and needed the gas fire to make it habitable.

With our higher mortgage payments, we were on a tighter budget but still coping.

Margaret was teaching at Wynford Primary in Maryhill and travelled to and fro by bus, a seven minute walk away. Likewise I travelled by bus to Strathclyde or to the Corporation offices during the holidays. Occasionally I walked to Bearsden Station about twenty minutes away and took a train to Queen Street or High Street.

During the run-up to my finals, we were planning to start a family.

In June 1975 aged twenty-eight, I graduated with a BSc (First Class Honours). Over the Summer, out of the blue, an opportunity arose at Strathclyde and after a competitive interview, I was suddenly a Lecturer, teaching students I had known from various departmental activities when I had been elected President of the Environmental Engineering Society in my final year.

My university salary was only very slightly higher than I had been earning at the Corporation (now Strathclyde Regional Council) but we managed to afford an ancient and rapidly rusting (!) Renault 6 which made us mobile again.

However, after only two years at Tinto Road, the local estate agent valuation for No. 57 was very encouraging. We looked again in Jordanhill but then, by serendipity, I saw a house for sale, a red sandstone fronted semi-detached built in 1907, located in a quiet street in Bearsden where a new batch of friends were waiting to welcome us.

We made an offer at the upper limit of our budget and after a bit of a delay, it was accepted. Thankfully, our house at Tinto Road sold well above the asking price and we were solvent, just.

Looking back, we were very ambitious and had convinced ourselves we had found the house of our dreams . . .

## *Next Move*

### *27 West Chapelton Crescent, Bearsden.*



(This photo was taken shortly before we moved again, see below.)

We moved into our new home around October 1975 about a month after I started at Strathclyde University.

Stuart was already on his way, due in May 1976.

Our new house had a spacious Lounge, a separate Dining Room, a small Kitchen on the ground floor, a compact bathroom on the half landing and a large upper hallway leading to three bedrooms. It was exactly what we had hoped for when we were married in 1972.

The front garden was small.

We had a good sized brick built garage and a side-gate which led to a compact rear garden. The rear boundary had a very high hedge (3.5 m) which separated us from the

## Next Move

railway line connecting Milngavie to Glasgow with electrified trains - so no soot or excessive noise.

Once again we had no central heating. With seventy year old single-glazed timber framed sash windows, the house proved cold and hard to heat, especially upstairs and in the bathroom on the half-landing.

*Here is a mini-tour:*

Our driveway led to our front door located side-by-side with our adjoining neighbours, sharing a party wall. Our main entrance had storm doors to protect a small porch. The front door proper opened into a long rectangular hall about 10 m long and 3 m wide. In later years, on several Christmas gatherings, we used this hall as an overflow dining area for our two boys and nieces and nephews with the adults in the Dining Room proper.

I should mention that the front door, Lounge door and the Dining Room door had bevelled upper glass panels, a very attractive feature which visitors frequently remarked on. The original dark varnished wood had been over-painted and after a few years we took on the challenge of stripping back and re-varnishing, a horrible task which dragged on and on for months and months.

Our new home came with good quality carpets and curtains throughout and a nearly a nearly-new small bed suitable for a child. Sadly, there was no central heating and in daily living, the Dining Room was the only room we heated with a gas fire, reserving the Lounge for special occasions.

When we arrived, the décor throughout was fresh and perfectly acceptable which is just as well as we had little time and no money to alter anything at that stage. It would be years before we could afford to redecorate and upgrade to add PVC double glazing and central heating.

Working anti-clockwise in this hallway from the front door, the first door on the right opened into a large Lounge heated by a powerful gas-fire. The Lounge was traditionally decorated with a retro wooden mantel shelf and tiled surround.

The next door along led into the Dining Room which had once been the Kitchen incorporated a Maid's Room whose dividing wall had been removed in the past leaving a tiny quirky window which gave an intriguing view of the driveway and the front edge of the garage. This room also had a more basic wall mounted gas fire with no tiled surround



## Next Move

or mantel shelf. This was the room which we used as our family room initially, with our small circular Formica topped dining table from Laurel Place via Tinto Road.

Adjacent to the Dining Room door, stairs led to a compact bathroom located on a half landing then onwards up to the bedroom floor.

Back on the ground floor, leaving the Dining Room and turning right, the corridor narrowed and led to a small galley Kitchen with a timber framed flat roof extension. Sadly, we had left the elderly washing machine at Tinto Road as it was plumbed in and deemed too difficult to re-locate. Almost immediately we were gifted a twin tub by Georgie, (Margaret's mother).

In this extension there was a small, wall mounted gas-fired convector. Mindful of costs, we used this heater sparingly.

Our Kitchen windows overlooked our rear garden which was at a lower level than the front of the house. Thankfully, with the side gate beside the garage closed and locked, this proved to be a useful and secure play area for children. There was an two existing apple tree and two plum trees, all productive, Later Margaret added raspberry canes which also thrived. The rear garden faced north-west and, since it was not overlooked by other properties, was sheltered, warm and sunny from around mid-morning in summer until late in the evening.

During our first winter in our new home we were down to counting pennies. When it was time to leave the warmth of the Dining Room, we dashed up to bed and snuggled together under our duvet pre-heated by an electric underblanket while breathing condensation into the icy air of our huge bedroom.

In the original design, this room had been an upstairs 'Withdrawing Room' with a huge ornate fireplace (now blocked off) and elaborate ceilings and cornices. This room faced onto West Chapelton Crescent with a three-window bay and, to the right, a further double window. Many years later we would sub-divide this monster room to create two good-sized bedrooms making four bedrooms overall.

To the rear there was a spacious bedroom which overlooked the railway line, Jubilee Path and the busy courts of Bearsden Tennis Club. Directly ahead was the low wooden building of the Bearsden and Milngavie Rifle Club firing range and behind it the long rambling halls of the 24th Bearsden Scout Halls.

## Next Move

When Stuart arrived, we had created a nursery for him from the smallest of the three bedrooms which looked out sideways over the roof of the garage. This room was heated by an electric panel radiator. Our large bedroom adjacent was unheated and bitterly cold in winter.

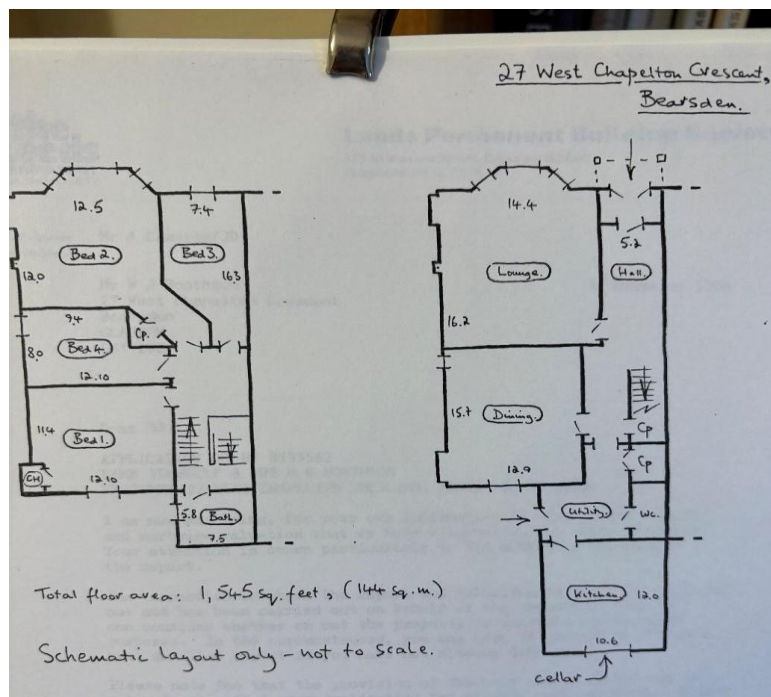
In December 1978 Craig arrived and his cot was moved in beside Stuart's small bed and a later we moved them into the larger rear bedroom.

In September of 1979 I changed jobs, resigning from Strathclyde to move to a firm of consulting engineers with the promised opportunity to progress to become a Partner.

After a year in my new job, I was promoted to Associate Partner and in 1983 I was elevated to become a full Partner. I had a series of better cars provided by my firm and in time we bought a replacement brand new car for Margaret.

At work, I was beavering, working long hours. We were definitely moving forward financially. Over the next few years my income improved and we embarked on a series of upgrades.

Our first priority was central heating followed by double glazing.



(This sketch is from the sales brochure, circa 1990, just before we moved on again.)

## Next Move

Our next big change was to divide our front bedroom (the huge Withdrawing Room) into two bedrooms. A few years later we added an extension to form a new kitchen with a utility room and a downstairs loo with a washbasin.

During our years in this 'ideal home' at No 27, we did inherit problems of water ingress from our shallow slate roof and its flashings. The attic space was low, dominated by roof trusses. There were signs of departed wood worm in the roof timbers. Duly masked, I sprayed the roof trusses and joists with a protective treatment.

We discovered a fairly large patch of dry rot under the Dining cum Living Room caused by a faulty DPC. The crawl space in the underbuilding was very shallow and the earth was not sealed with bitumen. The DPC was formed of 2" slabs of slate (with gaps) supporting the perimeter walls on our half of the semi-detached structure. Apparently this approach was commonplace in the early 1900s.

Soon after we moved in and during these underfloor investigations, my father and I discovered that the party wall which separated us from our neighbours was only one single brick thick with lathe and plaster on both sides. At noisy times, we could definitely 'hear' each other.

A secondary factor causing dampness from above was that the original cast iron ogee gutters sat directly on the exterior wall head and, unknown to us, these gutters were seeping water at some of the joints directly onto the wall below.

In keeping with the construction of other buildings of its era, the external wall of our 1907 home comprised three layers of brick with a cement rendering externally and a direct lath and plaster inner surface. The front façade was red sandstone. Insofar as I could determine, the external walls themselves were waterproof. The problem was water ingress from the gutters and dampness rising from the faulty damp roof course.

These issues were addressed, gutters sealed, breeches to the DPC fixed using bituminous felt, rotted wood replaced with rot-resistant treated wood, damaged walls sprayed, re-plastered and rooms redecorated.

*With central heating throughout and an insulated attic, we were secure, dry and rot free, warm and toasty. But the worry remained - we had no protective wall cavity.*

In 1990, after fifteen years in our lovely four-bedroomed red sandstone fronted ideal home, we decided to move.

## Next Move

I must confess that this impulse to move was driven mainly by **my** concern that the railway to Milngavie would close to allow a loop road to be built on its track, a few feet from the perimeter of our garden. The twin track railway line was in a dip, around 4 to 5 m below the level of our garden. The trains were around six per hour during peak times, less at other times and weekends. We hardly noticed them.

This 'loop' idea was vague but I feared a fast single lane road with cars and lorries whizzing along day and night, destroying the quiet serenity of our lives.

This loop road idea was all part of a grand plan which involved changes to Canniesburn Toll, the plans for which were already affecting house prices in the immediate area.

In the end none of these grand schemes came to pass and the train service still runs to Milngavie.

Another factor was the boys had taken up drumming. They had a shared drum kit and we felt it was quite unfair to impose the racket of their enthusiastic practice sessions on our semi-detached neighbours.

Margaret was reluctant to move but I was determined.

As with our previous move to Tinto Road but for different reasons, in my mind we simply **must** move and I confess, I forced Margaret to accept a house which was **not** of the style or in the area where she wanted to be.

## *Next Move*

### *18 Westbourne Drive, Bearsden.*

For the first time, we were in a villa with no cojoined neighbours.

Dating from 1937, it was imposing with cement rendered walls over a conventional cavity brick construction and a steeply sloping red tiled roof.



(This image is from the sales brochure before we moved to Kessington Drive.)

However, the reality must be admitted: many of the rooms and in particular the entrance hallway and stairs to the upper floors were smaller and narrower than the house we had just left. This meant there was a very limited space to meet and greet visitors and to wish them goodbye.

## Next Move

*Here is a short tour of our new house. Again, Stuart and Craig knew it well and can add detail and answer questions for our grandsons, if required.*

From the front driveway, a short flight of steps led to storm doors which enclosed a small porch. The front door led to a compact L-shaped hallway dominated by a stairway which led to two upper floors.

On the ground floor, the two south-west facing rooms overlooked Westbourne Drive. The Lounge was not as large as No. 27. Regrettably, the Dining Room (an extension which could easily have been bigger and more useful) was narrow and very tight when set for eight people.

Both of these spaces accessed directly from the hallway, directly beside the front door, not ideal.

To the rear, the other ground floor rooms comprised a good sized Living Room accessed by a door two paces opposite our front door. This Living Room was our family room and had an original metal patio doors opening into old, small, wooden sunroom with a very leaky roof.

To the right of the Living Room we now had a spacious family dining Kitchen with a smallish Utility Room off to the right. Our first change was to extend and remodel this space to accommodate a clothes washing machine and tumble drier, a 'dirty' sink and an L-shaped worktop with a new upright freezer. We also replaced the fitted kitchen and tiled the floor.

Our new utility room opened to a small patio area which we remodelled and extended. This patio proved to be an excellent late evening suntrap, ideal for pre-dinner drinks for small gatherings.

Back in the hallway, under the stair up to the first floor, we had a toilet with WC, washbasin and a small window looking onto the side door to our Garage.

On the first floor there was a fair sized square hall giving access to a modest family bathroom, three fair sized bedrooms and a smaller guest bedroom which we reserved and kitted out for Georgie.

From this upper hallway, a door opened to a narrow enclosed stair which climbed steeply to the attic area where we had two further bedrooms with headroom limited by sloping

## Next Move

roofs, a small study facing to the rear, several good sized cupboards and a door to a walk-in water tank and unfloored storage area.



(This image is from the sales brochure just before we moved to Kessington Drive.)

After a year or so, we had painted the exterior walls, installed new fitted kitchen, replaced the boiler, added and replaced radiators, remodelled the bathroom, tiling the walls and floors.

With replacement PVC double glazed windows throughout, we were once again warm and toasty.

Now studying for O-levels and Highers, the boys were set up with study bedrooms with their own PCs while Margaret and I shared a home PC in the attic study.



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Perhaps the most beneficial improvement we made was to add a Conservatory accessed from the original French doors from the Living Room. This addition was the largest floor space in the house, around 4 m deep and 9 m in width with a side door to the rear garden. Even in winter it was almost self-heating from around noon. In summer it was warm all day, self-heated by the sun, sometimes overheated.

Our Conservatory was definitely a success and proved to be a good place for entertaining. At Christmas and other special events it was where we served meals for family and friends.

Our rear garden was around 25 m deep and 35 m wide. It sloped upwards to a good sized flat area of about 7 m deep by 35 m wide, with views to the south and lots of sunshine. The rear boundary was dominated by two huge sycamore trees, one at each corner. To the right we had an elderly garden hut which we restored and re-roofed.

When we first moved in we had five or six huge larch trees on our left-hand boundary which we had removed during our first summer, a move very popular with our adjoining neighbours.

Our boundaries to the left and right were tall hedges, beech to our left and privet to the right. The beech hedges was a monster, about 3 m high by 1.5 m thick. It became my job to keep the grass under control and trim our hedges twice a year and to cut them back from our side about every five years. This latter exercise was a long and arduous task and required many trips to the recycling centre to dispose of cuttings. In retrospect, I should have employed a gardener.

On the upslope, we created a sizeable flower bed which reduced the area of awkward sloping grass to be mowed.

Located in the heart of the Thorn area of Bearsden, we were directly below the flight path of 'planes in and out of Glasgow Airport. Oddly, after a while, as with the passing trains behind our hedge at West Chapelton Crescent, we learned to tune out this noise.

In June 2001 (age 54), I retired and embarked on a secondary career as a self-employed consultant offering training and mentoring, becoming a Visiting Professor at Glasgow Caledonian University. Soon after, I was recruited as a NEDO (a non-executive director) at a software company based at the West of Scotland Science Campus, a determined



## Next Move

and clever group who promoted energy efficient design of buildings using powerful modelling software.

Margaret was working part-time, heading for retirement. Holidays began to dominate our lives with several long overseas trips.

Over time the boys moved out and we lived mainly alone with Georgie visiting for long weekends and for about two weeks or so at Christmas and New Year. It soon became obvious we were rattling around in a huge house with rooms we did not need and a garden which would soon become hard work.

From No. 18, the main shops at Bearsden Cross were downhill and the round trip on foot took around thirty minutes. Ditto to our nearest bus routes. Bearsden train station was downhill and quite a trek back uphill. By car our nearest food shopping supermarket was Asda on Milngavie Road, a car trip of ten minutes each way with Tesco and the larger M&S in Milngavie, a longer round trip.

Aged 60, I was now fully retired and free of my other commitments and employments.

In 2007, we started to look for someplace smaller and more central.

***I had learned my lesson: Margaret would choose our next house.***

When we found it, we were **both** certain it was the one for us.

After 15 years at No. 18, we bought our present home in the Kessington area, close to where we had been at West Chapelton Crescent and within walking distance of many of our friends from that era.

We know now we paid well over the odds for No 8 but, fortuitously, we got a very good price for Westbourne Drive and used the surplus to create the house we have today.

## *Next Move*

### *8 Kessington Drive, Bearsden.*

Our present home is located just off Milngavie Road, handy for Asda with a Sainsbury Local and a row of shops which includes a Pharmacy, all within easy walking distance.



(This image is as we bought No 8, copied from the vendor's sales brochure.)

We are three minutes from buses to central Glasgow, the West End and for Milngavie. It is 10 minutes level walking to Hillfoot Railway Station and 15 minutes on foot to Douglas Park Golf Club.

Built around 1937 (about the same time as 18 Westbourne Drive) our semi-detached chalet home has a traditional cavity wall brick construction with cement rendering

## Next Move

providing waterproofing. The roofs are steeply sloped, easily shedding rain. So far as we have discovered (using Google Street view), it is a unique design.

On the ground floor, the Lounge and (original) Dining Room faced onto a fair sized garden and driveway. Prior to our purchase, this Dining Room had been re-purposed to provide a private Living Room for an elderly mother. To the rear of the Lounge there was a bedroom where granny slept. Also to the rear, the original Kitchen had been converted to provide a compact family Dining Room. Opening directly from it, what we think had originally been a scullery had been converted into a compact one-sided galley Kitchen.

All modifications had been internal only and the original footprint was as first built with no extensions.

On the half-landing there was a good sized bathroom with a large shower *and* a bath. To the left of this bathroom, there is an cupboard which we use for storage. (Our cojoined neighbours still have this as WC room with a washbasin as per the original design.)

The upper floor provides two good sized bedrooms. The previous couple had a primary age daughter who had the bedroom facing the rear. Her parents used the slightly larger bedroom located on the right side as viewed from the front. The upper hallway has a small seating area with storage below in front of a large dormer window directly over the front porch.

Prior to occupation, we embarked on an extensive re-modelling exercise.

*I will now describe our house in its current format.*

The front Lounge is little changed except we have a modern log burning stove with a tiled surround. On occasions, even in winter, we can easily get above 30 Celsius - Bermuda in Bearsden! This is where Margaret watches TV most evenings while I watch footie and YouTube in the rear living. Dining area.

The room which had been the Living Room for Granny, we converted to a bedroom for Georgie when she visited, adding an en suite shower room and WC with a single bed and a roll out second bed. Later, when Georgie's mobility was impaired during her final months, this arrangement proved invaluable, giving her privacy, her own toilet and showering facility and easy access to the other ground floor rooms and to the garden and deck to the rear.

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We still use this room as a back-up bedroom for visitors but in day-to-day use, I have gradually taken it over as my study for story writing and singing practice.

On the half landing, we replaced the bathroom fittings and re-tiled the floor and walls, adding overhead spots. On the small landing just outside the bathroom, there is now a pull-down ladder to access the attic which has been floored and lined. Over the years this space provided temporary storage but nowadays it is empty as we are steadily clearing out our superfluous possessions.

In both upstairs bedrooms we installed fitted wardrobes and remodelled the eaves spaces into narrow wedge-shaped 'Quasi-Modo' cupboards.

What was once the ground floor bedroom at the rear is now our open plan Kitchen area (circa 5 m by 5 m) with a breakfast bar where we eat our day to day meals. This Kitchen opens onto our Living/Dining area created by extending the previous dining room/former kitchen rearwards, creating a space which is 8 m deep by 5 m wide. In daily use, this is our main living area and it has underfloor heating, toasty in winter. The rear of the building faces south which means this room is often self-heating from around mid-morning until late afternoon both summer and winter. Informally we call it our Sun Room.

The small kitchen we inherited has been extended and re-modelled to form a proper Utility Room with a secondary freezer, washing machine, tumble drier and 'dirty' sink and gardening/hobby worktop. This is also the location of our gas boiler, the modern condensing type which supplies domestic hot water as well as central heating so we no longer need a roof storage tank, freeing up eaves storage.

As part of our redevelopment, our rear garden was landscaped to provide a raised bed area where Margaret spends many long hours talking to and tending her hundreds of plants. We have no hedges and no grass although trees and bushes need trimming and pruning from time to time.

With garden access via patio doors from our 'sun room' living area, we have a sizeable decking area, comprising an upper deck of 3.5 m by 5 m and a wrap around lower deck about 5 m deep and 7 m wide. Both upper and lower decks are enclosed by 2.3 m high wooden fencing panels which afford us and our adjoining neighbours a fair measure of privacy.

## Next Move

To the right of the garden we have a brick garage and an elderly wooden garden shed both re-roofed with green corrugated powder coated aluminium panels. To the side of the utility room in front of the garage, we have a storage area for our elderly caravan (now 25 years old and still functioning). This old friend is permanently plugged into the 240 volt supply and easily heated to provide additional overnight sleeping accommodation for two extra guests.

On occasions we accommodated up to six guests plus another on a foldaway bed.

Recently we added a tiny 2 m by 1 m lean-to greenhouse in the corner near the rear stairs from the utility room. With a self-watering system and constant love and attention from Margaret, this provides a good crop of tomatoes from August onwards.

The front garden has also been remodelled to provide a raised bed for planting and the driveway re-laid with pavements to provide easy access parking for two cars with enough space for up to three additional visitors' cars to keep them off the roadway.

We are now approaching twenty years at No. 8, probably the longest either of us have lived in any of our homes. Provided we remain mobile enough to manage the stairs up and down to the upper floors to access our bedroom and bathroom, we see our home at 8 Kessington Drive as *our last move*.

And, if push came to shove, we could remodel our ground floor study/bedroom by adding a proper double bed allowing us to live mostly on the ground floor.

*Below is a selection of recent images of our home and garden.*



## Next Move





## Next Move



John Bonthron

August 2025

A family history project



## Next Move





## *Next Move*





# Next Move

*Endnote references shown in text.*

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**i**

Carnwadric is a housing estate located on the south side of Glasgow. The development began in 1927 and was completed by 1932, making it one of the first large peripheral housing schemes in this southern part of the city.

The land had previously been part of large agricultural holdings owned by Sir John Maxwell, as well as earlier by the Royal Stuart line, descendants of Robert the Bruce. It was historically known as "Carnwatherick"

**ii**

Bettina Graziani, whose birth name was Simone Micheline Bodin, was a celebrated French fashion model who became the fiancée of Prince Aly Khan, the son of Aga Khan III, but they were never married. Bettina was widely recognized as Aly Khan's companion and was deeply involved in his life until his death in 1960, following their tragic car accident.

**iii**

In the 1950s, housing on Batson Street in the Govanhill area of Glasgow was predominantly comprised of traditional four-story tenement buildings, constructed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and designed for working-class families. Most tenements offered fairly good quality accommodation for the time, though many still lacked modern amenities like indoor toilets or bathrooms, which were gradually retrofitted in the years that followed.

In later years (when we lived in other locations in Govanhill, see later entries), I walked along Batson Street and thought these red sandstone tenements were quite posh. Nowadays, Batson Street has modern low rise housing (red brick).

**iv**

The likely origins of the surname Sprunt are rooted in Scotland and England. The surname was first found in Angus, in the Tayside region of northeastern Scotland.

**v**

Clip from the film From Scotland with Love - [https://youtu.be/rGFnCtH0E94?si=7JTH\\_anoQ55NueJs](https://youtu.be/rGFnCtH0E94?si=7JTH_anoQ55NueJs)

**vi**

The dye-works industry in Pollokshaws, Glasgow, originated during the late 18th and early 19th centuries as the village evolved into an important textile weaving and manufacturing town. Pollokshaws used the water power from the River Cart and Auldhouse Burn for textile production, which included weaving, bleaching, printing, and dyeing textiles.

# Next Move

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## vii

This is a link to a tale called 'Hand of God'. Not for under eighteens!

<https://www.thebuzzinbee.co.uk/cgi-bin/yZEX9TspXjJ6PWdy6E4jfZQe2S7UtESP/mt-search.cgi?limit=20&search=Hand+of+God>

This is a story about my early career as a singer of religious songs. For all ages.

<https://www.thebuzzinbee.co.uk/updates/2020/11/mario-lanza/>

This story is called 'The Go Between' and is based on truth. For all ages.

<https://www.thebuzzinbee.co.uk/updates/2015/02/the-go-between/>

## viii

Pollokshaws Baths

[https://www.google.com/search?q=image+of+Pollokshaws+public+wash+house+1950s&oq=image+of+Pollokshaws+public+wash+house+1950s&gs\\_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUyBggAEEUYOTIHCAEQABjvBTIKCAIQABiABBiiBDIKCAMQABiiBBiJBTKCAQQABiABBiiBDIKCAUQABiiBBiJBdIBCjI4MjgyajBqMTWoAgiwAgHxBUweGbAtrOX5&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8#vhid=wmz14GDcSgYcVM&vssid=fJzTaMSwM8yAhbIP-9zK6A4\\_43](https://www.google.com/search?q=image+of+Pollokshaws+public+wash+house+1950s&oq=image+of+Pollokshaws+public+wash+house+1950s&gs_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUyBggAEEUYOTIHCAEQABjvBTIKCAIQABiABBiiBDIKCAMQABiiBBiJBTKCAQQABiABBiiBDIKCAUQABiiBBiJBdIBCjI4MjgyajBqMTWoAgiwAgHxBUweGbAtrOX5&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8#vhid=wmz14GDcSgYcVM&vssid=fJzTaMSwM8yAhbIP-9zK6A4_43)

## ix

Here is a link to a story about Rusty.

<https://www.thebuzzinbee.co.uk/cgi-bin/yZEX9TspXjJ6PWdy6E4jfZQe2S7UtESP/mt-search.cgi?limit=20&search=rusty>

## x

Originally built in the 1920s, this row of 'modern' tenements has been upgraded several times since the 1950s. Surprisingly, this squat row of tenement closes still exists today, bracketed by taller tenements built during the late eighteen hundreds when the former village of old Pollokshaws was being redeveloped as Glasgow expanding westwards from the city centre.

## xi

As an aside: Bathing at home was either strip-washing for children standing in a basin or sitting with our feet in the sink. For adults it was standing in a galvanised bath normally stored under my parents' bed, (see later).

The main alternative was renting a bathing cubicle an Pollokshaws Public Baths for half an hour. This huge establishment was also a Wash House (our local Steamie) for bulk clothes washes with access to spin driers and warmed drying racks. There was a Public Swimming Pool with changing cubicles and hot showers, an even cheaper option for bathing combined with swimming but not so warm when drying and changing.

# Next Move

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## xii

Uncle Billy Mac had a droll sense of humour. When I was in my teens, he regaled me with tales of working permanent nightshift at Weirs of Cathcart where he was a Toolroom Turner, the elite of the shopfloor. He always made me laugh.

‘Johnny, we have a deal, called ‘job and finish’. WE then have a confab and decide the priorities for home repairs needing attended too. The we throw the whole resources at these faults and generally by knocking off time we have everything working again. Kettles, vacuum cleaners, you name it. Nothing every defeats us, even if we have to make exact replacement parts from scratch.’

He was a close friend of my father from school days and they attended Sir John Maxwell Junior Secondary together. It was through his wife, Auntie Lottie (Charlotte Bonthron) that Mum and Dad met at ‘the dancing’.

This gift was inherited by his son, my cousin Billy Mac (sixteen moths older than me, almost like a big brother). Billy Mac could always turn a phrase making me laugh uncontrollably.

## xiii

In the 1950s, Hilversum was home to the studios of several Dutch public broadcasters such as NCRV, which aired a range of programming that would have included news, cultural shows, and music tailored for Dutch audiences.

## xiv

The school officially reopened as the Sir John Maxwell School in 1909, with the ceremony conducted by Sir John Stirling Maxwell, a descendant of the original benefactor. This striking three-storey red sandstone structure became a local landmark housing around 500 pupils. The school was notable not only as a centre for general education but also for its role in adult education. Between 1908 and 1915, the influential socialist and political activist John Maclean taught evening classes in economics and Marxist theory at the school, attracting significant attendances from the local working-class community.

## xv

In 1854, Sir John Maxwell of Pollok House, a prominent landowner and local benefactor, gifted land in Pollokshaws for the creation of an industrial school. This institution aimed to provide education and vocational training to local children, including lessons in various trades for boys and girls. Goods produced and vegetables grown at the school were then sold to help support its operations.

## xvi

Saturday Kids’ Club (films), <https://www.1900s.org.uk/1940s50s-sat-m-pics.htm>