

Aluminum Palaces

In order to recreate an authentic picture of life in a prefab an appeal was published in the local newspapers during the summer of 2000, asking for information from past-occupants regarding their lives in these special buildings. The Museum received over forty letters containing priceless first hand information about life in prefabs.

The prize for the best letter went to Mrs Ann Owen. For two years she, her husband, who returned home from the army in December 1945, and two children, stayed with their parents until they were allocated a prefabricated bungalow in Cefncoedycymer near Merthyr Tydfil in April 1947. In the letter she describes their initial reaction to their new home, the community on the new estate and more importantly from our point of view, how they went about furnishing their new prefab:

'The Prefabs looked strange to us, they were grey in colour and neat and fresh if unusual ... We entered the front door that was painted green, as also were the windows and back door, we found the interior was cream and green right through, very much to our taste.

We were in a narrow hall with a cupboard for coats etc. on the right, on the left a toilet, an indoor toilet. What luxury! Then a bathroom with a hand basin and airing cupboard. We were delighted, this was much more than we had expected. To our

right were the two bedrooms, with wall wardrobes and cupboards, splendid! We decided the smaller room for the children ... The living room was next, a large room with more cupboards and drawers. The fireplace was to our left ... This heated the water, we were going to have hot water on tap. It was incredible and with two small children, it was almost too good to be true.

The kitchen was still to come, it had everything, my husband by this time was speechless with happiness. I went along the green units opening cupboards and drawers, a boiler for washing clothes, an electric cooker and most remarkable of all a fridge. We couldn't believe our good fortune ... All I had to get was a table under the window, net curtains and floor covering ... We had taken a tape measure with us so that we could measure the windows for curtains and the floors for coverings, this took some time, then we had to decide how to spend our coupons. This was a worry and a problem. We were fortunate in having been able to collect some furniture from family and friends. We made lists and more lists and crossed out and added, then decided on essentials and once we were in we could gradually collect what we did not have.

We had to cover the floor boards and bought linoleum for each room. The curtains I was able to make. My mother had given me her Singer treadle sewing machine. We had also made a woollen hearth rug during the previous winter. When the floors were



The children's bedroom in the prefab at the Museum of Welsh Life



The prefab's living room

covered and the curtains up we felt we had a home, we bought what we had coupons for in the way of furniture and moved in. We were thrilled and excited at having our first home, with what we thought every modern convenience.

We had bought a Rexene three piece suite, it was brown and I was able to put material, orange, green and beige ... striped to cover the cushions and make curtains to match. We also bought a dark oak dining suite consisting of four chairs and an extending table. I'm still using the table. We had one fireside chair given to us and were able to buy another.

We were fortunate in having a complete bedroom suite and I was able to buy a wicker chair and a carpet mat. I had to buy a bed for my son and as our coupons were exhausted, the manager of the shop where we had bought our furniture had one made for us

out of an old mahogany table, it was splendid. My daughter's cot, made by my husband, had sides we could remove and she had a little bed. There was a small coffer, I had when I was 21, between the beds and a carpet mat.

We had linoleum in each room. Rust and cream in the kitchen, autumn leaves in the living room, green and cream in the large bedroom and blue in the children's bedroom.'

Through the information gleaned from this letter and numerous others, we were able to furnish and interpret our prefab at the Museum of Welsh Life as it would have been in 1950.

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