

Waterloo to Ballingry by David Blane

Early in nineteen fifty my family moved from a small village called Waterloo, which is just outside Wishaw in Lanarkshire to a brand new council house at 24 Craigie Street, Ballingry. In those days families had to move to where employment was good and the Fife coalfield at that time was a massive employer, subsequently miners moved to Fife from other Scottish coalfields.

I was amazed by our new council house. In our previous location the toilets were at the bottom of the garden with newspaper for toilet rolls. I went into the bathroom at Craigie Street and was amazed to see I could operate a handle on the cistern which would cause water to flood through the bowl. I played with this for hours just watching the water disappear – good entertainment for a 9 year old!!!

I was enrolled at the new local Benarty Primary School and after only two weeks at the school it was flooded due to the burn at the back of the Cemetery being blocked. The water just flowed down the natural gradient through Navitie Park and into the main entrance of the school. Oh happy days!!! We had a few days off until things were cleaned up but I still remember going through the school with water up past my ankles. A teacher I remember was Andy Lambert.

Many happy days were enjoyed at Benarty and in 1953, Coronation year, we had a street party where my gran, Mrs Shirlaw, gave out presents to the kids in Craigie St.

At school, English was my weak subject and prior to me sitting the 11+, my mother enlisted the help of the local minister Rev John Sievewright to tutor me in English. It worked because I passed and went on to Ballingry JS School.

I was pals with the Rutherford's who lived at 73 Navitie Park and played football at every chance with Robert, Harry and Willie out in the street with our jersey's as goal markers. Other pals I remember were Johnny Steele his brothers Billy and Peter, Davy Russell, Matthew Blair and Jackie Robertson who all lived in Kirkland Gardens.

In 1954 my family moved to the prefabs at MacGregor Ave in Lochgelly where I finished my education at Lochgelly East School. We returned to Ballingry in 1957, and stayed at 80 Ballingry Crescent. Early in 1959, after all my pals had been called up for National Service, I bit the bullet and joined up myself. I completed my service in the 1980s and my years in the regular army were thoroughly enjoyable as regards comradeship and travel. My family also enjoyed their time with me travelling the world and having a broader knowledge of other countries and cultures.

I recently joined the Benarty Heritage Preservation Group and attend the weekly meetings in the Community Centre where I have met some new and old faces from my time in Benarty. They are doing a grand job in promoting and keeping alive the heritage of Benarty – long may it continue and hopefully some of the younger generation will take up the challenge of keeping it going for the future.