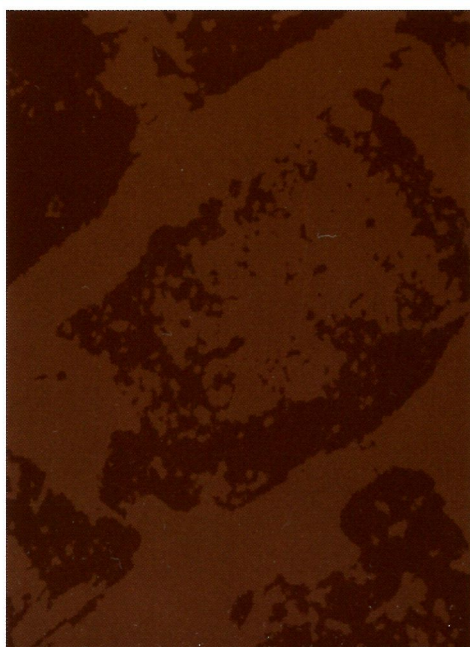
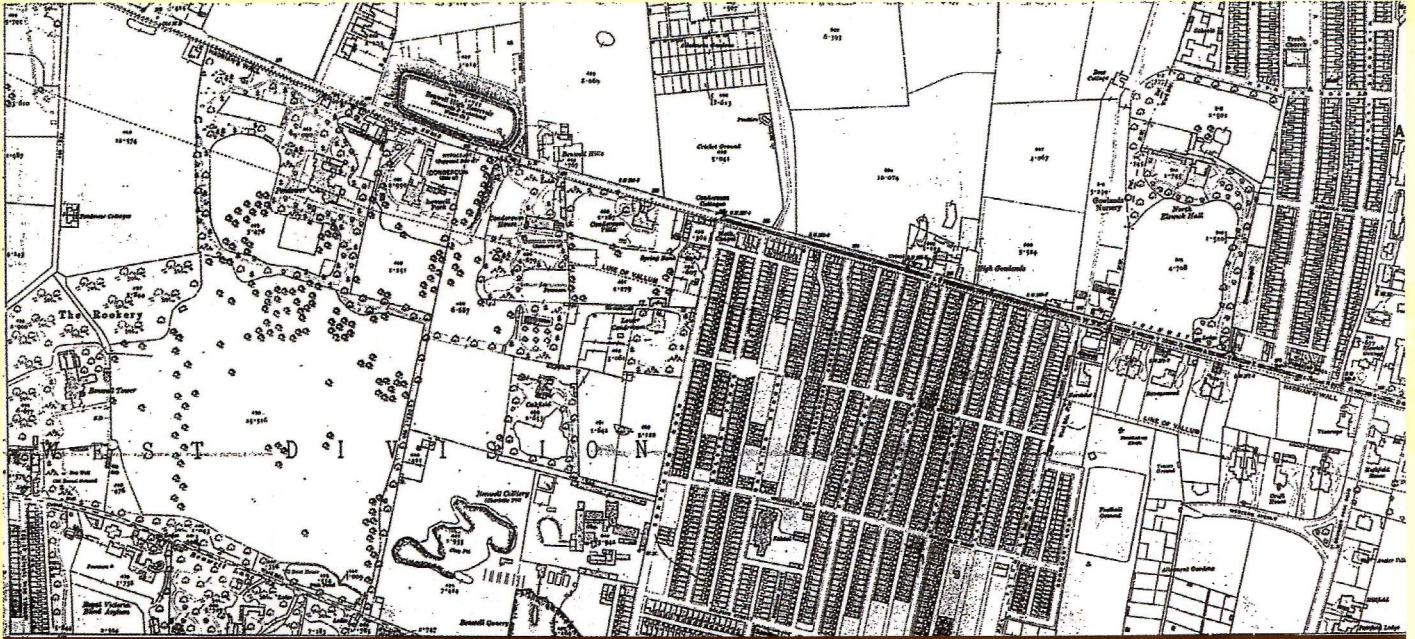


Pendower Estate

Homes For Heroes



Homes For Heroes



Benwell in 1919 prior to building of Pendower Estate.

This short history of Pendower Estate is based on the reminiscences of past and present residents. The project was publicised locally and through the press. During 2008 and 2009 three Memories Events brought people together to share and record their memories, and local residents researched old photographs of the area from the West Newcastle Picture History Collection at Benwell Library. Additional interviews were carried out by an independent researcher. The project was organised by the Pendower Good Neighbour Project and the West End Community Development Consortium.



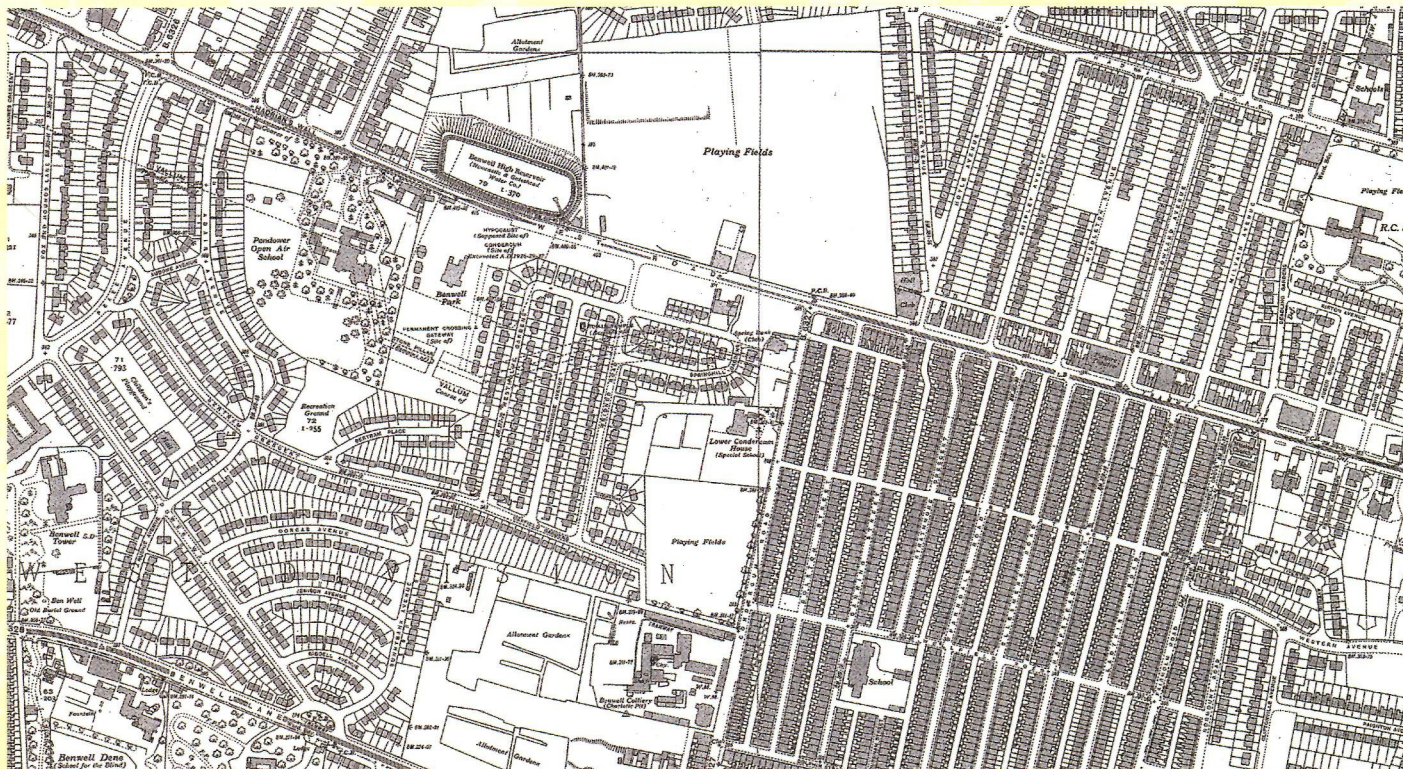
Present and former residents of Pendower taking part in a Memories Event at the Sunnybank Centre where they shared reminiscences and photographs of life on the estate.

In the mid-19th century, Benwell was semi-rural with a population of around a thousand. Housing in the area mainly consisted of the stately homes and mansions of wealthy land-owners and industrialists. Towards the end of the 19th century there was a rapid development of private housing, creating by 1900 a township of New Benwell with a population of 18,000. Despite the boom in house-building, the provision of new homes did not come close to meeting the needs of the expanding population. By the outbreak of the First World War there was still massive overcrowding in the city, with many ordinary working families crammed into unsafe and unhygienic tenements and single-room dwellings. Tyneside was second only to London in terms of the high density of its living conditions.

Faced with the high expectations of the returning soldiers at the end of the War, the government was forced to intervene in the provision of housing. Councils were given money for a crash building programme to provide "homes fit for heroes to live in". The development of Pendower Estate in the west end of Newcastle was part of this national movement which produced Britain's first full-scale council housing programme. For Newcastle City Council, it was an opportunity to provide local families with generously designed, good quality homes with gardens at affordable rents.

The first half of Pendower Estate was built under the provisions of the 1919 Addison Act which was the first piece of legislation to back up the aspiration of providing decent housing for ordinary working people with actual financial subsidies. The Act required councils to survey the housing needs of their areas and submit detailed schemes to tackle these needs. Pendower was the first of a series of land purchases by Newcastle Council, part of a package including areas of Fenham and Heaton.

The second half of the estate was built under the provisions of the 1924 Wheatley Act passed by the first ever Labour Government. It was meant as the first step in a plan to provide every working class tenant of the private rented sector with decent publicly-owned housing at a reasonable rent. This Act



Benwell in 1937 showing Pendower Estate completed

laid the basis for the huge expansion of council housing in the 1920s. Over half a million houses were built under this Act before its provisions were ended in 1933. The estates built under this Act are still among the most popular in Newcastle. The idea was to provide good housing for everyone rather than simply to clear slums and re-house the poorest families. This was about money as well as about good intentions. More than £400 was spent on each house on Pendower and the contemporary Walker estate, in contrast with the much lower figure of about £250 per home for Newcastle's later 1930s slum clearance estates.

The development of Pendower reflects a real commitment by Newcastle Council to build high quality homes. They chose a garden suburb model which they hoped would offer the best aspects of a traditional English village. A contemporary council report talked about building:

"Houses so designed and grouped as to be sequestered among the natural world, and the reproduction of an old English village".



Pendower Way, 1926

The estate was built to a relatively low density of about 12-14 houses to the acre, at a period when private developers were putting up houses in other parts of Benwell at 20 or more per acre. Standards of internal design were similarly generous, with separate toilets and cupboard space, and councillors successfully resisted the architect's attempts to save money by reducing the ceiling heights. Outside there were ample gardens to front and back. In general the estate conformed to the progressive town planning ideas of the period.

In 1919 the council bought the 60 acre site next to Old Benwell Village for £37,500. The Pease Trustees from whom they purchased it sold the land at almost half the original asking price on the condition that it was used "for the purpose of housing the labouring classes". The land previously belonged to the Pease family, well-known local bankers, who had lived in Pendower Hall. The Hall was later handed to the Education Committee for use as a school, whilst 45 acres of the site was developed for housing.

Between 1922 and 1931 a total of 589 homes were built at Pendower. The first two years saw 150 houses built in Pendower Way, Benwell Lane, Fox and Hounds Lane, Pease Avenue and Westgate Road. The peak years for house completions were 1927-8 when over 250 homes were completed.

Newcastle Chronicle 1927:
tenders for last phase of
Pendower Estate

**253 HOUSES TO
COST £94,203.**

**PENDOWER & WALKER
SCHEMES.**

LAND PURCHASE.
NEWCASTLE CHRONICLE
25.7.1927
**NEWCASTLE WEST END'S
£26,625 PLAN.**

Several interesting reports on city housing schemes are due to come before members of Newcastle City Council on Wednesday. Details were furnished to the "City Fathers" during the week-end.

Tenders recommended affect the erection of houses at Murton Street, Walker, and the Pendower Estate.

These number for Pendower 161 houses at a cost of £61,039, and 92 for Murton Street at a cost of £23,161.

The Finance Committee state:—
The Pendower scheme represents the completion of 275 houses under the 1926 building programme at Pendower, approved by the City Council on March 3, 1926.

The houses at Murton Street form the first instalment of a building programme for 1927. The acquisition of this land was approved by the City Council on October 27, 1925, and sanction has been obtained from the Ministry of Health to borrow the cost, amounting to £9,000.

The rents have been calculated on the same basis as already fixed for Pendower, under the Housing, etc., Act, 1924, and the rents fixed under that Act in respect of Walker Estate have been applied to the Murton Street Scheme.

In both schemes the Government subsidy has been estimated at the revised rate, viz., 27 10s. per house for houses not completed before Sept. 30, 1927.

The committee are reminded of the statement of financial commitments submitted to them on May 12, 1927, wherein it was stated that the total capital commitments, on existing post-war housing schemes, including the present proposals, amount to £2,552,400, excluding insanitary areas, rehousing schemes, and the net annual charge on rate account was estimated to be £22,337.

The Early Years

The first 22 tenants moved in to houses in Fox and Hounds Lane and Westgate Road at the end of 1922. Within ten years the estate was fully occupied. In the early years, the estate had a relatively low density of population, as lettings conditions were heavily weighted against any family with more than two children, with the result that at first large families were rare on the estate.

A large proportion of the original tenants came from private rented accommodation elsewhere in the west end of Newcastle. The rents charged were initially set at a range from 9/6d to 12/3d, which was relatively high for the times. Even though most of the first tenants were better-off working families, many found themselves struggling financially, especially as the economic depression worsened during the late 1920s and early 1930s, and widespread unemployment led to rising rent arrears.



Alan Firth (top left) pictured with his class at Pendower Elementary School, 1934-5

Alan Firth's mother was unusual in having a paid job. She worked as a barmaid at the Green Tree pub in Benwell Village. Although his parents worked hard all their lives, they struggled to make ends meet:

"They earned a pittance in them days. I used to go down with her to a little place in Bond Street in Benwell, and she used to take different things out of the house and I used to wonder. She used to go down to Bond Street, and there was a little wooden door with a half door, you know, and she used to stand there at the counter and put the things over. I tumbled in the end it was the pawn shop. That was what she was doing there. And she was going down and getting it back out again, you know. She used to go and do papers as well, for all that me dad had this shop, as I say. He had a break-in and all, and they took all his stock. No insurance or nothing in them days. He lost it, and he had to pay for all that. He used to be out at 10 o'clock at night delivering shoes all round the estate there. 1/6d for a sole and heel for a woman's shoes – 18d. He used to do work for the Theatre Royal tap dancers. He used to put 6d in their heels. Sixpence – lot of money and all! For the click, click, click. Out until 10 o'clock at night delivering shoes for people. He went out at 7 o'clock in the morning and was there till 10 o'clock at night."

Alan Firth



A few women ran unofficial businesses from their homes. Sandra Robson's grandmother, Florrie Colligan, was a seamstress who sewed for other people in the community and also ran a shop from her front room. She made sweets and cakes and other items and sold them out of the window.

Pendower had a reputation for being "posh", and prospective tenants were strictly vetted by the council. But many of the early residents came from flats and tenements in poor condition and lacking basic amenities, with back yards leading on to back lanes, in densely built tree-less areas. For them the opportunity to live in spacious homes with bathrooms, indoor toilets, and gardens front and back was a source of great joy.

"It was 1945 when we got the house in Adair Avenue. My parents had a room on Ladykirk Road in Benwell. It was them and three children in one room in Ladykirk Road. You just couldn't get council houses then. And then they were offered Pendower. They were all hand-picked, I think."

Jean Probert

"I was born in 1935 on Pendower. My brother was 12 years older, and they lived in a house in Spital Tongues. He kept getting chest infections and the doctor said "You must get him out of here, this house is damp." And that was when they were building Pendower, and they were the first tenants in that house in Pendower. When we were young it was beautiful. The streets were lovely because you had the pavement, you had the grass verge, you had trees growing along. That was the ideal. It was lovely."

Sheila Robson

"The family were moved from Gerald Street, and they got this new posh house in Pendower. It was so exciting for them. It was a flat with no electricity, an open fire, no cooker. Pendower had an inside toilet for a start, and a bathroom with hot and cold."

Marion Dobson

Marion Dobson pictured in 1949 on her way home from Pendower Infant School



The houses were well equipped by the standards of the day and had substantial gardens:

"I remember my mother had a washer – one of those you had to move out. And I think there was a set pot in those kitchens, in the corner. (A set pot was a cast iron pot in which hot water was heated by a fire). And I remember the coal house and the pantry next door to it. We didn't have central heating or anything. I remember we had a paraffin stove on the landing. We were terribly posh! And we had inside loos and a bathroom but we used to have a lamp to hang in the bathroom to stop it freezing so it couldn't have been that warm."

Joan Maughan



Joan Maughan's sister Alson pictured in the kitchen of their home, 1948.



All the gardens were bordered with privet hedges and iron railings. The railings were later removed and replaced with concrete slabs which are still in place throughout the estate today apart from Riddell Avenue which has had an external makeover. This is Sunnybank Avenue in the 1960s, with Muriel Carney (nee Matthews) who lived at Number 14.

In the early years, everyone grew vegetables. The City Council offered an annual prize for the best-kept garden on the estate:

"Huge garden. The window at the back really just faced a grass slope, and when you got to the top of that slope there was this huge expanse of garden. My grandfather grew everything there, everything. Vegetables, salad stuff, scallions, radishes. And he had a huge greenhouse and he used to grow chrysanthemums at one end. They were going to the show – Pendower School

and the Benwell House Hotel. It would be fruit and veg shows there. And then later down at Hodgkin Park there was a show. He used to show his onions and his chrysanthemums. There was a lot of competition. People used to actually go in at the depths of night and ruin their stuff. My grandfather used to take caterpillars off his cabbages and put them on the guy next door's cabbages. He used to say "This is war!" "

Marion Dobson

"Big gardens back and front. Everybody grew vegetables. We used to go up and down right down from the top end to the bottom, pinching turnips and eating them, when we were kids. That was a big day, pinching turnips."

Alan Firth



William Scott (above) showing his prize vegetables in his garden in Sunnybank Avenue in 1938, the year he won three first and two second prizes, and (below) in 1947 pictured next to the hut he built in his garden for his hens.



As well as people's own gardens, there was plenty of green space in and around the estate:

"Pendower was built, and you were out in the country. The trams stopped at the Fox and Hounds – that's as far as they went. That was it, when the trams stopped – you felt like you fell off the edge! Two Ball Lonnen, there was nothing at all, just a little track, up to Cowgate. And there was a brickworks now where Morrisons is, that was a brickworks that. Fields, that's all there was. And the West Road, that was a field where the garage is now. And further up, Weidner Road, that was all fields."

Alan Firth

"The road up to Hadrian School used to be all trees. We called it "the woods".

Dorothy Wilson

Community activity was a feature of life on Pendower from the beginning. As with any new estate, problems arose during the period of construction. Moreover for some time afterwards there were design and structural problems to be sorted out, such as dampness caused by water ingress and dry rot in the unventilated floors of over 400 houses. A tenants association was active from the earliest months, pressing the council for repairs and modifications to the housing and environment and seeking improvements to services and facilities on the estate. A letter written by its secretary to the council in January 1924 complained about the "shocking condition" of the paths around the houses, inadequate road sweeping, and rubbish dumping. The association also ran social activities, receiving a grant from the council to support its work.

After 1930 the main focus of the tenants association's efforts was directed towards the establishment of a community hall. At the end of 1933 part of the recreation ground was leased to the association and a single-storey building was erected which was used for concerts, dances, whist drives and other activities. Later plans for an extension, including a library, were drawn up but these were never implemented.

"The Hall was built in the 1930s, and it used to hold all the Scouts and the Brownies and all that. My sister was a Brownie there. Dances at night. Used to have trips for the kids, used to come down here to the coast – thought all my birthdays had come at once, used to come down here to Tynemouth for the day. And it was the time of the Spanish Civil War, and the people in the Gala Land thought we were Spanish refugees and we got everything free. I was only a kid and I remember this. "Come on, you've been through all this!" and we were from Pendower! And we got candy floss and all this."

Alan Firth

Alan Firth and Joan Maughan lived on the estate as children:

"One of my earliest memories is street singers. I know it was a man and a woman, and I remember in my memory they were quite young. And I remember my mother sending me out with pennies for the couple. And I remember an old bulldog used to live just round the corner on Pendower Way called Billy. And every day he walked round the block by himself. You'd see him plodding round."

Joan Maughan

"I loved Pendower Estate. Everybody was nice and there was no trouble. I tell you what there used to be – there used to be

gangs. Ones from down the West Road used to come and do battle. Gangs came up from Scotswood to fight the lads from Pendower. They were the Tanyarders from Scotswood, where the tanyard was on Scotswood, you know. That's St Margaret's Road. Used to be a big tanyard there, and there used to be a right rough lot, you know, come up from there. And there used to be battles at the plantation at the bottom of Pease Avenue. Because they had a Gatling Gun they got out of the Towers – you know, where the Bishop lived – somebody had taken this Gatling Gun and they used to fight for it."

Alan Firth



Joan Maughan holding her sister pictured at the rear of the house in 1949

Joan Maughan moved to Pendower from Cowgate in 1935 at the age of 5:

"It was a very friendly place. If your mum wasn't in, someone else would take you in. It was a happy enough childhood.

And we played out in the streets. We played skippy, and there was always seasons for tops and whips, and we had hoops and things. We used to sledge down here – and, when you think, the buses came round this way. A boy was killed sledging, went under a bus. We used to go out on Sundays all day on our bikes.

We had gangs. We didn't like Riddell Avenue, and their gang used to come up to our street with a bundle of newspaper rolled up with string around and they used to thump you with those. It was hit or be hit."

Joan Maughan

Pendower during the War

The Second World War disrupted life on Pendower in many ways.

Pendower School was closed for 18 months at the beginning of the war. The army occupied the top part of the building, and the ARP used the bottom part. Alan Firth was a messenger for the ARP and remembers going out on his bicycle during air raids. His job also involved collecting shrapnel and shells and other items from bomb sites. The air raids had an impact on daily life on Pendower :

"I remember when the war broke out in the end of September, everybody round about got an Anderson shelter and they was just stacked in the gardens, you know. People would say "Oh I canna be bothered with that". Then the sirens went on a Sunday. They all had them in, I can tell you. Took about an hour to put them in the gardens. But then they used to fill up with water and you had to use a sump to bail out every day. Of course, they bombed the West Road heavily. Next to Milvain, the doctor's surgery, that was flattened."

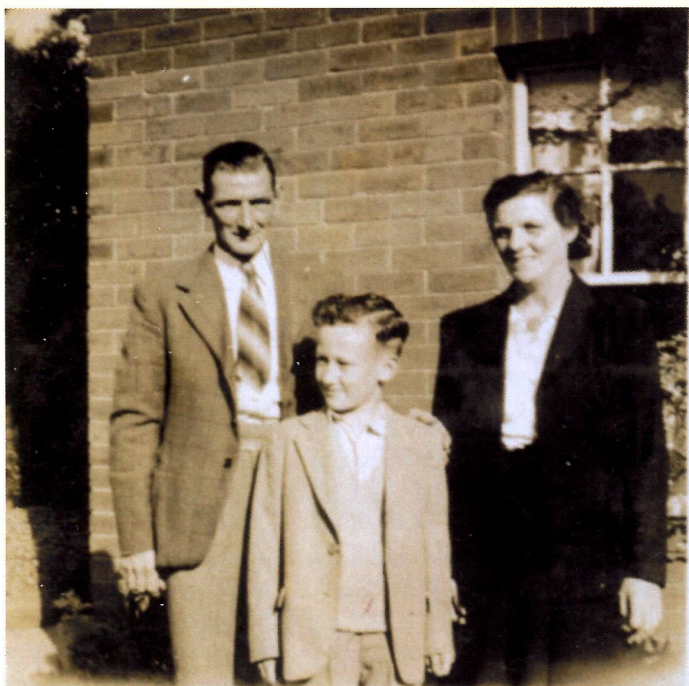
Alan Firth



A legacy of war time - an Anderson Shelter still standing in Helga Simpson's back garden in Rushie Avenue in the 1960s

"We had Anderson shelters during the war, much to my father's disgust as part of his garden had to go. You got the Anderson shelter and there were bunks in it. We had a paraffin stove as well, and we used to play cards. Mrs Bell across the road used to like coming into ours because we had a proper door and candles and things. They used to play cards and we used to just get tucked up in the bunks. As soon as the warning went, you were in, and you would stay there until the 'all clear'. Sometimes we were in on our own because my dad and brother Jimmy were on ARP duty. They used to go round to the Pendower hut and they were there watching on the roof."

Sheila Robson



William and Margaret Scott pictured in the front garden of their home at 14 Sunnybank Avenue with Arthur, an evacuee from the south, who lived with them during the war.

"During the war you had to have an Anderson shelter. I remember my father putting soil over the top. You had to step down into it and off course it was awfully cold, awfully damp. The sirens were always going off. I remember being in and there was shrapnel because the guns were going. I remember my father used to say "That's the big gun at Lobley Hill" and all the china on the mantelpiece dancing. I was given this coat to wear when I was in the shelter. It was right down to my feet and it was green and it had a big fur collar. I thought it was wonderful. We had a primus stove in there, and there were bunks."

Joan Maughan



Sandra Robson's uncles standing in front of her home in Pease Avenue. From left to right: Stan Colligan was in the RAF, Den Bradley was in the Army and Arthur Colligan in the Home Guard



Marian Dobson's uncles aged 18 and 20, pictured in August 1939 just before they went away to fight in the war.

Joan Maughan went to Pendower School from 1935 until it closed at the beginning of the war. She was initially transferred to Canning Street School, and then evacuated to Cumbria for several months where her experiences at school were less happy:

"I was always very happy at school. During the war I was evacuated to Clifton just outside Penrith and I went to Clifton School. I didn't like that very much. There were a few other evacuees but nobody liked us. And of course you had to split your time because it was such a tiny school. And when I came home the schools were still closed. But latterly there were people who were evacuated here when the buzz bombs were in London"

Other aspects of life were affected too:

"I remember the spire on St James' Church coming down. There was a barrage balloon that took it off, and it fell, and it was sort of on the path exactly as it was except it was shattered. It lay there for quite a while before they removed it, and of course it

was never replaced until after the war.

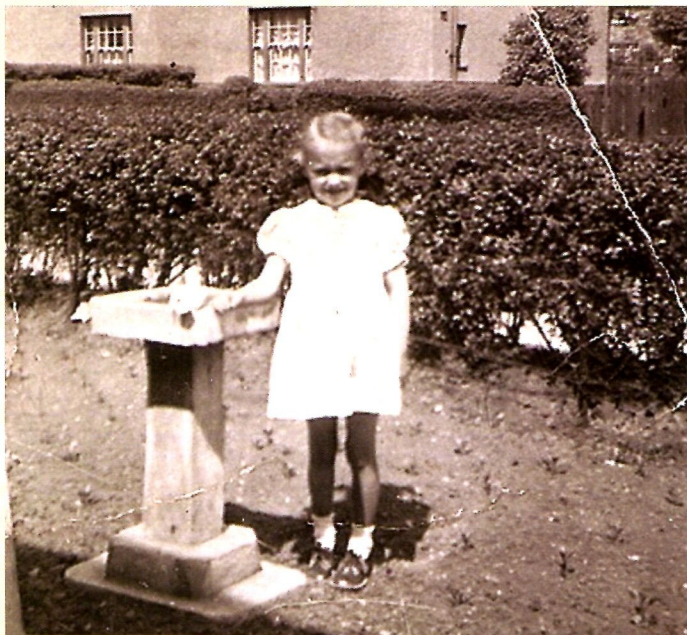
My father was in charge of the St John's Ambulance Brigade down at Vickers. One night they had an awful lot of incendiary bombs down there, but they managed to put them all out.

My brother was in a reserved occupation during the war. He worked at Vickers. He was in the Home Guard. And I remember my mother having hysterics once because the Home Guard were creeping around the back gardens and she worried about her flowers and her veggies. Real Dad's Army. I don't think he ever had a rifle. I think they were on manoeuvres. If I shut my eyes I can see all these men climbing over the fences and crawling across the gardens.

And I remember standing in queues at the Co-op in Benwell for things. I remember standing in a queue and getting a tin of fruit and two oranges, and I thought it was wonderful!"

Joan Maughan

Never had it so good



Maureen Hope aged four in the front garden of her home at 59 Pendower Way

Stories of life on Pendower during the postwar years paint a picture of good quality and well maintained housing, a settled population, and a happy community. The initial housing and environmental problems appear to have been ironed out. The estate had a good reputation and people were proud to live there. Living on a council estate still signified a big improvement in the quality of life for many people:

"I think then to get a council house you were very happy, weren't you? It was heaven to my mam. You had an indoor bathroom, an indoor toilet, and a garden. My dad loved gardening. That front garden until he died wasn't full of nothing else but roses."

Maureen Hope

Residents seem to have been largely happy with the way the council managed the estate despite strict rules and measures

such as regular garden inspections. Complaints about repairs and maintenance were generally dealt with satisfactorily. It probably helped that a number of local councillors lived on the estate during this period and were able to encourage prompt action.

This was a period of relative stability on Pendower. Many families had lived on the estate since it was built, and houses were passed down the generations. Sandra Robson's family had lived in Pease Avenue for over 20 years when she was born in 1948 :

"My grandparents moved there when it was built. My grandfather died in 1932 and my grandmother in 1945, and that meant my mother and two of her brothers were still at home. So they all lived in the house. And then eventually they all got married and my mum and dad lived in the house, so I was brought up there."

Sandra Robson

At the end of the war, Pendower was still on the edge of the built-up area.

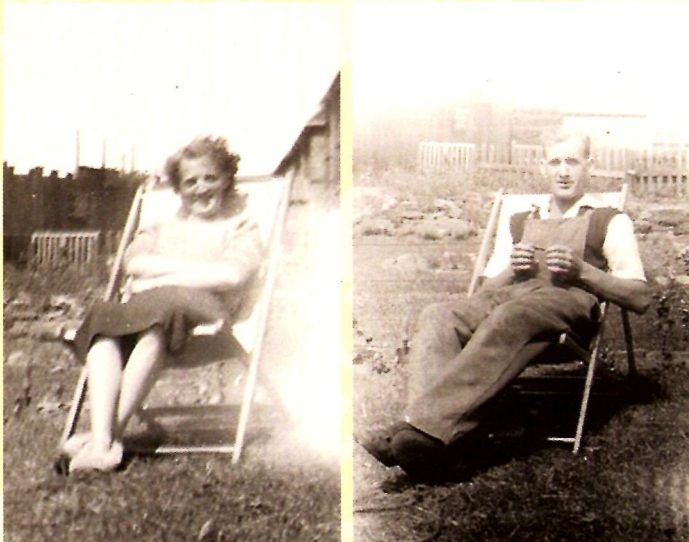
We used to walk to Denton Square, my mam and I, and we used to pick bluebells there."

Dorothy Wilson

It was certainly not an isolated out-of-town estate deprived of facilities, however. Pendower was near to the busy urban neighbourhood of Benwell with its thriving shopping centre. In addition, there were three smaller shopping areas in the immediate vicinity of the estate clustering around Delaval Road, Benwell Village and Oakfield Gardens, as well as the West Road with its variety of shops. Favourite memories of local shops from this period included Wright's sweet shop in Benwell Village and the bakers shop on the eastern edge of Pendower which baked its own bread and sold delicious cream cakes. Sisters Jean and Brenda remembered Delaval Road Co-op, just below Pendower, as a large store with several separate departments for groceries, fruit and vegetables, and other types of goods.

"Benwell was our biggest shopping centre. We'd walk along the top and down Condercum Road past the Majestic Picture House on the corner. And that was all shops all the way along there. My mam used to shop on the West Road too. There used to be a Co-op at Westacres (because everybody was a Co-op person then) and Denton's for bread, a butchers and a bakers shop. But there was more shops on Benwell. Benwell Village had a small police station, and there was the Hawthorn and the Green Tree Pub. There was a club and there was the Rex Picture House, and further down there was the Embassy Picture House."

Jean Probert and Brenda Crawford



Maureen Hope's parents Ted and Kathleen Johnson at their new Pendower Way home in 1949 shortly after moving in and before they began work on the large back garden

There were several cinemas within easy walking distance from the estate, including the Rex on Fergusons Lane, the Plaza on the West Road, and the Regal in Fenham, and the Grand and the Majestic on Condercum Road. There were also dozens of churches across the local area ranging from the big Benwell Parish Church of St James, designed by the famous architect John Dobson, to tiny chapels.

Although it was adjacent to the old Benwell Village, Pendower residents did not see their estate as part of Benwell but as a place on its own, almost like a separate village.

"Pendower was never Benwell. Pendower was just Pendower on its own. You would never say Benwell, never."

Sandra Robson

"I don't think we ever thought about living in Benwell. We just thought we lived in Pendower."

Joan Maughan

The estate enjoyed a high status locally:

"People on Fenham even used to say, "Pendower – that's a posh area, that."

Jean Probert and Brenda Crawford

Pendower was a large estate of almost 600 houses with distinct neighbourhoods within it. Sisters Brenda and Jean Gibb lived with their parents in Adair Avenue in the top part of the estate which had the reputation of being the "posh end". Although they never felt any sense of superiority as children, they were

Tenant's rent card belonging to the Johnson family (Maureen Hope)

Below: Colligans' front door in Pease Avenue in 1951. From left to right. Back row: Doris, Florrie, Doreen and Arthur Colligan. Middle row: Stan Colligan, Anne Bradley. Front row : Sandra, Ethel and Jim Robson, Judith Colligan (baby) , Nan Colligan, Malcolm Storey , Harry Storey, Den Bradley, Susan Bradley. Far left neighbour Brian Armstrong. The occasion was the imminent departure of Stan, Nan and Judith to live in New Zealand

ESTATE *Pendower 1949*
Corporation of Newcastle-upon-Tyne
Tenant's Rent Card Serial No. *198*
1949-50

Tenant's Name *E. Johnson*
Address *59 Pendower Way*
Weekly Rent payable on *1st* weeks each year —
Net Rent — *10.00* per week
Rates & Water Charges — *5.00*
TOTAL — *15.00*
Commencement of Tenancy *9.1.49*
Type of House *2.5*
Housing Officer: E. E. JOHNSON
City Treasurer: FRED WILCOCK, Town Hall, Newcastle-upon-Tyne
Medical Officer of Health: Dr. W. S. WALTON,
IMPORTANT:—Please have this Rent Card ready for the Collector calling



not allowed to play in the bottom part of the estate and believed their mother's story that the lane leading to Benwell Lane was haunted.

A common feature of the stories told by people living on Pendower during this period is an emphasis on the lively community life and strong community spirit.

"As a community, all I can remember is how friendly people were."

Christine Davidson



The Matthews family lived at 14 Sunnybank Avenue from 1955-1974. Pictured here are Margaret (nee Matthews) and Jimmy Smith with baby Margaret in 1967/8

"Pendower was a great place to grow up. The community spirit was really very good. I remember clearly at the Coronation there was all sorts of decorations put out. Of course there was still rationing, and my mum was a very good baker and everybody took their sweets and rations to my mum and she made replicas of the crown. We had huge gazebo tents and things like that in the garden. And everybody was outside at first and then it poured."

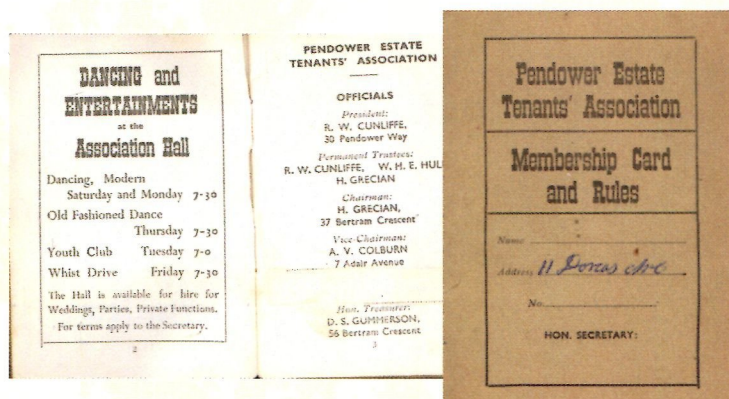
Sandra Robson

"New Year's Eve you used to go from one house to another, and then you'd end up in somebody's house for breakfast. At least the men did: the women didn't. The children would end up in one house, in one bed, and one of the women would stay and look after them."

Christine Davidson

The community hall (commonly referred to as "The Hut") was at the heart of community life. During the war, use of the community hall had declined as so many of the men were away in the armed forces and social activities dwindled. For part of the time, the hall was used by the ARP. However, as life started to return to normal after the end of the war, so the residents of Pendower began to organise their community again. In 1949 the original community hall was replaced with a more permanent structure built of brick instead of weather-boarding and with an additional storey. It was a large building extending from the Pendower Way entrance to the gardens at the other side of the park. The new building cost about £3,000 – a large sum in those days. The money was raised by the tenants themselves through subscriptions and fundraising activities.

For the next two decades, the tenants association was occupied with administration of the hall and running social activities there. During this time, almost every family on the estate paid a regular subscription and enjoyed the concerts, dances and other social activities that centred on the hall.



"My mum used to play whist there. It was an amazing place, Pendower Hut. Everything happened there. Oh Pendower Hut – whist drives and beetle drives. Never bingo – bingo hadn't been heard of then. My dad used to play bridge there. The Hut was absolutely the centre of community life. I can picture it to this day. I can remember going with my mum to afternoon whist drives when the school holidays were on, and I used to play in the park and run in and out of the hall. And there would be three rows of tables with all of these people playing, all playing whist. You were talking 21 tables or something of whist players. At least a hundred people madly playing whist."

Marion Dobson



Fancy Dress competition at Pendower Community Hall party, 1958. Maureen won first prize as a robot. The Judge was Mrs Weddell who ran the dairy in Delaval Road

"My mum started the Under-Sixties Club on Pendower Estate. That was in the mid-fifties. They decided there was nothing for anyone of their age to do. They said there was things for the over-sixties but nothing for the under-sixties – hence the name. That was Pendower Hut. It was well used by the community. And my mum started the very first keep fit in the fifties. Eileen Fowler used to be on the TV, so my mum sent away for the booklet, and you got a record in those days. And she used to practice in the house and then go round to the Hut and teach people how to keep fit. I remember the Under-Sixties Club they used to organise, they raised funds by holding beetle drives or jumble sales, cake sales – they were always organising something to raise funds. I can remember getting dragged in to help them out with things – especially whisking cream! And then they would have days out, go to the theatre or something. And another thing: the women used to get together and do clippie mats. Mum had a big frame and they used to have craft nights at the Hut. My mother would be rushing around beforehand making sure she had everything ready to show people. They would teach each other."

Sandra Robson

Dorothy Wilson was among the many residents who had their wedding receptions at the community hall.

"Quite a few of us did. And had the same menu. The Co-op did the catering – no starter, ham salad and trifle. And we had a band. Got married at 2, had the ceremony, then the food, then we had bands and dancing, and the whole thing finished at 5."

Dorothy Wilson

Jean Probert had her 21st birthday party in the hall, with a skiffle band on the stage, two big barrels of beer direct from the Brewery, and catering provided by her mother.

Dorothy met her future husband at a youth club dance:

"We had a youth club at the Hall. The boys used to play cricket, and I learned to play pontoon and brag there. They had football teams and dances. You really looked forward to the dance on a Saturday night. Quickstep, foxtrot, and we used to do country dancing. We used to have days out – we used to have a bus full."

Dorothy Wilson

"As a young teenager I used to sit at my mam's window watching the teddy boys coming out of the dance – me and my friend. The suede shoes and things! I used to think they were lovely. But it was finished by the time I was old enough to go."

Maureen Hope

"We played there all the time in the Pendower Park by the old wooden hut. That's all we had on Pendower. I remember them building the new one though, because we had fantastic times playing with the beams and that. I remember when a boy fell and broke his leg and we all got stopped going on the beams, and they railed it off and said nobody was to go on it. That spoilt it!

That's where all our holidays were spent, in the Park. We knew we could go down to the Park, play, come home for lunch, go back again, and be back for teatime. And then we were allowed a couple of hours at night but we had to stay in the street then. Playing in the street, everyone played bays and chucks and spinning tops and skates.

When we lived in Adair Avenue, there was a green, and we used to play cricket in the street. Mrs Greaves across the road was in a wheelchair but he used to bring her to the front door so she could watch us, and he used to sit on the steps and he was always umpire – and we took his word. Everybody mixed. Neighbours used to sit on their front doorsteps.

As teenagers we used to sit in the Pendower Park. You could go round to Wrighty's and buy for a penny a Woodbine, and she used to give you a match. That's where I learned to smoke at 14. We used to get one Woodbine and one match between about maybe ten. Somebody always had a hair grip so that when it was getting down you could put your hair grip on so you didn't burn your fingers. Mrs Waggett who lived on Bertram, her back garden faced onto the Park and she would come out each night as it was getting dark and she used to shout "Get yourselves away home. I'll tell your mothers." So we just used to up and away because we knew Granny Waggett would tell our mothers. But we never caused any damage or anything like that. We had some good times at Pendower Park."

Brenda Crawford

Families were often large and included grandparents, aunts or other extended family members.

"My grandmother had to live with us and my auntie lived with us. When my grandfather died, my grandmother had to get out of the house because that was owned by the Coal Board, so she came and lived with us in Rushie Avenue. It was always a house full. My grandmother and my auntie slept in one bedroom, my mam and dad in the other, and me in the box room."

Christine Davidson

Marion Dobson was born in 1944 in Dorcas Avenue in her grandparents' three-bedroomed house:

Pendower Way Park. Pictured (front to back) Linda Farley, Maureen Johnson (now Hope) Gillian Farley, Patricia Lynn, Joy Nutman



Marion in garden of Dorcas Avenue in 1954, together with her grandmother, Auntie Elsie and cousins Kathleen and Don

"Everyone seemed to get married and move in because there was no houses being built. So the house began to be like elastic. Three bedrooms but there was a front room, a back room and a kitchen. So the front room was our bedroom – mum and dad had that as their room when they got married – and I was in the front room with them. And there was three bedrooms upstairs. Uncle Arthur and Auntie Evelyn lived upstairs, and Auntie Elsie and Uncle Jack lived upstairs, and grandmother. We got ten places set around the table every day. I lived there till I was eight. I was the only child in the house.

I remember the house being a hive of activity at Dorcas. Everyone was allowed to bring one person – a friend – on a Sunday. Not everybody got to sit at the table. They would have two card tables with a cloth over them, and stools that my grandfather made. There'd be twenty people on a Sunday teatime."

Marion Dobson

For most of the women, their working lives were spent looking after home and family and their social lives focused on their neighbours and their community.

"My mother loved it at Pendower because she knew everybody. Her house was her domain. She never had to work; she done everything in the house. She had certain days for different things. They all did. They done their steps certain days, their windows another day, and Friday she used to go to the shops."

Jean Probert and Brenda Crawford

Maureen's mother worked on the school dinners.

"There wasn't too many mothers worked. How my mam got this job with the school was, with us living near, someone was off sick and they said "Is anyone's mammy at home that can come and help?" And I went for mam and that's how she started. She got took on permanent eventually. My dad wasn't against it as long as it didn't interfere with his social life and he got his meals on the table.

I had to help with the housework. You had to go out and sweep the front path, not just the steps, and in front of the hedge had to be done. I can remember having to clean my bedroom before I could go out and play."

Maureen Hope

At this time, most the men of working age were in skilled and relatively secure jobs, such as railwaymen, joiners, decorators, firemen, policemen and office workers, as well as the various trades employed at the big engineering factories along the Tyne, especially Vickers.

Mines Fire and Rescue Service



Benwell Towers Mines Rescue Brigade Staff, pictured left to right.

Back row: Ralph Chisholm, Jack Todd, Bob Alderson, Ted Johnson, Jack Brownbridge, Bill Ingleby, George Coulson, Rex Nutman, Bob Fletcher, Bill Waddington. Front Row: Mrs Rutherford, Miss Ashbridge, Steve Harle, Station Officer Cunningham, Chief Officer Mills, Mr Bowman, Joe Postle, Jack Chadwick, Brenda.

In the 1940s the Mines Fire and Rescue Service moved from Scotswood Road to Benwell Towers. Christine Davidson and Maureen Hope were among those who moved on to Pendower Estate with their families because their fathers worked for the service. The Fire and Rescue families lived on Pendower Way in houses that backed on to the grounds of the Towers. The houses were council-owned but the rent was subsidised and the families received free coal. The superintendent lived in a big house in the driveway of the Towers.

Working for the Mines Fire and Rescue Service was a specialised and dangerous job. The men went all over the Northumberland, Durham and Cumbria coalfields responding to emergencies and pit disasters. They were also responsible for checking the safety of mining equipment and fixtures in different pits and for training miners in how to respond to disasters.

When there was an emergency, a bell would ring at the back of the houses and the men on duty would stop whatever they were

doing and run through a door at the rear which led straight into the grounds of the Towers. Those on duty had to sleep at the Towers – “camp bed, grey blankets” – so they were available to respond immediately if a call came about a mining accident. In cases of major disasters, the men would be away from home for days.

“Every time the bell went in the house, you worried until they came back.”

“When it rang that was it. The women were on hot bricks until they came back.”

Benwell Towers had an underground training shaft where the men trained with full apparatus and caged birds. One of the men’s jobs was to breed the birds – originally canaries and later red-eared waxbills.

The old chapel at Benwell Towers was converted into a garage for the rescue vans.



Maureen (above) in grounds of Benwell Towers with her mother Kathleen and Aunt Dorothy, and Joy and Sylvia Nutman and (right) in front of the Towers





The Mines Rescue team pictured at the time of the Whitehaven disaster in 1947 which claimed 104 lives

"All the men had a garden allotment in Benwell Towers at the back of Rushie Avenue at the entrance into the Towers. Massive allotments, huge. Went the full width to the driveway. And then there was tennis courts on the next bit up where they used to play football and things. And there was a beautiful lean-to conservatory right down the full length of that wall where they had grapes and tomatoes and roses."

There were about 17 Fire and Rescue families on the estate, and they formed a little community within the community.

"When the men were tied on duty at the fire station during the summer, most of the families used to gather together on the lawns and have cricket, rounders, football. It was a good family thing."



Mines Rescue Christmas Party at Benwell Towers 1949/50

"Everybody joined in. Even the outsiders were brought into our little community. It was the sort of place where you could leave your door open. Every Christmas there used to be a fantastic Christmas party at Benwell Towers, but you could all take a friend."

Living opposite the Pendower Way Park and trained in first aid, the Fire and Rescue workers were also much in demand to deal with childhood accidents.

"If ever there was an accident in the park they would always come and knock on our door, and my mam would go "Not again". How many heads my dad's bandaged before going to hospital! We were like a first aid station, there was always somebody there had hurt themselves falling off a slide or falling off a swing."



Mines Rescue group including Ted Johnson (Maureen Hope's father) on left with breathing apparatus, photographed on Scotswood Road



Mines Rescue Van at Benwell Towers

A Better Life



Helga Smailes (now Simpson) Beverley Morrison, Christina Morrison and Lynne Askeff in the garden at Rushie Avenue in 1966

Pendower remained a popular and desirable estate during the 1960s and 1970s. Helga Simpson moved with her parents into Rushie Avenue in 1963 from a terraced house in Arthurs Hill:

"They came here, my mam and dad, because they wanted the garden. She had to have two references and she had to have at least two interviews before she was even accepted to be on the waiting list. And they came and checked her house."

Helga Simpson

The Weavers family moved on to the estate about 1970 when their home in South Benwell was demolished:

"It was very difficult to get on at that time. It was lovely. We were four children and we'd had an upstairs flat of a terraced street with no garden. So for us it was wonderful. We had three bedrooms. It was very well kept, because people had moved from the old terraces and having a garden was fantastic, so not many gardens on the estate were neglected"

Julie and Elaine Weavers

During this period, competing sources of entertainment and changes in social life began to challenge the central role of the hall in the life of the community of Pendower. For a decade or so after the war, the community hall had been the focus of community life. However times were changing. Whereas most of their mothers had been full-time housewives and mothers, the generation of young women who reached adulthood in the sixties and later had jobs outside the home and looked for their leisure opportunities beyond their doorsteps.

"Once we left school, we moved away from it. I think it was when we left school we started not bothering with Pendower. I started work at 15 and my life changed. I loved dancing so I used to go to the Brighton and anywhere there was dancing on. But you always had a time to be in and we wouldn't have dared to be late. I often used to take my shoes off and run down the street to get in by ten."

Jean Probert



By the beginning of the 1970s the tenants association was in decline and the hall was falling into disrepair. Finally, in 1974, it had to be demolished, having reached a dangerous state as a result of vandalism and neglect. At the end of 1974 the old association formally disbanded.

Remarkably, however, a new tenants association emerged only 18 months later with a campaigning focus. There was considerable discontent among residents about what they saw as the deterioration of the estate. There had been limited and piecemeal improvements over the years, but the housing generally was in need of significant modernisation. The estate had been bypassed by the big council housing modernisation programmes of the period. The new association was set up in 1975, committed to taking action to reverse the decline of Pendower. It soon had a membership of over 80% of the households on the estate. Within a few years the tenants association had succeeded in its main aim of securing major improvements for Pendower.

"Pendower had never been modernised. There were no radiators on the estate. You had ice on the inside of the windows when you woke up in winter. Our house in Bertram Crescent still had the old pantry. Very little work had been done. They were good solid houses but, while Cruddas Park and those places were built, they didn't modernise places like Pendower. They fought for the modernisation programme. It was marvellous. Central heating was put in and proper fitted kitchens, the bathrooms changed, and there were new doors front and back. It was completely gutted. We had to move out, there was so much work."

Julie and Elaine Weavers



Tenants Association volunteers (above) Edie Weavers and Jean Brown, and (right) June Jardine and Mary McDonald.



The community centre provided activities for all ages. Childrens party (above) teddy bears picnic (below), early 1980s



The tenants association also put a lot of energy into organising social activities for all age groups on Pendower. Changing its name to Pendower Community Association, it took over premises in the grounds of Pendower School from which it ran a youth club, toddler group, playgroup, and a range of activities and services for adults including a lunch club and regular social and bingo nights.

Julie and Elaine Weavers remember how their mother Edie and other women from the estate started by running summer holiday activities for children:

"There was nothing for kids in the summer holidays. They started by organising trips. There were so many kids on the estate and nothing for them to do. They would go around the doors talking to other mothers and seeing if they wanted to join in. Loads of kids would come. It was the mothers off the estate that organised it. It was fun, honest fun, and no-one got into mischief. They went to places like Saltwell Park and Plessey Woods. Then they did playschemes on St Cuthbert's field. They used to carry boxes of stuff up from their houses because there was nowhere to store things – rounders equipment and that. The mothers played the rounders too – they didn't just sit back and watch. Our father did the football team. At the beginning they did their own fundraising. They didn't charge for the playschemes. The council would provide equipment and later grants, but they did a lot of fundraising themselves – summer fairs, bingo.

They campaigned for their own premises. They used to have meetings in our living room. Then once they got the Hut they were just Jacks of all Trades. They took it in turns to call the bingo. They ran a gardening club on a Saturday. We would weigh out fish blood and bone every Saturday for the men to come in and buy it. I can remember the tables with the vegetables on display. They used to be cooking all day – soup, quiches, pies etc. I can remember the first portacabin – the excitement of having our own premises where you could lock the equipment up and didn't have to carry it. Then they got the second hut and turned it into a youth club."

Julie and Elaine Weavers

Edie Weavers was the mainstay of the tenants association for many years. She fitted her voluntary activity in together with looking after a family of four children and holding three part-time jobs at the same time.

"She worked so hard and she enjoyed every minute of it. It was her passion, and we were all involved with it. They were good times."

Julie and Elaine Weavers

Despite the flurry of activities, the tenants association did not lose its campaigning spirit.

"Edie was arrested. She was protesting at the top of Pendower Way. The committee and the Association members sat across Pendower Way and blocked the traffic because they were taking off the lollipop person from Pendower Way. They were all up in arms. They sat across the road in chairs. The police came and warned them but they stood their ground and a couple got taken to the police station."

Julie and Elaine Weavers



A GROUP of Newcastle mothers have staged a "sit-in" on the road they claim could cost the lives of their children.

About 20 mothers blocked a road and stopped traffic to complain about a council decision to remove a lollipop patrol.

They are concerned for the safety of their children on the Pendower Estate who attend the local junior and infants' school.

Three weeks ago the lollipop lady at the top of Pendower Way resigned. Tyne Wear Council did not replace her but moved the crossing patrol to the top of the street.

The group's demonstration ended after 15 minutes when police arrived and agreed to leave an officer on duty.

But protest group spokeswoman Shirley Brady said: "If there is one hour when children have not got someone there, we are going to come back again."

Mrs. Brady, aged 33, of Bertram Crescent, mother of two children who go to

Reclaiming Pendower

A TERRIFIED family are prisoners in their own home after being targeted by violent youths.

Linda Henderson says bricks have been pelted through her windows, she has been threatened with a baseball bat, and her nine-year-old son Carl has had his head split open.

Now the family are too frightened to leave their home and Linda, 39, has had to take time off from her job as a canteen assistant.

A TYNESIDE family has been driven out of their home after a three day siege by axe wielding thugs who pelted the house with bricks.

The Magneron family, of Pendower Way, in Benwell, Newcastle, said they would rather sleep rough than spend another night in the house they own and have lived in for 15 years.

A FAMILY driven out of their Newcastle home by thugs have gone into hiding.

The Magneron family were forced to flee their Tyneside house after a three day siege.

For many years, Pendower continued to be a popular and stable estate, reasonably well provided with community facilities. However, in the early 1990s, conditions began to deteriorate sharply. Pendower began to be afflicted by the same problems of crime and social disorder that troubled many other neighbourhoods in the west end of Newcastle during the late 1980s and early 1990s. It was the lower part of the estate in particular that bore the brunt of these problems, which included high levels of burglary and intimidation, arson attacks, joyriding, drug dealing, and street violence. Many long-established families fled the area, demand for homes on Pendower fell dramatically, and clusters of empty houses appeared for the first time in the estate's history.

"It started to change in the late eighties, early nineties. Not the whole estate. Sunnybank was no good, Bertram was lovely. Our end of Dorcas was fine but I wouldn't go around the other end. People at the bottom of Pendower Way got burnt out. If you heard anything in the street you couldn't go. Edie would say; "Don't look out the windows." It became intimidating. I remember the riots – taxis wouldn't take you to the west end. It was a scary place. The appearance of the estate was a massive thing. It started to go down. Some of the trees were burned and chopped to bits. Also the appearance of the houses – people didn't seem to care so much. We had two or three burglaries then. Not a lot was taken – we didn't have a lot to take. Edie lost the tips she got from the club that she kept in a jar that was going to be the turkey, and they had a whip-round at the club. We were especially angry when I think what my mother did on the estate."

Julie and Elaine Weavers

"They would watch you going past, and I didn't know what was happening until they broke in. Then they knew you would have insurance and they would give you enough time to replace your stuff and then they came back for the new stuff. And we were having terrible trouble with cars. We were getting broken into all the time. One of my lads' cars was stolen from outside the door and used to ramraid at the Metro Centre.

It was absolutely atrocious at one point. I was trying to move away only because of what was going on round about not because I didn't like the house any more or the neighbours. But

there was a lot of joyriding and things. There was arsonists setting things on fire and it even made the national news at one point. It was just joyriders everywhere, police chasing them, cars being abandoned, set on fire, smashed into walls and other people's cars, lamp posts. It was horrific actually."

Helga Simpson

Apparently powerless to tackle the root causes of the problems, the City Council resorted to selective demolition to remove whole blocks of housing, including many trashed and burnt-out properties which there seemed no realistic prospect of re-letting. To make matters worse, Pendower was excluded from all the major regeneration initiatives targeted at the west end during this period, which exacerbated residents' feelings of marginalisation and hopelessness. A new tenants association was set up, but it struggled to make an impact in the face of the estate's multiple problems and the demoralisation of its residents. A 1995 research report carried out for the tenants association found that 100% of residents were concerned about security and that, although they supported the association, two thirds were afraid to join because of fear of harassment by other residents.



Community life was in decline. Closing party of Monday Night Club, 1987. Among this group are May Cater (second from right) and Babs Graham (third from left)



Fox and Hounds Lane, 1994, showing site of demolished Pendower School (with Benwell Towers behind)

For residents, the situation was exacerbated by major cuts in community provision. The primary school was closed down together with its nursery and associated playgroup, which removed provision for younger children from the estate. As the entire site was sold for housing, this meant also the loss of the community centre and youth club building. The youth club activities were transferred to a new modular building hastily put up on a site to the south of the estate but, because of its peripheral location, it has never been felt to "belong" to Pendower in the way that the earlier facilities clearly did.

"There's only four houses left. All the rest was knocked down. And I take a little pride in myself because I wrote a letter and the houses were spared. It makes me think the letter had something to do with it – I hope so. They were going to take the whole lot down, both sides. Lots of people were moved out that didn't want to go. They were scattered. They were moved to Fenham and all over, but the people didn't want to go. Dorcas, Jenison and Sunnybank came down all at the same time."

Win Cowling



Win Cowling moved into Dorcas Avenue in the 1950s, and still lives in the street in one of the few houses to have survived the demolitions. Win (on left with baby) pictured during a community trip to the coast in the 1950s

Fast forward just over a decade later, however, and Pendower has become once more a strong and stable community. There are no longer any empty properties, demand is strong with a substantial waiting list for homes, and plans are afoot to create

additional housing on the estate. The Residents Association has become a strong voice again, ensuring that the needs of Pendower have been kept high on the agenda of policy makers and service providers.

Pendower once again has its own community centre in the form of the Pendower Good Neighbour Project. The project was initially set up in 1998 by local churches and voluntary organisations in an effort to stem the decline of the estate. As its name suggests, it was meant to be a "good neighbour", living alongside residents on an equal basis, supporting them in their daily lives, and offering practical help, support and a listening ear. For the first few years the project consisted of resident volunteers living on the estate, and later funding was obtained to employ part-time workers. It soon became clear that residents – especially children – also wanted somewhere they could meet and take part in activities. With the support of the council, the project took over two houses in Sunnybank Avenue and managed to fundraise to develop these as a community facility with meeting and activity space. The Sunnybank Centre opened in 2003. The concept of being a good neighbour remains at the heart of the project, which still has volunteers living on the premises as well as paid staff and a team of local volunteers from the estate and elsewhere.



Despite the difficult times the estate has endured, there are many residents who have remained there throughout and still love Pendower. Four generations of Helga Simpson's family live on the estate now. Helga's mother, daughter and grandchildren are pictured here in a garden at Rushie Avenue

Pendower Hall

Pendower Hall was originally the home of the Pease family. It was built with all the mod cons of the age – water, sanitation, central heating and gas lighting. First occupied by the family in 1867, the Hall was later used as a convalescent hospital for wounded soldiers during the First World War. The building housed Pendower Hall Open Air School for “delicate children” from 1925 until 1971 when the school was rebuilt on an adjacent site within the grounds of the Hall. Now called Hadrian School, it is still at the top of Pendower Estate. Meanwhile the old Hall was used for various educational purposes over the years, including an emergency teacher training centre and an Education Development Centre for the City Council until a few years ago when it was closed and put up for sale. It remains empty.

Julia Young's father was the groundsman for Pendower Hall School from the end of the war until the 1970s. She lived with her family in the Lodge near the West Road entrance to the school.



Julia and her parents pictured in front of Pendower Hall on the occasion of her 21st birthday party

“It was like living in the country. They had horses and stables. The children loved the riding. Mam used to feed the horses every morning at the door, they used to come right up to the back door.

It was an excellent place for disabled children because the grounds were so lovely. When we were there, there was a tennis court at the back of the house, and down by the side there was a kitchen garden where Dad grew vegetables there. I think he must have grown them and given them into the school kitchens because there was a huge kitchen garden and an orchard with apples etc right down to Pease Avenue.

My father was a groundsman. He did the grounds and caretaker. But he didn't like to be called the caretaker: he was a groundsman. From our house, right up the drive, were rhododendrons, so you looked out onto these lovely red rhododendrons.

At the front entrance there's a portico where the carriages used to stop. And upstairs there was a beautiful lady's boudoir. It

was beautiful – done out Edwardian – and it had a balcony which overlooked the valley. And there was a conservatory part – old glass. One child hid in there one night and stayed there. But I would have been terrified because it was spooky. The servants' quarters were at the back, right upstairs in the roof really. They were so dingy. Little tiny windows. It must have been very scary for young girls.

At the back there was a small door and through there you went into the back half of the building, and then the rest sheds were adjacent to that in the grounds. Every day the children lay and had a rest, and they opened up the sheds so they had fresh air. The sheds were in the grounds near the weeping willow tree. It was good air. It was on the hill, so it was ideal. The children weren't resident when we were there. They were day pupils.

Further down the West Road was the coachman's house. It's still there – the stone building further down. When we first went in there, the kitchen was just as it had been, with pulleys for the tea towels and things. There's a well in there too in the courtyard, just adjacent to the kitchen, and you can actually pump water out. And this woman was still there with her husband who had been the coachman. She had worked in the kitchen in the big house, and she was really subservient. It was like walking into another era. She used to sit and make raffia handbags with old milk bottle tops.

I don't think they should ever have built the new school. It was such a unique building. There were stairs down on to the lawn, and then beyond there was the paddock. It was beautiful, really beautiful. I was very fortunate to live there all those years.”

Julia Young



Julia pictured on the school tennis courts, with the children's rest room in the background. Fresh air was thought to be beneficial for children with illnesses such as tuberculosis. At Pendower Hall the children were literally taught in the open air. In winter, pupils and teachers were often to be found wrapped in blankets, and the ink sometimes froze in the ink wells.

Pendower School

Pendower School was opened in 1929. Originally the site housed an Infant School, a Junior School, a Technical School and a Commercial School. The older pupils occupied the upper floor and the roof playground. During the 1960s when Newcastle's secondary school system was reorganised along comprehensive lines, the new Benwell Girls Comprehensive School was opened at Pendower, but after 1975 the Pendower site ceased to be used for secondary education altogether. A decade or so later, the last remaining school on the site – now known as Pendower Primary School after the merger of the Infant and Junior Schools - was also closed despite a campaign by parents. The building was demolished and the site sold for housing.

"All I remember is painting in the dinner hall. You had to paint one side then let it dry, and then the next time you had your painting lesson you had to use the other side. And everybody had the same reading book, and the teacher used to go along the rows and everyone had to read a couple of sentences. They were big classes, and they were all double desks that were bolted to the floor. They had ink wells, and you lifted up your seat to get in."

Christine Davidson

"I can remember it was a very happy school. You went to Pendower from 5-11. There was no nurseries in those days. The Primary school was boys and girls. Then if you didn't pass for Rutherford College and you passed for Pendower, it was the boys on the roof and the girls on the bottom, and there was different entrances. The Primary entrance was on Pendower Way through the cut where the old fire tower was, the entrance into the Girls was on the bottom of Pease Avenue or Benwell Lane, and the Boys had an entrance further down. When we were out playing in the yard, the Boys were up on the roof. While I was down in the Infants Yard, my future husband was playing up on the roof – but I didn't know that at the time."

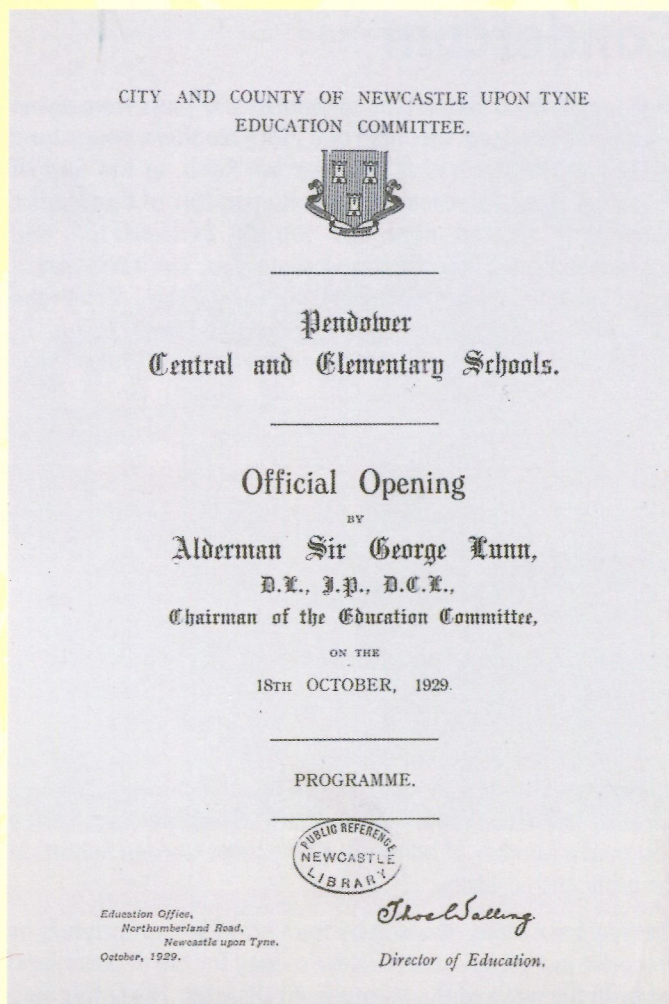
Brenda Crawford and Jean Probert

"My memories of the school is this quadrangle inside the school. Your classroom looked on this green bit in the middle. It was an open air corridor on the inside of the school. When you went from classroom to classroom on the corridor, there was no protection from the elements, so it was cold. It had a roof over it and brick pillars and a low wall."

Marion Dobson



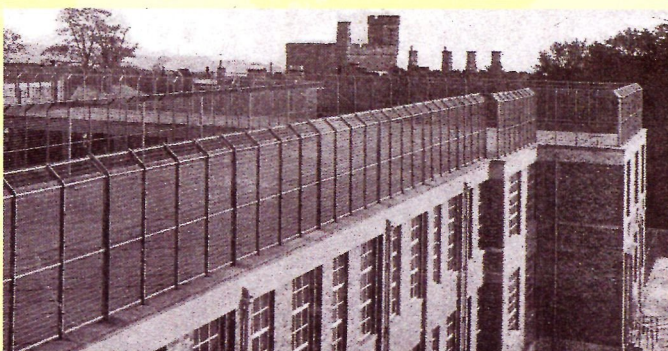
The quadrangle of the primary school



Pendower Schools officially opened in October 1929



Pupils and staff pictured on the last day at Pendower Secondary School



Photograph of the distinctive roof-top playground taken from the programme for the official opening of the schools in 1929

Condercum

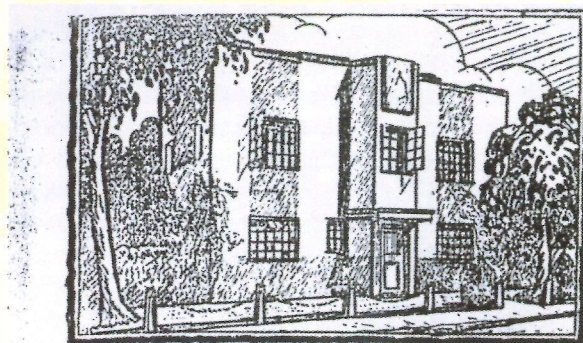
The Romans lived on the Tyne for almost 300 years from about 100 AD. Benwell was an important place for them, lying along the line of Hadrian's Wall. Condercum Road, to the east of Pendower, takes its name from the Roman fort of Condercum which was located near the top of Benwell Hill and commanded extensive views in all directions. The name means "place with a fair view". Condercum was the third fort on the Wall after Segedunum at Wallsend and Pons Aelius at Newcastle which guarded the river crossing. It was a large cavalry fort with 500 troops.

The extensive remnants of the fort and wall were destroyed or covered up when the West Road was developed and there are few visible signs of them today. However two important sets of Roman remains are preserved near to Pendower – a temple in Broomridge Avenue and a defensive structure called a vallum in Denhill Park which suggests that local residents of the time were not too keen on the Roman occupation.

The Shilling House

The "Shilling House" on the West Road, north of Pendower, was built in 1925 for the Newcastle Daily Chronicle as a demonstration house to illustrate the latest techniques in building with reinforced concrete. It is of considerable architectural interest, believed to be the only modernist house built by Michael Bunney and Clifford Makins, who also designed a number of homes in Hampstead Garden Suburb in the early 20th century.

The new house was donated by the Chronicle's proprietors as first prize in a competition to raise money for the disaster fund set up in the wake of the Montagu Pit Disaster. Thirty five men and boys were killed when water flooded the Low Montagu Pit in Scotswood on 30th March 1925. The winner had to estimate the number of people using the Newcastle Tramways on 30th May 1925. The cost of entry to the competition was one shilling – hence the name by which the house became known locally.



THIS
£1,500 HOUSE
FOR
ONE SHILLING

This Freehold House is the Prize in a Competition of skill which will commence to-morrow (Monday).

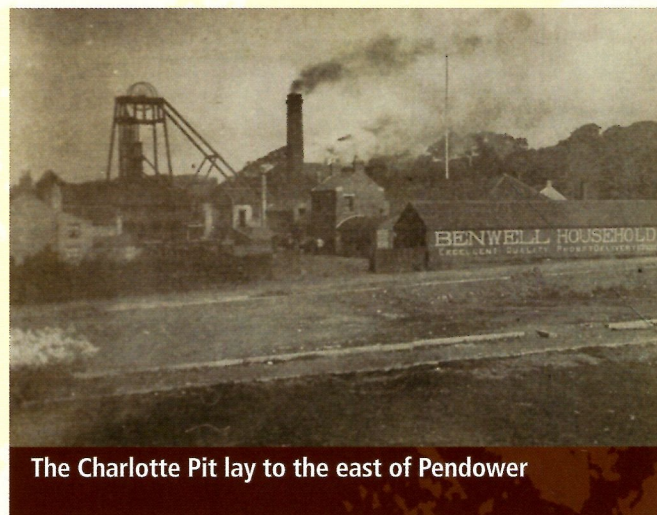
The whole of the proceeds will be given to "The Lord Mayor's Relief Fund for those who suffered in "The Montague Pit Disaster."

If you are interested in how many passengers travel on your Tramway service, you should certainly enter this Competition.

Chronicle advert for Shilling House

Charlotte Pit

Coal has been mined on the banks of the Tyne for centuries and beneath the mainly rural landscape of 18th and early 19th century Benwell lay a complicated and often uncharted network of both active and abandoned coal workings. By the end of the First World War there were three working pits in Benwell – the Delaval Pit at the end of Delaval Road, Benwell Colliery West Pit which was to the west of Atkinson Road below Armstrong Road, and the Charlotte Pit between Condercum Road and Pendower Estate. The Charlotte Pit, known locally as the Charley, was the last surviving pit in Benwell, finally closing in 1936.



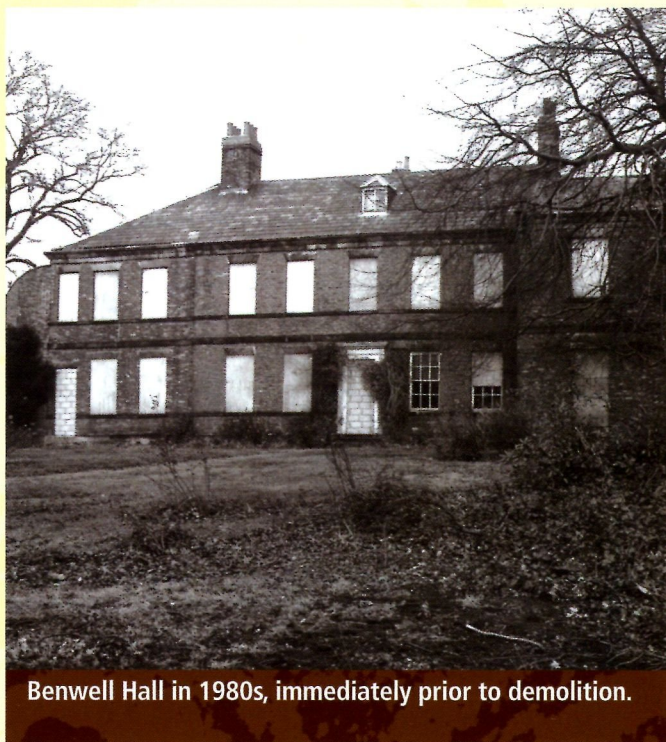
The Charlotte Pit lay to the east of Pendower

Benwell Hall

Benwell Hall was built in the 18th century to the north of what is now Fergusons Lane. One of its notable residents was William Surtees, the son of Newcastle banker and merchant, Aubone Surtees, and brother to Bessie Surtees who was famous for eloping with John Scott, a young man of humble origins who later became Lord Eldon.

The last residents were the Bramble family. William Bramble was a local politician and property developer who was responsible for much of the development of Adelaide Terrace and was later involved in the development of Darras Hall.

The Hall was set in extensive grounds. During the 1920s some of the land was sold off to create a sports field for the workforce of Vickers Armstrong. Later this passed to Newcastle United for use as a training ground. Despite protests, the Hall itself was demolished in the 1980s after falling into disrepair. A new housing association estate was built on the site. Part of the boundary wall and some of the old trees remain as visible markers of the past. The site lies to the north west of Pendower.



Benwell Hall in 1980s, immediately prior to demolition.

St James' Church

St James' Church on Benwell Lane was built in 1833, almost a hundred years before Pendower Estate, at a time when Benwell was a mainly rural area with a scattering of farms and large houses which were home to some of the richest and most powerful landowners, industrialists and merchants on Tyneside. The church was designed by John Dobson, one of the most famous architects in Victorian England. Among those buried in the churchyard are Richard Grainger, Dobson's partner in the re-development of Newcastle city centre, John Buddle, known to his contemporaries as "King of the Coal Trade", John Sowerby, owner of the huge glassworks in Gateshead, William Cookson, manufacturer of lead and glass

as well as an important inventor in his own right, Nathaniel Grace, paper manufacturer, and William Cochran Carr, owner of Benwell Colliery and part of the Charlotte Pit and of South Benwell brickworks.

St James' was the parish church for the whole of Benwell and over the years many residents of Pendower have been christened, married or buried there and taken part in the many youth groups, choirs, and social or sporting activities that used to be based at the church – although some preferred the smaller daughter church of St John's in Benwell Village.



Adelaide Terrace pictured at the start of the 20th century, looking west towards St James' Church at the beginning of Benwell Lane.

Benwell Towers

Benwell Towers still stands today, to the west of Pendower although the present house and grounds occupy only a portion of the estate of which it once formed a part. The house was re-built in 1831 to replace a much older building with a long and eventful history.

For a time during the 15th and 16th centuries this was the summer residence of the Priors of Tynemouth who made money by leasing the mining rights. This ended with the dissolution of the monasteries during the reign of Henry VIII.

In the 17th century Benwell Towers passed to the Shafto family who went on to acquire the whole of the Benwell estate by the beginning of the 18th century. At one time, Capability Brown, later to achieve fame as a landscape gardener, worked for the Shaftos at Benwell. Despite the family's success, a later generation of Shaftos was forced to sell Benwell Towers as a result of their gambling and profligate lifestyles.

One of the house's most notorious owners was Andrew Robinson Stoney Bowes – a member of the Bowes family who were the main coal-owners in County Durham during the 18th and 19th centuries, and a distant relation of the late Queen

Mother. Stoney Bowes, who owned Benwell Towers in the 18th century, had a bad habit of marrying rich heiresses and living off their fortunes while keeping them as virtual prisoners and treating them with extreme cruelty. His treatment of the Countess of Strathmore caused a major scandal.

In 1881 John William Pease, whose wealth was based on banking and railways, bought the house. He gave it to the newly formed Bishopric of Newcastle to be used as a palace for the Bishops. It continued to be the residence of the Bishops of Newcastle until 1943. The Pease family kept part of the land and built themselves a new house which they called Pendower.

From 1943 until 1976 Benwell Towers was used by the National Coal Board's Durham, Northumberland and Cumberland Mine Rescue Service for the mining industry. Its large grounds, under part of which the brigadesmen constructed an underground training gallery, made it a good site for training colliery rescue workers. After this, the house had a short life as a pub and then a nightclub before being taken over by the BBC as the set for the long-running Byker Grove television series. It has remained empty for several years since the demise of Byker Grove and its future is uncertain.



Painting of Benwell Towers by Christine Davidson's uncle Bill Waddington who worked there for the Mines Rescue Brigade

Royal Victoria School for the Blind

The original Royal Victoria Blind Asylum was opened in 1838 in rented premises in Westgate Street, Newcastle, on a site that is now part of the Central Station. Within a few years it became obvious that the premises were inadequate, and the Asylum was moved to Northumberland Street where it remained for over fifty years. Then in 1894 the name was changed to the Royal Victoria School for the Blind and it was relocated in Benwell Dene House on Benwell Lane, south of Pendower

Benwell Dene House had been the home of Thomas Hodgkin, a well known banker, writer and historian. Hodgkin was one of the founders of the Hodgkin, Barnett, Pease and Spence bank, which was taken over by Lloyds in 1902. The house was designed by the architect Alfred Waterhouse who was also responsible for the Natural History Museum in London. Hodgkin donated Benwell Dene House for the School and, at

the same time, gave the grounds to Benwell Urban District Council to create a public park which is still known today as Hodgkin Park. After leaving Benwell, Hodgkin went to live in the keep of Bamburgh Castle.

In the 1920s the School for the Blind was extended in order to provide training facilities for young people over 16 by the purchase of nearby Benwell Grange to create a training centre for young women and Benwell Cottage as a hostel and training centre for young men.

Sandra Robson remembers playing with the children at the Blind School:

"They were very integrated into the community. A lot of things went on there, and we used to hop over the fence if we saw them playing, and we'd go and play with them."

Pendower street names

Tracing the origins of Pendower's street names is largely a matter of guesswork in the absence of contemporary records telling us exactly how and why they got their names. There are however many interesting echoes of the complicated history of land ownership in Benwell.

The **Pease** family lived in Pendower Hall from the 1880s until they sold the house and land to the council. John William Pease, together with his brother-in-law Thomas Hodgkin, was the founder of the Newcastle bank of Hodgkin, Barnett, Pease and Spence. Pease came from a large Quaker family who had made their money from woollen manufacturing, railways and coal mines. His uncle, Edward Pease, was the mastermind behind the development of the famous Stockton and Darlington Railway. The Peases were also heavily involved in politics, and six members of the family were MPs. JW Pease's wife Helen came from Falmouth, which may explain the origin of the name given to the house they built for themselves in Benwell. Pendower is the name of a beach in southern Cornwall, not far from Falmouth.

Almost three hundred years earlier, Sir Peter **Riddell** was one of a handful of merchant families to buy land in Benwell when it was split into smaller estates and sold off by King Charles 1. From a merchant family, Riddell was interested in exploiting the ample coal reserves along the Tyne. Riddell left the estate to his daughter when he died, and this land was later sold in 1670 to Ralph **Jennison**, a Newcastle merchant who had already acquired considerable land in Elswick.

At the same time as Riddell, the Shafto family also acquired further landholdings in Benwell. Although there is no street in Pendower called after them, the Shafto name is commemorated in Shafto Court, a sheltered housing development next to the estate. By the beginning of the 18th century, the Shafto family owned the whole manor of Benwell.

The Shafto family tree includes at least two **Jenison** Shaftos, one the brother and one the son of Robert Shafto of Benwell Towers. The elder was a spendthrift who wasted his family fortune, but the younger **Jenison** Shafto had a more impressive record, becoming a captain in the First Regiment of Foot Guards and an MP. He is reputed to have performed one of the most extraordinary feats in sporting history by riding a hundred miles a day on Newmarket Heath for 29 successive days.

Bertram is another name that crops up in the context of the Shafto family. During the 16th century the **Bertram** family owned land in Benwell, which subsequently passed to the Shaftos with whom they had family connections. The name passed down through several generations, with the family tree including more than one **Bertram** Shafto.

The name **Dorcas** also appears in the Shafto family tree, with at least two **Dorcas** Shaftos during the 17th century. There is also an **Adair**-Shafto connection. Robert Shafto's daughter and heiress, Camilla, married into the **Adair** family - a long established family with extensive landholdings in Northern Ireland and whose ancestral home was the grand Flixton Hall in East Anglia. The Adairs continued to have land and mining interests in Benwell as late as the 19th century.

Aubone Surtees is best remembered today for the fact that in 1772 his daughter Bessie climbed out of an upstairs window of their home on the Quayside to elope with her future husband against her father's wishes. An important merchant and banker, Aubone Surtees was also an influential Newcastle politician, serving as both Sheriff and Lord Mayor of the city. His son William was associated with Benwell Hall and may even have been its first resident. The name crops up elsewhere in the history of Benwell, with an **Aubone** pumping station located in School Street in South Benwell.

Acknowledgments

Residents of Pendower, past and present, who contributed to this history

May Cater	Monica Nixon
Gladys Cleminson	Sheila Potts
Win Cowling	Jean Probert (nee Gibb)
Brenda Crawford (nee Gibb)	Sandra Robson
Christine Davidson (nee Wood)	Sheila Robson
Nell Donnelly	Helga Simpson (nee Smailes)
Alan Firth	Dot Tobin
Babs Graham	Pat Walls
Maureen Hope (nee Johnson)	Julie and Elaine Weavers
Iris Knaggs	Ann Wilkinson
Ellen Langan	Dorothy Wilson (nee Sadler)
Doris Marshall	Julia Young
Joan Maughan (nee Logan)	

The biggest thanks go to the past and present residents of Pendower who participated in this project by sharing their memories and loaning their photos. Their contributions represent the main source of information for this history. A range of secondary sources were also used, including

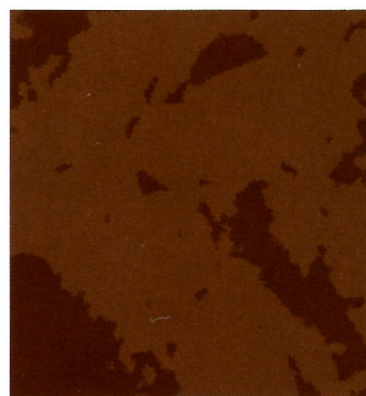
- The series of publications on housing in Newcastle produced in the 1970s by Benwell Community Development Project. The Project supported Pendower Tenants Association in its campaign for modernisation of the estate, and carried out research on current housing and environmental problems and also on the history of the estate using contemporary documents such as council minutes.
- The collection of documents pertaining to the history of Benwell held by Newcastle Picture History Collection at the West End Library

Thanks are also due to:

- West Newcastle Picture History Collection and Newcastle City Council Libraries and Information Service for help with researching illustrations and permission to reproduce items from the collections
- Newcastle Evening Chronicle for permission to reproduce extracts from contemporary newspapers
- Your Homes Newcastle for providing maps.

This history of Pendower in West Newcastle brings together memories and family photographs of present and former residents of the estate. It is a story of everyday life through the course of almost a century and of a community that has worked and fought to support its members and to ensure that its estate remained a good place to live. Pendower was one of Britain's first council estates and its story is also a timely reminder of the benefits of good quality and well designed social housing.

The Pendower Memories project was organised by the Pendower Good Neighbour Project in partnership with the West End Community Development Consortium. The Good Neighbour Project is based in the Sunnybank Centre in Sunnybank Avenue on Pendower Estate. The Centre was created from two houses and it provides space for community activities, living space for resident volunteers, and a community garden. Among the services and activities offered are a parent and toddler group, after school clubs for children, family events, a pensioners' lunch club and social outings, a credit union session, and activities such as reflexology and computers. Being a good neighbour by offering informal support and help remains an important part of the work. The Project also runs a gardening, decorating and small repairs service for pensioners living on the estate and supports the Residents Association and other community groups. It produces a monthly newsletter, The Pen, which is delivered to every home on Pendower.



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