

BUILDING THE RANCH

DEFINITION OF HUTMENT

An encampment of huts (Usually for the military). Peter Dawson has commented that no attempt was made to camouflage the estate it could easily have been mistaken from the air for a military camp.

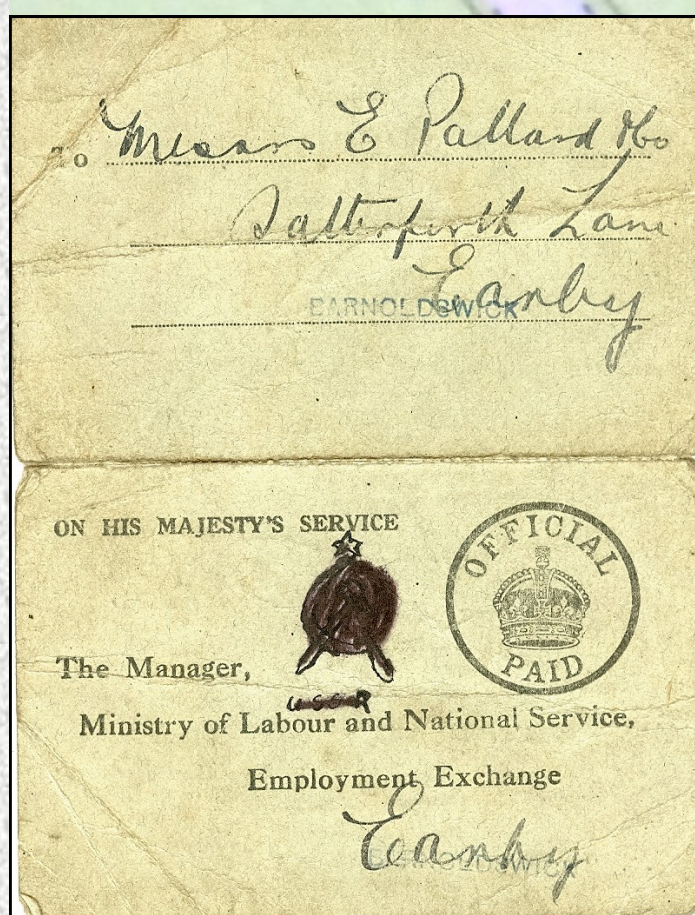
The Solution Resolved

November 1941 Earby Urban District Council (EUDC) agrees to undertake on behalf of the Ministry of Aircraft Production the full control and management of the 176 married quarters in the process of erection.

July 1941 Messrs Shuttleworth of Northholme Farm complained to the council about the land being requisitioned.

July 1941 Three hundred workers had been billeted on a voluntary basis and saturation point had almost been reached, compulsory operation was to be put into action if no more voluntary billets forth coming.

February 1942 – reported that 14 married quarters had been completed and that a considerable number were expected before the end of March.



MINISTRY OF LABOUR AND NATIONAL SERVICE
Local Office, Earby

Part A
Date 13/4/42
In reply to your request of 13/4/42
I am sending the bearer, James Lakeman
Please complete Part B of this form and return it to my
return of post. No stamp is required.

IMPORTANT NOTICE
If the worker is engaged, this portion should be retained by you for record purposes
in evidence of compliance with the Unemployment (Restriction of Issuance) Order, 1942.

Part B
Name of Employer: Messrs E. Pollard & Co
Order No.: 13
Class No.: 2001
Have you engaged: P Dawson
Date applicant is to start work: April 2nd 1942
Remarks (if any):
Date: E.D.245
Signature: [Signature]

Building of the Ranch As Remembered by Peter Dawson

I was still at school when a start was made on what is now the Northholme Estate. Its official name was Earby Camp and all documentation eg delivery notes was addressed accordingly; to others it was, for some reason, nicknamed The Holy City.

Some of us lads used to go up Salterforth Lane to watch the huge earth-moving machines levelling the ground which was to become Warwick Drive.

On part of the site there was a large depression which the earth movers were filling by scraping soil off the higher ground into the hollow. We had never seen the likes of those enormous earth movers which were towed by large track laying tractors fitted with a bulldozer blade. I had no idea that I would be working there when I left school.

In those days you finished school at the age of 14 and on the Friday I left, all the boys had to report to the labour exchange in Earby. This we did the following Monday and were given a "Green Card" with a number on it, I was told to report to the building site office at 7-30am. Another boy, Jim Walker, went with me and he was given work in the office. The firm given the contract to construct the prefabs was Pollards, a London based company.

At that time, anybody of working age was subject to the "Essential Working Order" (the Defence act). Under the Emergency Powers Act the Minister of Labour, Ernest Bevin, had complete control over the labour force and the allocation of manpower.

We had no choice in the matter. Each of the men and boys working on the site was given a lead disc with a number stamped on it. At the end of the working day (5-30pm) the disc was handed in and this was used as proof of your attendance at work. A time keeper was employed instead of a clocking on machine. We worked on Saturday mornings as well to make up our 48 hour working week. We worked Monday to Friday from 7-30am to 5-30 pm with an hour for lunch and a Saturday morning until lunch, for this the wage was 30/- (£1.50p) for a 14 year old boy.

The whole site was like a scene from the Western Front of World War I. There were duck boards to walk on but if you slipped off you were knee deep in mud.

I was told to report to the concrete gang and the man in charge told me I would be wheeling barrow loads of concrete. They were very heavy and difficult to manoeuvre over the rough, soft ground.

The prefabs were built on concrete rafts 60ft x 20ft and 6 inches deep and the concrete gang was on bonus work. They had to lay one of these bases a day. Once the concrete was set the joiners and brick layers moved on to start the construction of the house.

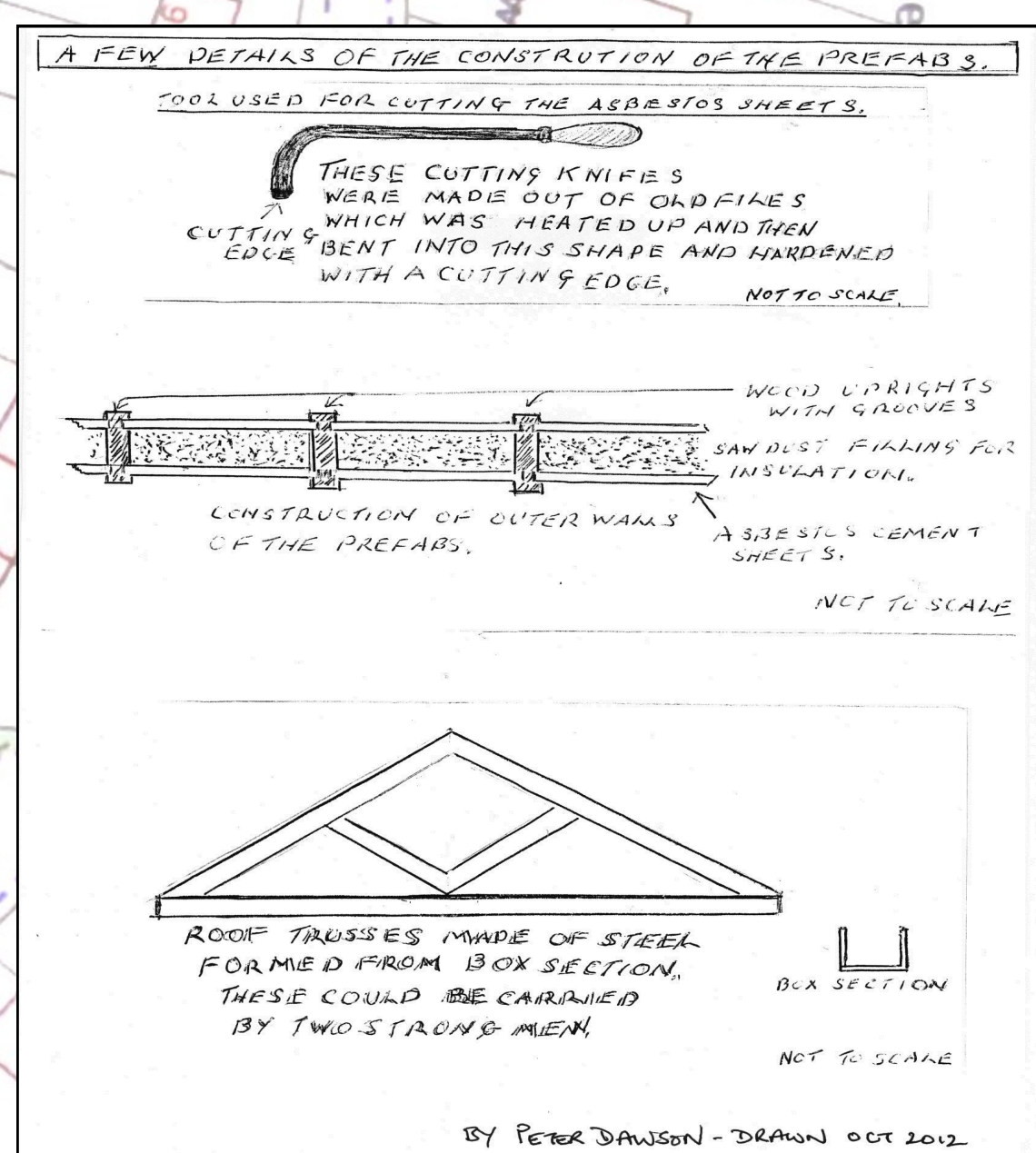
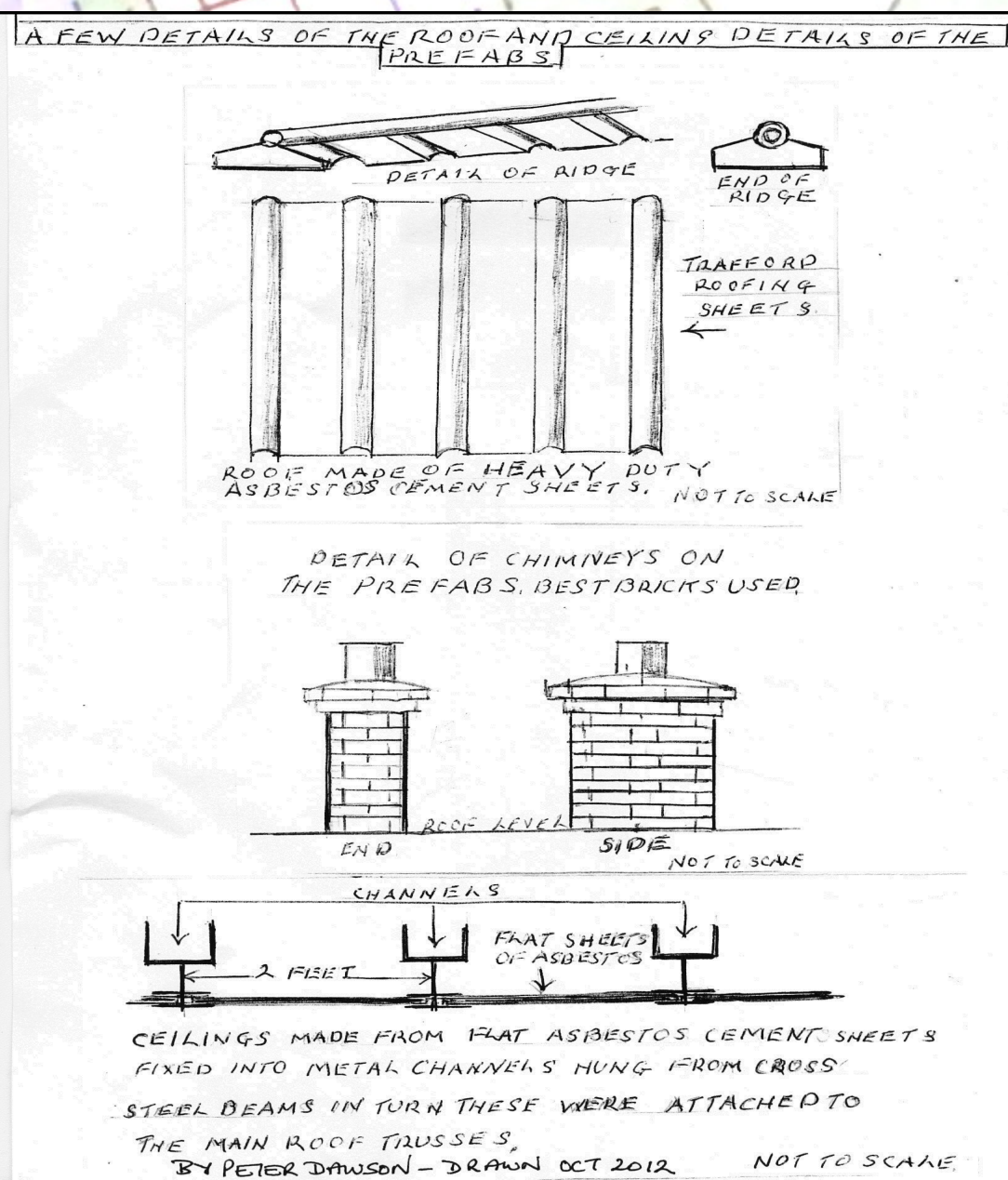
One day the "big boss" came round and after seeing me struggling with a barrow full of wet concrete asked who had set me on doing this, when I told him he was angry and said the work was far too heavy for a lad to do.

Although the concrete gang would be one short I was moved from that job to asbestos cutting. Flat sheets made of asbestos reinforced cement were delivered to the site in 8ft by 4 ft sections about a quarter of an inch thick.

The usual size sheets used in the construction were 8ft by 2 ft (called standard sheets) which meant that the delivered sheets had to be cut into two equal pieces. Any broken sheets were not wasted, they were used for the smaller sheets used above and below windows and doors. The sheets had to be cut accurately as they had to be fitted into grooved timber uprights fixed to the base.

The ceilings inside the houses were made of asbestos cement sheets which were fixed into metal channels. Sometimes these came out and had to be put back which meant going into the roof space which was very tricky.

The sheets were then cut into sets sufficient for a pair of semidetached prefabs and the "Heavy Gang" moved a complete set onto a base ready for construction to begin.



All the cutting was done outside, in all weathers. We made a shelter out of waste timber and old plywood. Tools used for the cutting were curved blades made from old files, these were bent to shape and hardened and made very sharp.

The sheets were not cut all the way through but sufficiently deep to enable them to be snapped in to two pieces. The scored sheet was put on a table and holding each end the sheet was broken along the line. The edges produced were quite rough and had to be trimmed using a rasp to take off these rough edges. No one was provided with any protective wear, not even a pair of gloves and our hands got very sore probably due to the lime in the cement in the asbestos cement mix.

The canteen was an unfinished house on Salterforth Road. I remember water was used from a large electric boiler. Timbers used were treated on site with preservative. The lengths of wood were immersed in long metal tanks which were filled with a green rot proofing liquid called Solignum, very much like Cuprinol. This was delivered in 45 gallon drums.

The installation of all the services; water, gas, and electricity, surface water drains was the biggest job, along with the laying of sewer pipes. The main sewer ran down Salterforth Road, it had to be deep and it was stepped down. A mechanical digger was used to do most of the excavation and this ran down each side of the trench. The depth of the trench meant that the ground was unstable so the sides had to be shored up with timber. One day a man was working in the bottom of the trench when the timber supports gave way and he was buried alive as the sides collapsed inwards. It took a while for his work colleagues to dig him out and to get him to hospital in Colne. However it was too late, he died from his injuries. It was said at the time that the weight of the digger had caused the trench to give way.

When the houses were finished the internal floors were coated with Trinidad Lake Asphalt giving the bare floors a very black and shiny appearance and providing a damp proof layer.

A porch was built over the door of each house which was inevitably used for storing prams, they were called pram sheds. In those days prams were quite large and would have taken up a lot of room inside the house. The porch also provided shelter, being on the top or a hill the houses were quite exposed to the elements.

Skilled workers were very hard to find in the building trade as many had been called up in to the forces and skilled men like joiners had to be brought out of retirement.

One old man came every morning, what ever the weather, from Settle on a very old motor bike, probably of First World War vintage. He was called Mr King and the men used to call him the King of Settle. I got on very well with him and was sorry to see him go when the houses were finished.

Every Tuesday I went with a man to Colne taking very large sacks to Riddihough's saw mill (where the end of Vivary Way is now). We went to fill the sacks with saw dust which was used as insulation material in the cavity of the prefab walls. I used to treat this as a day out and in winter months it felt warm in the saw mill.

Most of the roads on the estate were named after places in the Midlands where many of the workers came from. I think this must have been to make them feel more at home.

In my opinion the site for the estate was chosen because it was handy for the shadow factories in Earby, Sough (Rover Co.) and Barnoldswick (Rolls Royce). In fact they would be within walking distance. Another site which was considered was near the Punch Bowl pub but this was rejected.



