It was a proud day when Keith Twamley and his family got the keys to their prefab house.

With his father Reg away serving in India, Keith, his mother and sister had been living with family above a shop in Canton when the news came that they had a home of their own.

For them, like others desperate for housing as World War Two came to an end, the little temporary two-bed in Ely was a dream come true.

Now, more than 60 years later, photos have been unearthed of life on what was at the time one of the most desirable parts of Cardiff.

Keith, now known to the city as 'Keith the fish' for his legendary fishmonger's business, said: "We were one of the first families to move into the prefabs on Heol-Y-Castell".

"Before that we were living in Canton with my auntie. We were all living in a flat just above a shop - there were a lot of people there."

"My father was stationed in India during the war and my mother sent him a letter saying we were going to move into a prefab."

"He wrote back to my mother and just asked 'what the hell is a prefab'?"
At the time, Cardiff was struggling to keep up with demand, both from families bombed out during the war and those in unsuitable slum housing across the city.

Although small and unassuming in sight, for many living in the 1950s it was the first time they could boast of having a space of their own.

Keith, 77, said: "My mother used to say it was the best thing ever. Ours had two bedrooms, it was wonderful."

"There was an inside bathroom and a fridge which was a luxury. One of my jobs was to check the gas flame at the back of the fridge."

"We used to climb on the roof, although I wasn't supposed to, and drop stones down the chimney."

The grandfather-of-seven added: "When I was living there, there was no Heol Trelai - it was just fields. We would go up there and the woods by the fortress every day, as we knew the family who owned it from school."

As a child growing up through the war, Valerie Collins remembers first-hand what it was like to start again from scratch.

When her childhood home was bombed out, her family also stayed with relatives before receiving their very first home.
Valerie, 84, said: "We lived on Pentrebane Street, but we were completely bombed out. I was only a toddler, but I remember I fell asleep under the stairs in an oven with a cushion inside it. My father was working away."

"From there we went to live in Elford Road in Ely. There were about five of us in one bedroom, with a curtain between us."

For the family-of-four there was no other choice but to simply wait until their own prefab home was ready.

Valerie, now living in Rhiwbina, said: "We got the key and it was 'house number nine on number three road' until it changed to Heol Trelai and it became number 309."

"It was the first home we have ever had. It was lovely and big with a modern kitchen and a table that dropped down from the wall."

"There was no central heating so we used to buy electric fires. It was so cold in there that we used to sleep with gloves and hats on."

"We used to have icicles inside the window."

Today, many former residents of the prefabs still keep in touch. After years of growing up side by side, their friendship is testament to the close-knit community that grew around those who lived there.

Valerie said: "I used to go to Victoria Ballroom when I was around 14 and my mother would never let me wear my best clothes. I would chuck them out the window before I went and then pick them up outside to change into."

“When people were rehomed to Pentrebane, when the houses were knocked down, they put a lot of neighbours in the same block.”