

My earliest recollections are of living in a tenement block, Rochester Dwellings, riverside Walker, a squalid, run-down dockland/shipbuilding area of Newcastle; mind you I didn't realise it was squalid, rundown or riverside at the time or, as I found out much later in life - a notorious hotbed of crime and violence. It was just where we lived. In fact I don't think I had developed the concept of living in places yet, it was just how it was.

Things I remember most ... the stench of the nearby boneyard; kids swinging from ropes tied to balconies; lighting rubbish fires in the middle of the square; a big queue to see the weeping Madonna of Walker ... oh yes and Arthur Blenkinsop' the Labour MP for Newcastle East who lost his seat in the 1959 general election. No ... I wasn't a political prodigy, I just remember a van going round with a big horn loudspeaker blaring 'vote for Arthur Blenkinsop' to the tune of 'Battle Hymn of the Republic' (Glory, Glory Hallelujah) ... a grubby, rollicking gang of kids, cheering, shirt tails flapping, bottoms hanging out of trousers, some barefoot running after the van and singing along "vote, vote, vote for Arthur Blenkinsop". I must have been 5 or 6 at the time and didn't know who or what Arthur Blenkinsopp was of or even what 'vote, vote, vote' meant ... it's just the funny stuff that sticks in your head.