

## Parents in Drumchapel

The death of Shea Ryan, the 10 year old boy killed in Drumchapel is shocking. My first response is to turn away. My second is outrage and anger. Drumchapel kids have been killed on a regular basis since the new housing schemes were built from 1953 onwards.

Those who saw the filmed news sequence on television had a perspective from the location of the tragedy which is not Glenkirk Drive but Kinfauns Drive. Since I was a boy tunnels have been laid beneath the road right here, right at this same location. The pipe-tunnels beneath the road carried the overflow. There would be flooding without them. Where these sewers are being built is, roughly, the location. It was a place of adventure for children, of danger and concern for every parent and grandparent.

In the filmed sequence in the news report of Shea Ryan's death there was a view of the large pipe sections, waiting to be lodged and fitted beneath the road. These pipes are built for weans to worki their way along, even when water is gushing through them. Weans will clamber their way through, wedging themselves against the sides of the circular pipes.

From this location you can see Glenkirk Drive up the hill to the left, where my family stayed from the beginning of 1954. We moved here from Govan when I was 7 years of age. (My novel Kieron Smith, boy takes to do with this.) Southdeen Avenue lies down the hill on the right. In the middle is what we weans called the field. Going back several hundred years this would have been a loch. Nowadays a burn runs through this field, and into the old Garscadden Estate. This burn was also the dividing line between Scheme 1 (Glenkirk Drive) and Scheme 3 (Southdeen Avenue).

Kinfauns Drive is another dividing line. On one side of the road is Drumchapel. On the other side of the road is Bearsden.

I wonder in which side they will locate the sewers.

When they were building the flats in Southdeen Avenue in the late 1950s that was one long building site. Kids raided these sites as soon as the men went home from work. They climbed up ladders on the inside and outside of the scaffolding, played chases up and down stairs without walls, jumping across floors not fully formed. They stole bricks, cement, nails and any tools that could be found and planked them down in the field and along the banks of the burn.

This is what weans do. It is not had to predict. In fact it is inevitable. This is why there has to be proper safety precautions. This is why security staff and secure surroundings are in place in locations where the priority is to protect the lives of children. In Drumchapel this is not the priority. Here parents and grandparents protect the children, as best they can. The authorities have other priorities.

A hundred yards farther along to the right, from the location of the tragedy, is Tallant Road, and the entry into Scheme 4. Much of Scheme 4 sits on the top of another hill. This is the one we kids knew as 'the gunsite'. Anti-aircraft guns were based here during the Second World War. Kids crept in here beneath the barbed wire fence and tragedies happened. They looked for anything to do with weapons and ammunition and whatever else they could lift. They climbed under tarpaulin and swung on the barrels of these anti-aircraft guns. A sentry used to come along every week or so, presumably to check nobody had stolen the guns.

The gunsite is long gone. That became more building sites. Building sites everywhere. Everyone of them an adventure playground. The old gunsite is now Scheme 4. Find a map and look for Rozelle Avenue and Jedburgh Avenue. About 35 years ago I wrote a story of a father walking down from there, passing over Southdeen Avenue. He crosses the field, jumps the burn, heading to the pathway up to Glenkirk Drive and over by Belsyde Avenue, so he can trot down another hill to Drumchapel Railway station. He has to

pass by a place he doesn't like passing. It is a place where kids have adventures, where tragedies occur. This place was the side of a wee hill and was known as the sandpit. Boys and girls tunneled into the sand wall of this wee hill. These tunnels collapsed in on themselves. Sometimes a child was inside a tunnel when it happened and didn't manage to escape out. It happened one time to a pal of mine. The firebrigade came and the firemen managed to dig him out. A couple of kids weren't so lucky.

When the workmen were first building along Kinfauns Drive from the new sewer location they had to demolish an extended farmhouse and its barns around where Goyle Avenue is. These ruined buildings were favourite places for adventure. Weans climbed the walls and ran along the roofs and fell through the roofs. A little way round the bend here is another escape route out of Drumchapel. This was bounded by a woodland area known as the Bluebell Woods. Kids were warned against entry but this too was a place of adventure and of tragedy, where people were killed in the worst of circumstances.

Keep going along Kinfauns Drive to the Peel Glen Road turn off and pass down by the old Bookie tree, and keep going along Peel Glen Road and it becomes a fast road out of Drumchapel into Duntocher and Bearsden, where cars move as fast as they can; too fast for some kids here where tragedies and deaths also have occurred down through the years.

Years ago when I was working as a volunteer at Clydeside Action on Asbestos, word came from local activists in the Peel Glen community. They had spotted old asbestos sheeting and boards amid all the rubble and debris that had been piled in the Primary School playground at Kilcloy Avenue. It was all waiting to be uplifted at some point in the future, apparently. I went with the Chair of the Action on Asbestos group to check it out. Sure enough, the deadly poisonous fibre was lying about in the playground awaiting removal. What a great adventure playground it was for local weans. They

could find all that blue and white fibre stuff and fling it at one another. The poor old Bearsden children never had it so lucky.

Keep going right round Kinfauns Drive past the so-called park and bid a fond farewell to the place where they once had 40,000 residents and no shops. What a wonder to behold, this place where we don't need to cross the Bearsden border to spot various locations named after the aristocrats who stole the land and made it theirs. They have been idealized, idolized and immortalized by the Glasgow authorities.

Parents are given compensation, not justice. They are offered money. The money is given in lieu of legal retribution. There will be no charge of manslaughter or murder. Those responsible will apologize in such a way as to ensure that they will avoid liability. They will pay as low a sum of money as their lawyers can get away with. It is what the authorities call Civil Law. It is this that allows business interests to escape criminal negligence, to escape from charges of manslaughter and murder.

Will those responsible for the death of Shea Ryan ever be brought to account?

Whatever happens there will be no justice. There cannot be justice. A family has lost a child, a great wee boy, an ordinary wee boy. There is no point talking about lives that matter. Life is life. Humans are humans.

One thing continues: the lives of working class children are of no account except to working class families and working class communities. Every time an authority steps up to the camera and says, Our Thoughts are with the Family, I have to resist heaving a brick at the television. What on earth are they talking about? It is meaningless nonsense. It is humbug and it is hypocrisy. My thoughts are of vengeance. I want to dump them in a room with all the uncles and aunties and mummies and daddies and grannies and grandpas that have tried so hard to protect their weans, in spite of all, in spite of all.