Oil company housing was built in “rows”. The usual form of workmen’s housing was rowing and forming groups throughout Scotland. It was a form of work accommodation which was gradually improved as the industry progressed. The usual form of workman’s housing in mining and farming districts throughout Scotland was built in “rows”, usually built of brick with a slated roof. A row, subdivided into anything between four and twelve homes. Many of the homes built in the early days of the oil industry had only a single room. As the industry progressed, housing standards gradually improved and homes with two or more rooms became normal. Some also had a scullery and occasionally an attic room.

Early housing was often cheaply and hurriedly constructed, and provided only single rooms. Poyner’s Row, built in 1866 to serve the short-lived Poyner’s oilworks in Broxburn, contained ten single-room homes.

Single-Roomed Houses

Single room houses were sometimes built back-to-back to form a double row. An example of this type of row survived at Stewartfield (Broxburn) until the 1960’s, although by then some doors had been bricked-up and internal walls demolished.

Two-Roomed, Two-Storey Houses

During the 1870’s and 80’s, rows of two storey houses (known as “high ends”), were built in some of the major villages, including Addiewell, Broxburn, Tarbrax and Oakbank. These had two rooms on each floor, divided by a wall.

Two-Roomed, Single-Storey Houses

At Dalmeny, Oakbank, Stewartfield and Tarbrax, two-room houses were built in which the rooms were entered from either side of a small hall at the main door. This arrangement allowed for such houses to be let as two single apartments when there was a high demand for housing.

The most common type of two-room dwelling was the “through house”. This was divided into two rooms; the kitchen leading off the street and a smaller room at the rear. Both rooms were fitted with bed recesses. Later houses were built with a scullery extending from the kitchen door.

Architectural drawings show “through-house” houses built at Livingston Station c1905 by the Pumpherston Oil Company. Entrance to the house was through the scullery and into a kitchen equipped with a range (for cooking and heating water) and two box beds. You needed to walk through the kitchen to reach the room at the front of the house. This was one of the earliest designs to provide each home with their own flushing toilet, accessible from the yard outside. This design was unusual in having an attic room with a gable window in the two houses at either end of a block of eight. The castle-like crenellation around the scullery was a distinctive architectural feature used in many of the Pumpherston company’s buildings.

Livingston Station in the 1960’s

Large, grander homes were built at Livingston Station to house foremen and other senior staff. Much grander homes were built at Livingston Station in the 1960’s to house foremen and other senior staff.

“We lived in a room and kitchen. Nine of us, not including my parents. We were all girls but one! They were set-in beds, and we had the big bed and the wee bed and one bed in the room and we just huddled together.”


“The most common type of two-room house was the ‘through house’. This was divided into two rooms; the kitchen leading off the street and a smaller room at the rear. Both rooms were fitted with bed recesses. Later houses were built with a scullery extending from the kitchen door.”

Mrs J.S., born 1901, interviewed in 1985.

“The most common type of two-room house was the ‘through house’. This was divided into two rooms; the kitchen leading off the street and a smaller room at the rear. Both rooms were fitted with bed recesses. Later houses were built with a scullery extending from the kitchen door.”

Shale Villages
The communities that served Scotland’s shale oil Industry.