

# Tales of the “Craig Nedd, Glynneath” river bank.

## Early years

My parents moved to 32 Craig Nedd, Glynneath on New Years Eve 1955 when I was one and half years old. I was born in the village of Cwmgwrach just a short distance from our new house. My sister Jean was born a few weeks before we moved in, and the four of us made up our little family. The house was a council house and was built on a new council estate.



At the time we moved in a lot of other newly married parents moved in with their children as well, and the majority of these children were all of a similar age to myself and my sister.

The land that the council estate was built on lay between the village of Cwmgwrach and Glynneath in the area called the Lamb and Flag. This land consisted of two fields as seen in **(picture 1)** and lay between the A465 trunk road and the River Neath. Apparently these fields were prone to

flooding but this did not stop the Council building there anyway, nothing changes there then.

As we had moved into our new house the gardens had never been planted up so in **(picture 2)** you can see me helping to dig the garden and remove a rather large tree from the garden, although I do not think I was much help, probably more of a hinderance to be fair. My parents also reminisced about the crop of potatoes we had that first year, it was never to be beaten by future crops.



## Early memories

Our street was situated on the bank of the River Neath with a small woods across the river, and beyond that the railway sidings to Glynneath washeries and the main Neath to Aberdare railway line alongside that. As you can imagine the river and woods were an ideal draw for the kids of the street and we certainly made good use of these facilities on our doorstep, but as we were so young, it was a few years before we were allowed to venture too far. Which brings me to the purpose of this blog, I would like to share with you in words and pictures my experiences of growing up alongside the river and the fun we had. I would also like to share with you the changes to the river, and river bank, that took place over the years.

I mentioned we moved in on New Year's eve and on that first night one of my first memories was listening to all the whistles and bells being sounded at the stroke of midnight from the local collieries and the steam trains at Glynneath railway station and siding's. This went on for a number of years until in June 1964 Beeching, sharpened his axe, and closed down the railway lines. Then under a Thatcher government the collieries closed and the iconic sounds of New Years Eve ended with them.



# The Big Freeze 1963

The winter of 1963 was a particularly bad winter with a record cold spell which lasted from just before the New Year to the first week in March. I remember it as it was the only time I have seen the river completely frozen over for weeks on end, and if I remember correctly, the schools at the time were also closed due to frozen pipes. Put these two together and you get the ideal set of circumstances for the children of the street to come out and play on the river.



Sledges were quickly fashioned and winter woolies donned for some fun on the ice, it was like a scene from the film "Frozen". **(Picture 3)** shows my friend and neighbours having some sledging practice along with Tinker the dog. I am at the front of the sledge, Terry at the back with Tinker, Keith standing, with Alma on the right kneeling down. The river was completely frozen over to it's full depth of about six inches, so there was no fear of us falling through the ice. **(Picture 4)** shows the view from the river bank down towards the river

bridge into the village of Cwmgwrach. Again you can see people playing on the ice, I think the person in the foreground is probably me, as my father took the picture.

# Summer Sunshine

If the winter of 63 was a particularly bad winter, then in contrast, we did have some nice summers growing up as well. We took advantage of the sun to spend some glorious hours paddling in the river and swimming in the deeper pools, and even trying to dam the river as well. You can see in **(picture 5)** my sister Jean a neighbour and myself sitting on an old tree stump. In **(picture 6)** my sister and, on her left, her friends can be seen cooling off in the river.





As we got older there were a number of other activities that attracted us to the river. When the fishing season started on March 1st, you would find us rod in hand along the river bank, where we would catch eels and sometimes trout, and as the river was tidal up to Neath I once actually caught a flat fish, it must have come up on a flood. We would also grope for small fish in the pools on the sides of the river where we could catch Tiddler's, Bumbleys, Minnow's and Catfish, although I'm pretty sure that's not the proper ichthyologist name for them.

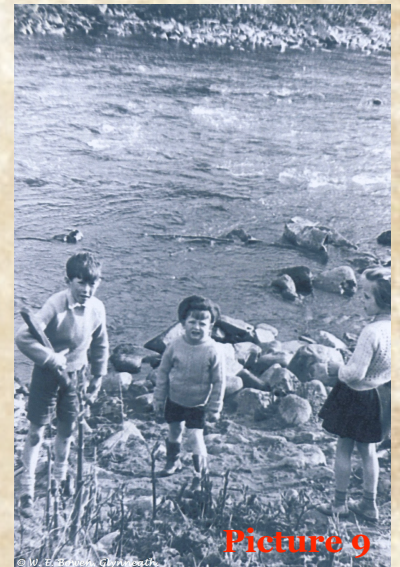


We would build dens along the river bank or in the woods across the river where we would also climb trees, play Cowboys and Indians making our own bows and arrows, looking for bird nest's and generally having a good time.

We would make camp fires on the river bank and sometimes if we found some lead we would melt it down in an old tin can on the fire, then pour it into a heart shaped mould in a local brick to make a nice lead heart. Obviously no such thing as Health and Safety back in those day's to hold us back.

The woods were also our supply of wood for Bonfire night, it was a long way to drag the wood from the woods down to the river bridge and back up

to our house, but somehow we used to manage it. Then it was all about protecting it from being set alight early by other gangs. You can see in **(picture 8)** my cousin Howard and myself building our bonfire at the bottom of the garden.



**(Picture 9)** shows my neighbours Alma and Lynn and me in the middle, with my trusty Davy Crocket hat on, down by the river collecting wood by the looks of it.

In **(picture 10)** you can see me standing on the style at the bottom of the garden looking out across the river to the woods, no doubt looking out for indians, or bears.

A funny thing about that style, for many years people would use the style to get from the river path which ran alongside the river to the street or vice versa, nobody ever asked they just used it. At the time I found it most unusual and it went on for years, but my mother and father didn't blink an eyelid they just went with the flow. Eventually the style was replaced with a gate and for some reason this stopped the people using our garden as a short cut.





# Floods and Changes to the river



Looking back at the changes to the river bank over the years, most of the changes that affected the course of the river can be attributed to flooding or major roadworks. It seemed that the rainfall in the 70's and 80's was a lot more severe than what we get now, there was definitely a lot more storms with thunder and lightening then if my memory serves me corretly. The result of which was that we had many more severe floods over these early years.

The river on some occasions would actually come into the bottom of the garden as can be seen in **(picture 11)**. We would often, from the comfort of our living room, see large trees being carried away down the river and getting stuck under the road bridge into Cwmgwrach, and as the river was tidal lower down the river would rise even further when it coincided with a high tide.

One memorable flood in the mid 60's washed the river bank and gardens completely away, up to about six foot of some houses, as well as the path and trees along the bank as can be seen in **(picture 12)**. The storm happened during the night and the rescue services evacuated all the houses up to ours, but let us sleep all night not knowing there was a problem. I still have nightmares to this day that the house will be washed away by a flood. They then reconstructed the bank using large stones, which meant you could no longer access the river easily.



In 2002 they started to build the dual carriageway between Neath and Glynneath. A few years after it was built it was found that the water was being channeled from one bank to the other side of the river and eroding this bank. Carillon Construction was contracted to build a flood defence wall along the river bank. This wall has certainly helped with flood defence, but makes it impossible to access the river as we did as children. **(Picture 13)** shows how the river bank looked like in 2010.



Now you can no longer see people fishing on the river as there are few access points to get down to the river. Unfortunately as well, the river appears lifeless due to the pollutants flowing off the forestry and farmland higher up the valley. You can no longer access the river or the woods we once played in as children all those years go. The river has been cut off by the flood defence wall, and the woods have been cut off by the Neath to the Heads of the Valley dual carriageway now running where the old Neath to Aberdare main railway line lay.

**Progress? I don't think so.**



I hope you have enjoyed this short blog on living along side the River Neath for so many years, and it certainly helped me to jog some childhood memories.

I have included a few more photographs for you to enjoy. I have also included some [links](#) where you can find more photographs on this subject, in the People's Collection Wales website.



The type of brick we used to make lead hearts

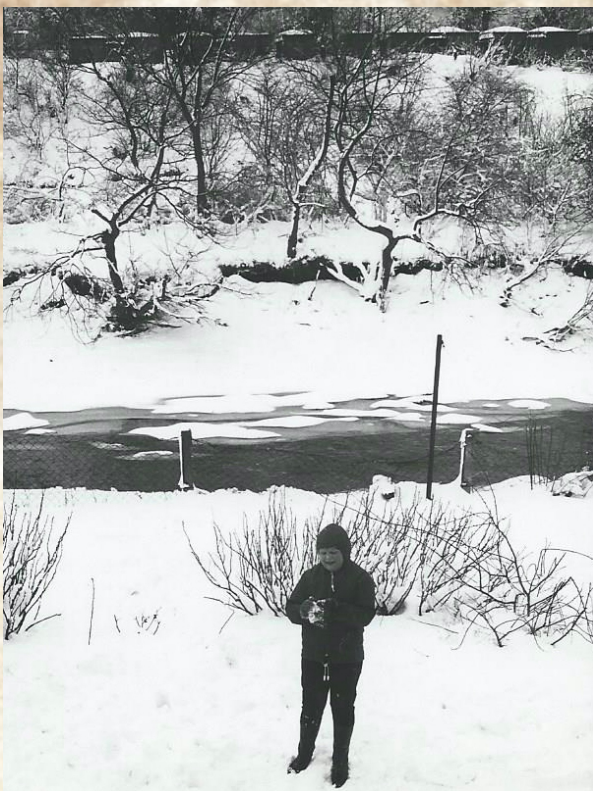
<https://www.peoplescollection.wales/items/1268296>



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The river in full flow at the Langy Bridge:

<https://www.peoplescollection.wales/items/1268256>



My sister Jean playing in the snow 1963:

<https://www.peoplescollection.wales/items/1268321>



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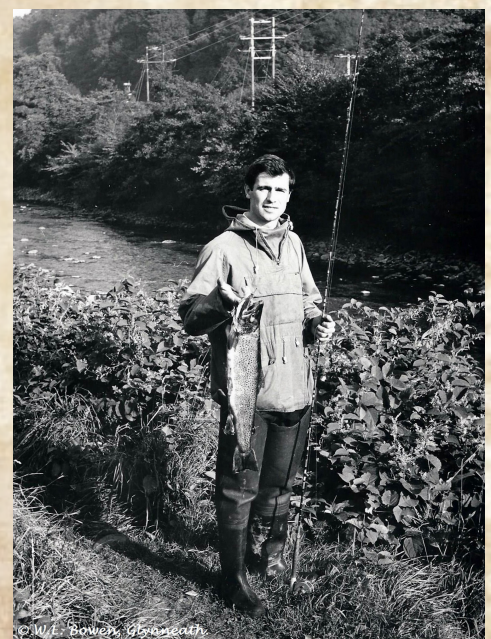
Reconstruction of the river bank circa 1966:

<https://www.peoplescollection.wales/items/1268211>



The Finished Glynneath Flood Alleviation Scheme

<https://www.peoplescollection.wales/items/1272661>



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Glan catches a 5 lb Sewin on the river