

Danny Powell's memories of Cowbridge, born 1940s

As a boy, he watched workmen building the houses in Borough Close, and once they had gone home he scraped mortar off a slate to cement some of the bricks in place. The men were puzzled the following morning – probably they hadn't been laid straight. Dan was apprenticed to Arthur Jones the builders in Eastgate from 1950 to 1955. He had missed a lot of early schooling because of ill health – Mrs Buchalik taught in standards 1 and 2 at the primary school. (Her father was Johnson Miles and had been killed on the road by the Morning Star pub near Pentremeyrick).

The boss at Jones's bought land on Broadway from Tom Bessant, the market gardener, costing £110 per plot, and built the Broadway houses there in the 1950s; also houses in Windmill Lane for two solicitors (from Gwyn and Gwyn, and from Gaskell and Walker). Cowbridge was having its sewerage system installed about 1953. Some of the Broadway houses had cesspits built with them, but they weren't needed as the sewers were installed about the same time.

In 1955, when Dan had done his military service, Jones's was changing to a builders' merchants, so he branched out to build himself. He got work for Graham Thomas to build a bungalow on the St Athan road, on the edge of the old railway cutting. He built this on his own, with Graham's wife Eileen acting as his labourer. It took 6 weeks and 3 days of non-stop work to be completed, and Danny received £104 in wages. He also worked for a time in Burnage's paper shop (next to where Country Casuals is today), and bought a plot of land, with a loan from his mother, in Llanblethian owned by the Burnages who were living at Dyffryn House there. He bought over 7000 bricks from the Cowbridge gas works, which was being demolished at the time, and once he'd met his now wife Gill, she laboured for him. They still live in the house today. He made his own concrete blocks to build the house on the footings of the bricks.

He recalls the gasworks in the Limes. Harold Blick was in charge there. He stoked the retorts. There were long cylinders – the gas going into a big cylinder, in water (?). The gas was used throughout the town. In about 1948, all the gas pipes were renewed as they were rotten, and were dug up in the High street, opposite the chemist's. By 1958, gas was brought from Pontyclun, and the gas works became redundant. About 1962, all the appliances in the town had to be altered. Calor gas was stored behind Arthur John's after the gas works closed.

He recalled the bakehouse of Gibbs by the Town Hall during the war – delicious smell.

The Bridge Garage burned down in 1948 when a tanker unloading petrol backed inside the building and knocked over a stove. The garage was run by a Saunders.

The Pavilion cinema also burned down, in 1942. It was said that the second best ballroom floor in Wales was in the ballroom above it (the first being in the Kings Hall,

Aberystwyth). The building was of iron construction, and the irons were warped so much by the fire that they had to be removed and taken to the blacksmith's (Webb) in Bear Lane. A portable forge was outside there, and men hit the iron with hammers till it was strengthened and replaced in the building. The wheelwright (Gilead Spencer) also had his business there alongside.

The air cadets used the ballroom for a while after the fire, then the council knocked down the back and drove their lorries in for washing and maintenance.

Danny used the river swimming baths a lot as a boy. During the war, when it was double summer time he remembers warm summers and he spent all his free time there. There was a culvert alongside the baths for the flow of excess water, and he was dared to crawl through. He remembers the tin wall to one side of the baths, running from the dressing rooms, where they sunbathed - till they were eaten by horseflies. Further up river by Newton moors, where there is a bridge, the farmers dipped their sheep in the river, putting chemicals into the water. A dead sheep was once found in the baths.

Memories from Danny Powell

London Scottish at Wilton, Sigginstone.
The open day in New Beaupre woods.

Air raid shelter behind Town Hall – nice for kids.

Belgian army – soup wagons behind the Town Hall.

Dug ? shit trenches into Borough Close field.
Rabbits, 6d. added to diet.
After the war, timber in Cowbridge railway yard.

River diverted 1947-8.
Granite setts for the mill race. Still in the garden (Llanblethian), under soil.
DR widow where waterwheel was.

Tobogganing areas – Bonds hill
Cottage 2 bedrooms 6-8 kids
Horse and cart – paraffin, tins, pots

Fire Engine photo (chs04670) : Back – Dan Powell, Tom Carter, Harold Tucker driver
Yorrie Jones, Harold Bevan, Ernie Wheaton standing

Gasworks -
1958 works closed down. Bricks of chimney used for Danny's house, halfpenny per brick.

Bridge Inn – Phillips the plumber there.

1958-9 Danny installing 6ft x 4ft window to display sanitary ware. Whole front of the building fell on to pavement. Old oak beams water through to last inch. Decided to renovate the building and make a flat upstairs.

Louis Fishers, Bear Lane – Harry Webb, blacksmith there, and Gilead Spencer, wheelwright, from Llanblethian.

Pavilion cinema – iron girder building. Girders twisted in the heat of the fire (1947ish). Harry Webb built a portable furnace in the yard and straightened the girders- men with heavy hammers. Concrete lintels with girders, tremendous might. Cinema re-opened 1948.

Church St demolition – cottages had outside steps to the first floor. JB Builders pushed them down – lorry with rope attached.

Red Dragon – barn, Denzil (Griffith Bros of St Hilary)
Builders' stores downstairs, carpenters shop upstairs (1958)
Post office vans in shed.

Woodstock House – Ministry of Food in war – ration books
Identity cards 1951
Baby clinic (doctor, weighing scales, orange juice etc) in 1960s

Eddershaws – garage owned by Jones, Llansannor Court. General dealer.

Bill Sloper. Fire engine in war.

Cinema burnt down – kids went to Pontyclun cinema by train on Saturday afternoons

Hedley Davies (Oscars) – Yorwerth's house. Danny's mother was in service there.

Danny's father worked in Beaupre quarry, smashing up rock to make lime for munitions – one truck a week sent to Birmingham. Larger coal, larger stone. Near Cot Farm.

Bob Collier's electrical shop – Bailey, electronics expert. Made his own TV in workshop. Supplied accumulators/batteries for places without battery. He taught Bob Collier.

Typed by Betty Alden, from Jeff Alden's notes after interviews with Dan.