

Memories of Herbert David the butcher, Tyla Rhosyr

Family Origins

My mother's mother and her sisters were from west Wales, from Adpar in Cardiganshire. They came up here and worked for the Evans family, as housekeeper and cook and so on. Samuel David Evans had a draper's shop where Xantippe is today. It was a big old premises, bigger than it is today, because when Ivor Treharne bought it he knocked a lot of it down. In the back of that the Evanses had built what the locals called the "American flats" to house staff. They had tailors, seamstresses, dressmakers, milliners. If you wanted a man's suit in those days, there was only one place you would go in the Vale of Glamorgan - that was Evans of Cowbridge. They'd make it there. They got nearly all their staff from down west, and that's how my grandmother came to Cowbridge.

My grandfather on my mother's side was a shoemaker. They lived in Eastgate Street, and he was on the local council - Isaac Thomas. They had about nine children. They were Welsh speaking. The local school headmaster used to send his wife, Ruth, a note, saying, "Stop speaking Welsh to the kids. I can't get the lessons across to them."

My father's family were from Miskin, near Pontyclun. When my father's father married, he went to live in Pendoylan. I don't know what he did for a living, but when my father was very small, he moved to Cowbridge. They'd started building the Aberthaw line, and there was tremendous work going on. There was a very deep cutting to start with. It was a lovely line, lovely scenery. It went through Beaupre great park. But it never paid.

My father learned his trade with a butcher in Cowbridge, by the name of Thomas. He left school at 14, and my mother did. They were apprenticed to a trade in those days. That's gone now. But if I'd had sons, I wouldn't have expected them to have carried on. It's too hard work. In those days, the local authority would give the master butcher about £25 for taking on an apprentice.

My mother was apprenticed to Mrs Miles, a solicitor's wife, who used to do some sewing 'on the side', but she must have been recognised as a good tradesperson. Where *Jenny Wren* is now, there was a big old property, Taynton House, where the solicitor's office was. Mrs Miles lived there right up until she died - I think she died during the last war. My mother remained friendly with her, but never took on the sewing business because she married and had four children, and she helped in the butcher's shop. Sometimes my father would leave her to it when he went off to market, and she enjoyed it. Just like a farmer's wife, she was expected to do her share. She might have cut a little bit of meat, but she was no expert at it.

World War I

They must have got married about 1912. Whether he saw it advertised in the paper or whether it was word of mouth I don't know, but he bought a small butchery business in Hayes and Harlington. They lived there for two years, but he was the right age to be called up for the army, and he had to leave the business. He trained for about three or four months, and was out in France for three or four months, and got wounded in Passchendaele in Belgium. He was shipped back to this country with shrapnel wounds in the back, lost a lung - a very big thing in those days - and was in hospital for two years. By then they had one daughter, my eldest sister, Megan, who is about 86 now. The medical people told him he wouldn't be able to do any heavy work.

Back in Cowbridge, his wife, my mother, was living with her mother, in Eastgate Street. It was near the station entrance. There was the Druids' hotel, then the road going to the railway yards, then the old station on to the road, then the road to the new station built for the line to Aberthaw. There's a house which is called Glen Cottage, and a very small house next to it, 37 Eastgate. Being an old house, whoever lived there built on out the back, so it was larger than it looked. That was where my grandfather had his shoe shop. He married the Evanses' cook, and she opened a shop in the front and sold bread and cakes. It was called Adpar House.

My father used to come home from hospital in Windsor, and he was walking down the street one day, and there was a butcher's shop where Keith Evans's shop is now [Bridge Studio] - opposite the betting shop. That used to be Thomas's butcher's shop during the first war. My father was walking down the street in his "army blue" [wounded soldier's uniform], in about 1917. This butcher came out and said, "Look here, Billy. My wife has

left, and I want you to take over the business." My father was discharged from the forces, because of his wounds, on a fifty per cent pension.

He said to my mother, "We'll move into this big old house behind the shop". They went to see it and it was in a hell of a state, and my mother said, "I'm not moving in there." There was a small shop next door to the Commercial Hotel, owned by a chap by the name of Williams, living in the Cardiff Road, and my father asked to rent the shop. The house was in a pretty good state, so my father finished down there and opened the other shop. We kids were born there. It was known as Bristol House, right opposite the station. It was a good position, because miners used to come down on the train from the valleys and go on the booze in Cowbridge, and decide to take a good leg of Welsh lamb back with them. My father said to Bob Thomas the builder, "Knock a hole in the wall. I'm going to open a shop here."

I don't think my parents ever had a cross word with one another. My father was easy-going. My mother was looking after us kids - we never went short. Children used to be sent to Sunday school and dressed up in their "Sunday best". They went on Sunday morning after the chapel service. Sunday school trips used to go to Porthcawl or Barry. One day we went to Cardiff Central Market and they bought me a Royal Enfield bike, for £3-19-6. I wanted to ride it home. They sent it by train, and it got to Cowbridge just after we arrived by car.

Early days of the business

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There was a market in Cowbridge, there was one in Ystradowen and one in Wenvoe, one in Bridgend and one in Llantwit Major. He didn't go to them all. He'd go to Cowbridge market and buy a couple of pens of lambs (about 12 lambs) and a bullock. He'd produce his own pork, because he was keeping pigs by the slaughterhouse. If we bought a bullock in the market, we had to drive it down the street. One day, one ran into Arthur Sanders' shoe shop and couldn't back out, so we had to drive him round the kitchen table to turn him round and get him out again. I'm glad to say he didn't make a mess in there.

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Before the war, we rented a couple of other fields around the town - on the Cardiff and St Athan road - where we ran about 30-40 ewes, producing our own lamb. We used to buy a couple of store cattle every year, and we had a "house cow" - for milk. I don't know what breed they were. A chap by the name of Thomas built a house in Llanblethian just before the war. He used to farm near Llantwit Major, about 300 acres, and the government took it over in the 1930s because times were bad. They brought people from the Rhondda down to St Athan and other places, hoping to get the miners to run smallholdings. They gave the families a house, a couple of acres and a cow. They never made a go of it, and then they started building the RAF base in 1932-3, so they sold the cow and went to work on the 'drome. That could have been where our cow came from.

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My brother and I started working in the shop when we were fourteen, but I could dress a lamb when I was twelve years old. My father taught me at the same time as he taught my brother. He thought that it was the best thing for us, to come into the business. Some had a "further vision". My friend, John Jenkins, his father was a builder in Pontypridd. John didn't pass the eleven-plus, and was sent to Monkton House School, and did very well. His last job was as manager of Cowbridge Midland Bank. When he was about eighteen, he went into the bank. His brother went into the building trade. I went to Cowbridge Elementary School, on Broadway. My brother left a bit earlier, because he went to Monkton House for two or three years. They wanted to send me too, but I wouldn't go.

World War II

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After the RAF, I went straight home, but my brother went to work in Cardiff. He didn't want to know. But eventually he came back to the business. The rationing went on so long, till about 1953. There wasn't much black market activity. Even before the war, the butcher had to make sure the meat went through the hands of the local sanitary and health inspector. But a local farmer might have been able to kill and dress lambs himself, or pigs, and that was a nuisance as far as we were concerned, because they used to flood Cowbridge with fresh meat that hadn't been killed in hygienic circumstances. I don't think sausages were rationed, but the butcher might make 100 lbs of sausages if he had a bit of spare meat, and he could offer them to customers who came in. We used to make a lot of sausages. We didn't have time to make a variety. You were tied to traditional ways of doing things. We had good rounds to farms. I started a good delivery round on the RAF camp in St Athan, and my brother came home to stay because I was ill, packed in his job, and he took over the round. My father was getting on, but he never finished altogether, because he and my mother lived behind the shop until they died in the mid seventies. He used to stick his nose around the door to see how we were doing. My mother had four sisters, and they all lived to be in their eighties and nineties, but she died when she was eighty-two.

Houses in Tyla Rhosyr

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in Cardiff. I asked his mother if he would be my architect if I decided to build a house. I bought a plot of land for £150. I was tied to a builder, but not to an architect. I asked Keith's mother on a Friday afternoon, and he came to see me that evening in the shop. We kept open until at least 7pm on a Friday, because it was our busy day. That was in about 1952, before I got married.

Social Life

We used to go to a lot of dances. Billy Arnott and the Night Hawks were the band that used to appear at local dances, just after the war. Bindles in Barry was a later development. There was also the old Institute, where the young men used to play billiards.

"Old Cowbridge"

My mother bought a copy of the book, *Old Cowbridge*, before she was married - it was offered to the Cowbridge people. She was married about 1912, so this happened between 1910 and 1912, might have been a little bit earlier. I don't know what she paid for it in those days. Being as her surname was Thomas, she wrote in the fly-leaf, "Margaret Thomas". It was in the house for years, it was there but I never read it an awful lot. Strangers started coming to Cowbridge after the war. I happened to mention it to someone. My father, who lived behind the shop, came back with the book to show him. "Can I have a lend of it?" he asked. Never saw it again. I said to people in the shop, that if it was found in circulation, it would have my mother's name, "Margaret Thomas", written in it, so no one would associate it with the Davids.

Presbyterian Chapel

We went to The Limes chapel - it's been converted into three flats. Lovely old chapel. Marvellous acoustics. It would have seated quite a number, upstairs as well. Typical Welsh chapel. The Presbyterians used to have an annual singing festival in this area, just before the war, and it was held in Cowbridge one year, Cardiff the next, Bridgend, Llantwit Major and so on. Some of the local chapels were too small, they wouldn't hold the number of people that Cowbridge would. I wouldn't be surprised if they would get 500 people in. The upstairs was never used for normal church services. My father was the registrar of weddings for quite a number of years, towards the end. My mother was a member, but my father wasn't until near the end.

Family Origins

My mother's mother and her sisters were from west Wales. They came up here and worked for the Evans family, as housekeeper and cook and so on. "Dr Dai" Evans was the son of the Evanses, and they had a draper's shop [Xantippe]. It was a big old premises. Ivor Treharne bought it and knocked a lot of it down. In the back of that they had built what the locals called the "American flats" to house staff. They had tailors, seamstresses, dressmakers, milliners. If you wanted a man's suit in those days, there was only one place you would go in the Vale of Glamorgan - that was Evans of Cowbridge. They'd make it there. They got staff from down west, and that's how they came to Cowbridge.

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World War I

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He came home to Cowbridge, where my mother was living with her mother, in Eastgate Street. It was opposite the station entrance. There was the Druids' hotel, then the road going to the railway yards. They built a new station when they built the line to Aberthaw. There's a house which is called Glen Cottage, and a very small house next to it. Being an old house, whoever lived there built on out the back, so it was larger than it looked. That was where my grandfather had his shoe shop. He married the Evanses' cook, and she opened a shop in the front and sold bread and cakes. It was called Adpar House. I think it's a river, which was running through the town where they came from in Cardiganshire. The Revd Roy Lewis used to come in the shop and say to me, "There's a bit of the old Cardi about you".

We had an accountant with the business and he used to do our personal accounts as well. When my father was first in business, he would have done his own books. That came to an end at the start of the war. We were self-supporting up until 1939, when rationing started. I think they were prepared for it. In the first war, my father was out of the business. He used to come home from hospital in Windsor, and he was walking down the street one day, and there was a butcher's shop where Keith Evans's shop is now [Bridge Studio] - opposite the betting shop. That used to be Thomas's butcher's shop during the first war. My father was walking down the street in his "army blue" [wounded soldier's uniform], in about 1917. This butcher came out and said, "Look here, Billy. My wife has left, and I want you to take over the business." My father was discharged from the forces, because of his wounds, on a fifty per cent pension.

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