

I was born in Great House, Llanblethian, but we moved to Penyrheol Farm, Llysworney - the farm of my mother's family - when I was 4 years old. I went to the village school in Llysworney, where we had a very dedicated schoolmistress, Miss Grant. It was such a small school that there was only one other teacher. Miss Grant was a disciplinarian - she could cane like nobody's business, on the hands only - but she was ahead of her time in getting us aware of our environment and in organising outings. On half days - given for good attendance or some such reason - we would go to the local beaches where she would get us to play cricket, and she would play, too, even though she had some problems with her leg. At least once a year she would get the 'Wick charabanc' from Mr Williams of Wick, to take us on outings to Bristol Zoo or other far away places. She also helped organise the village Christmas party, always a memorable occasion.

One particular village event which I remember was the Silver Jubilee celebrations for King George V, in 1935. The function was held in Nash Manor. There was dancing around the maypole, and I was chosen to propose the toast to the King and Queen. It was a great carnival; I was dressed as an Arab Sheikh - Hubert helped me dress up - and all the village took part.

Llysworney Show was another big event of the year. It was a very successful little show, mainly horticultural, with marquees for flowers and for vegetables, and other tents too. There were also horse riding and jumping competitions, and a brass band used to play. It was held on our farm, on the field known as Penyrheol Ten Acres.

In the village, there was earlier a small shop at Village Farm, but it is the village shop cum post office opposite the Carne Arms which I remember. My cousin William Thomas, Moorshead, and I would go in before school and buy five Woodbines for 2d. These we would share, two and a half each, and smoke the half before school. On one occasion, Miss Grant was bending over me to check what I had written when she smelled the smoke on my breath, and she wrote to my father to let him know what was going on. However, my father was a heavy smoker himself, and so I don't think he said too much to us. My grandfather's reaction was worse, at least when we'd said in the shop "Grandpa will pay" - and of course when checking the bill, he found us out straight away, as he didn't smoke Woodbines.

As our school was a Church in Wales school, every Saints Day we went to church. The parson was Dr Llewellyn, the vicar of Llysworney and Llandow (the grandfather of Dr David Owen, MP). He was a lovely man, who had been blind since his boyhood, as a result of playing dog and catty, we were told. He used to come to school frequently, and always found his way, even though Llysworney School was not the easiest place to get to. We were always sent to assist him, but he was very independent and did not want help.

We played a lot of the usual games - spinning tops, hopscotch, and hoops. If we didn't have a metal hoop, we would sometimes use tyres. I remember on one occasion when I was using a tyre down the road, it ran away from me and landed with a thump in the door of the Carne Arms. Mrs Howell rushed out, not well pleased!

In 1934, they started laying the water mains from Llysworney past our farm. One day, on my way to Sunday School, I passed the compressor which was standing idle because it was the weekend, and where there were bigger boys playing around it, fiddling with the starting handle. On my return from Sunday School, there was nobody around the machine, so I gave it one idle turn of the starting handle - and it started! What was I to do? The machine was all locked up and so could not be stopped; I ran round it frantically, and then ran home, where the family were sitting around the table, having tea. I joined them, but from the house I could hear the noise of the machine, and so I left the table and ran off into the fields. Eventually I returned to hear my mother talking to the policeman, PC Cosslett, who was 'winding her up' in terms of the potential dangers of starting up the machine. What annoyed my mother, however, was that the foreman of the water main gang, who lived in the village, had reported me - and yet a few weeks earlier he had come to my father for help in writing a letter! Even though all I got was a ticking off from the policeman, for many weeks I had to endure the calls of the men "Come and help us start it, Alan" as I passed them on my way to school.

Another memory of Llysworney was of the small field we called Gypsy's Acre. On this piece of land belonging to my grandfather, behind the church - there are two or three houses built on

it now - three of my uncles, all bachelors, lived in three caravans. One was a real gypsy caravan, all brass and glass, while the others were more utilitarian.

When my father died in 1938, my mother had *Ty Bronudd* built on the Nash corner, and we moved there. By then, I was a day boy at the Grammar School (I think I was the third boy from the village school to pass the 11+ examination), and travelled in by bus. When war broke out in 1939 I was still at school. For the first few months of the war Cowbridge was a garrison town. Large numbers of territorials were mobilised and were billeted in the town. Every available public building was commandeered: the Town Hall, the first floor of the cinema (which contained a large dance hall and sundry rooms, whilst the cinema continued to function below), and the grammar school's new dining hall and gymnasium. The latter building had only been opened the year before, providing day boys with a proper dining facilities and a first class gym. As pupils we had been made to take care of the wood block floors of the new building, (we had to change into gym shoes whenever we entered the building, be it for lunch or gym) and suddenly it was invaded by soldiers in army boots, and the polished surface became pock-marked with stud marks from boots.

RAF Station St Athan was opened in 1938, so Cowbridge was used to the sight of airmen in blue uniform, the first airmen at St. Athan wearing a type of breeches. (RAF Llandow was opened in about 1940.) The headquarters for the army, however, was the Duke of Wellington Inn, and the entrance was protected with a sand-bagged porch jutting out onto the pavement.

The town echoed to the sound of troops marching about during they day, often singing marching songs, "Roll out the Barrel" being a very popular one. The sound of bugle calls rang out, "Reveille" in the morning and "The Last Post" at night.

There were also soldiers stationed in small units in the countryside around the town, manning searchlights. I remember one of them who, not being used to the country, shot a cow which he heard moving behind a hedge.

In school, we carried on as normally as possible, but rugby fixtures were cancelled for the first term and we played the army in some soccer matches. The Bear Field (where the Leisure Centre is now) was at that time also one of the school's playing fields. While the Army was in Cowbridge, this was used by the military, so we were allowed to use the Town pitch in the Athletic Ground. The blackout was a problem in the evenings as all windows had to be covered with thick material to prevent the showing of any light. All street lights were extinguished and this again caused a problem at night, especially with the sand bagged enclosures protruding onto the pavement. It gave one an uncomfortable experience to walk into a wall of sand bags.

The soldiers departed as quickly as they arrived and by the end of the year, they had gone.

One of the wartime schemes that was encouraged was "Digging for Victory", in which people were urged to grow as much vegetables as possible. The school responded to this: the produce was used in its own kitchens, thus saving money! Seniors were put to dig up all the ground around the Gym & Dining Hall and plant cabbages and potatoes. The work was supervised by Mr. Penny, the school gardener. The work was carried out in what would have been those school periods devoted to non-academic periods such as woodwork.

After Dunkirk, the LDV (Local Defence Volunteers), the fore-runner of the Home Guard, was formed. It consisted mainly of elderly men and young boys. I joined straight away, when I was in school, and I always carried my arm band in my pocket. When an air raid warning went, all the pupils were supposed to take cover in safe rooms, which had been reinforced with timbers to give some protection. I used to slip out of school and report to our armoury, which at that time was in the Town Hall, collect a rifle and a bandolier of ammunition and along with other members of the LDV, man the road blocks which were at the main entrances to the town.

The road blocks were on the Cardiff Road at the railway bridge, on the Aberthin Road near the High School, and up at the Darren. These road blocks were manned every night by a platoon of six to eight men. During an air raid warning, all vehicles and pedestrians were stopped and identity cards had to be produced. In the blackout it was quite a risky business stopping vehicles, especially on the Cardiff Road as the vehicles were coming down hill, with very limited lights. The were

stopped by the guard swinging a hurricane lamp. We would even inspect all the passengers in the buses. This proved to be very difficult with a rifle slung over one's shoulder. The barricades were constructed of all sorts of material, pieces of timber, etc. and the one on the Aberthin Road included an old horse-drawn stage coach in which the guards often took shelter during poor weather. There were also posts at Penlline and St Hilary

The first bombs dropped in the Cowbridge area were on the Stalling Down. They came down at night, and because of the rocky surface of the ground they made quite an impact and a number of houses suffered minor damage. The only other bombs dropped in Cowbridge were across the railway line behind the High School; these were fire bombs and did no damage as they landed in open ground.

Later on the guards were withdrawn from the road blocks and we billeted in the Town Hall. You can imagine the noise with about twenty to thirty men trying to sleep on the floor of the Hall. During an air raid warning a patrol would be sent out. I think the reason was to watch out for paratroops. The Town Hall was a very busy place; as well as the Home Guard, as it was now known, the Red Cross Ambulance had a unit stationed in the Mayor's Parlour. The Air Raid Wardens were in another room downstairs and of course the fire brigade with their engine was also in what is now the kitchen of the Lesser Hall. Bill Brown, who was a self appointed Sgt Major as well as being the caretaker to the Town Hall, was quite a character. He had all the bearing of a Sgt Major, wore a fine waxed moustache and carried a cane under his arm. During the time the Home Guard was in the Town Hall, Bill Brown used to get up every morning and come up to dismiss the guard. He would be immaculately turned out, yet without his false teeth.

The next move for the Home Guard was up to a building where JB Builders Merchants now have their office. The nightly guard was now down to a unit of about 6 men and a sergeant. These evening guard duties always finished at 5am in the morning.

Another character was the CO, Reg Williams the Chemist. He was a Captain, and Captain Mainwaring of Dad's Army was the personification of Reg. He was very enthusiastic and devoted a great deal of time to the Home Guard. Whenever the air raid warning went, Capt. Williams could be seen emerging from the chemist's shop, strapping on a huge revolver around his waist.

We were expected to attend a parade one evening a week, and on Sunday mornings. We drilled, learned about weapons, went on exercises and all the other things necessary to train us for fighting the Germans in the event of an invasion. We practised firing our weapons down at the army range at Porthcawl and also at the old butts near the river at Llandough Mill. We were quite well equipped - not as it was usually depicted with pikes and poles. I had my own rifle from very early on and before I left to join the RAF (I was a sergeant by then) I had a Sten sub-machine gun.

The ATC unit in school under the command of Mr 'Taffy' Hughes was not formed until after I left; they apparently had a miniature rifle range in the roof of the Old Hall, but that is another story.

Alan Thomas

boarders or not

When war broke out in 1939 I was still at school. For the first few months of the war Cowbridge was a garrison town. Large numbers of territorials, were mobilised and were billeted in the town. Every available public building was commandeered: The Town Hall, the cinema (the first floor was a large dance hall and sundry rooms, whilst the cinema continued to function below), and the grammar school's new dining hall and gymnasium. The latter building had only been opened the year before, providing day boys with a proper dining facilities and a first class gym. As pupils we had to take care of the wood block floors of the new building, (we had to change into gym shoes whenever we entered the building, be it for lunch or gym) and suddenly it was invaded by soldiers in army boots.

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The school was a boarding school and out of a total number of pupils of about 240, approximately 50 were boarders. They were accommodated in the Old School and also in Franklin House. As well as the headmaster there were usually two boarding masters in the school house and one in Franklin House.

After Dunkirk, the LDV (Local Defence Volunteers) the fore-runner of the Home Guard, was formed. It consisted many of elderly men and young boys. I joined straight away and I always carried my arm band in my pocket. When an air raid warning went, all the pupils were supposed to take cover in safe rooms, which had been reinforced with timbers to give some protection. I used to slip out of school and report to our armoury, which at that time was in the Town Hall, collect a rifle and a bandolier of ammunition and along with other members of the LDV, man the road blocks which were at the main entrances to the town. There we would stop everyone, including all vehicles and ask to see their identify card (Everyone was issued with one). We would even inspect all the passengers in the buses. This proved to be very difficult with a rifle slung over one's shoulder.

The road blocks were on the Cardiff Road, by the bridge; the Aberthin Road, by the High School and up at the Darren. These road blocks were manned every night by a platoon of about 6-8 men. During an air raid warning all vehicles and pedestrians were stopped and identity cards had to be produced. In the blackout it was quite a risky business stopping vehicles, especially on the Cardiff Road as the vehicles were coming down hill, with very limited lights. The were stopped by the guard swinging a hurricane lamp. The barricades were constructed of all sorts of material, pieces of timber, etc. and the one on the Aberthin Road included an old horse drawn stage coach and the guards often took shelter in it during poor weather. There were also posts at Penlline and St. Hilary

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A "British Restaurant" was opened in about 1941 in what is now the Betting Shop. The idea of the BR was to provide cheap, good meals during war time rationing.

A new headmaster had been appointed in 1938, Mr. Idwal Rees. He was very young only 28 and he tended to recruit young masters. The problem with this was that when the war started many of them were of military age and were liable for "call up". This include Mr. Rees himself and eventually about half of the staff were called up.

The cinema was a great asset to Cowbridge. It was very much used. There were film shows every night, except Sunday and it was very comfortable. Unfortunately in the early part of 1942 it was burnt down, not through enemy action, but through someone leaving a lighted cigarette in a seat. This was a great loss to the town. It was finally partly restored and opened for cinema, but the first floor dance hall was never rebuilt.

The Grammar School used the cinema for speech days and also for putting on a play every year. The then owner was an old boy of the school and I think gave the use of to the school free of charge

miniature rifle was out

Alan Thomas
P. H. Day

I attended Cowbridge Girls' High School in the 1930s. There were boarders as well as day girls, with the boarders sleeping in the 'upstairs section' next to the matron's room. The headmistress had her office and sitting room downstairs.

Our headmistress, Miss Bennett Jones, "Benny", was quite unusual. She kept a pet monkey, which wore a little jacket and hat, made - as rumour would have it - by the girls who did needlework. The monkey was allowed to roam everywhere, and spent quite a lot of time in the boarders' dining room, where the day girls had lunch. Once I was standing near a radiator in the room. I had been given a pen and pencil set for my birthday, and had the pen clipped on to my gymslip. The monkey, on the window, pinched my pen from my gymslip and climbed up on to the window again, so I went into my form room, got the board pointer, and tried to use it to dislodge the monkey so that I could get my pen. The monkey slid down the pointer and bit my hand; the bite in time went septic. My parents protested and so she got rid of the monkey. It is said that the head took it to Bristol Zoo; some of the more malicious girls suggested that she went to visit it once a fortnight.

Benny cycled to Maendy chapel regularly, and - another eccentricity - used to take her bicycle into one of the pews in case anyone stole it. Benny's sister was a Mrs Crystal, the proprietress of a tearoom called the Copper Kettle in the Castle Arcade, Cardiff. Whenever there was any form outing to the theatre we were compelled to have tea in the Copper Kettle - always 'sawdust cake', bread with a semblance of a scrape of margarine, no jam, and weak tea. For this, in 1931-2, we were expected to pay 2/-. "Whatever are you having, for that amount of money?" my mother asked. "Is it for one, or for the whole form?"

One day, Benny decided the school was to have a radiogram. We all had to contribute 2/6, a considerable sum in those days, and I can only remember two occasions when we were allowed to listen to it. The biggest girls in my form had to push it into the Hall from the headmistress's office - and we heard Lewis Casson and Sybil Thorndike reciting a scene from Macbeth, and by contrast, Paul Robeson singing "Go and ring dem bells".

When I started school, the uniform for junior girls was blouses and gymslips, with skirts for the senior girls, but it soon changed to blue and white gingham dresses with white cuffs and collars. In summer we had speckled straw hats, and later, panamas with the school hatband. We also had to wear burberry coats, with scarves and gloves in winter. If for any reason we went into town - such as to the Bear field to play hockey, or when the boarders went to tea on Sundays to Nurse Rymer's cafe - we always walked in crocodile, and always wore gloves. The boarders had a grey uniform.

I took school lunch with the boarders when I started school, but I could not tolerate it, so then I ate my sandwiches in the kitchen. Benny would come around with a board pointer to check if we were sitting upright - if not, she would poke us firmly in the back with the pointer. She made sure of our table manners - and if a girl held her knife as if it were a pen, she would ask "Are you signing your name on your meat?"

During the whole time I was in school, the most severe punishment possible was a conduct mark - I never remember anybody getting one, but order marks flew about, especially from Miss Marks, the Maths teacher. She would bite and push out her lower lip when she became enraged. Miss Williams, English, was very severe and had no sense of humour. She wore big owl-like spectacles. Miss Gunter was very erudite about Cowbridge. She was so enamoured of the geography of Cowbridge that she used to claim that there were more meanders in the river Thaw than in the Mississippi, and we got the impression that Mount Ida was higher than Kanchenjunga! She taught History very well, and made people interested, but in the first form Benny taught us and it was she who fired my imagination. She was a very good teacher.

May Brown had a good sense of humour. She never became really cross, and could laugh things off. She taught Welsh, Latin in the first form, and Music. She was lovely, and had no favourites - she was very pleasant, and the same to everybody. Miss Powell who taught Latin was in digs with my aunt and uncle next door to the Railway Inn (in part of Basil's today). We also got on well with her; she treated us as equals. Miss Smeeth who taught Science was a very gentle person; Miss Morgan, teacher of cookery and needlework, had a mature attitude. When the girls who did cookery had finished the morning's cooking, the boarders would rush to the door to ask if there were any left-overs. Burnt or uncooked, the boarders would scoff them down. That room had coal-fired ovens; sometimes it was so hot you could hardly enter the room.

Mrs Phillips the gym teacher was about seven feet high, with junoesque legs like tree trunks. I was no good at gym - I could never jump over the horse. Soon afterwards, Mrs Phillips was replaced by Miss Phillips who was physically the complete opposite - string thin, quite small, with a very loud voice and commanding personality.

Finally, the peripatetic music and singing teacher, Miss Miles. She came to us twice a week - I don't know if she was able to go elsewhere after taking us! She was meek and timid, the last thing you want with schoolgirls. I am ashamed to think that we gave her a terrible time: we would sing the wrong tune to the words or sing the wrong words to the tune, and she would go red in the face.

At break times, we would round the tennis courts and along around the perimeter of the school, perhaps more than once. In our final year we were able to sit on the wrought iron seats near the tennis courts, and I remember the power of telling any juniors who were sitting there to move off!

Looking back, I enjoyed my schooldays. I was very happy at Cowbridge High School.

Recollections of ^{Henry} Elgeva Thomas, Sr Hilary

John Williams, draper - where he kept shop is now Gt uncle to Elgeva
v his sister was Selwyn Davies's grandmother.

His father was a William from Sr Hilary. It was an emporium of drapery, which operated ~~as~~ a scheme for people who couldn't pay (eg. on Xmas Eve). A concert was held in Sr Hilary to raise funds for this club. J.W. owned cottages on Primrose Hill, now demolished, on the left as you ascend the Roman Rd.

J.W.'s sister in law was Mary Williams who kept a baker's shop in High St where Sando's shoe shop is now. Story of Bostock & Wombles' Margerie parading through the town (about 1850-60) v Mary feeding the elephant with a loaf of bread. Ten years later, when it repeated its visit, the elephant stopped v ~~push~~ tried to push its way into the shop.

Mrs Thomas kept shop where Annie works later moved (Ogmore Vale bakery)

Rails family lived on Primrose Hill where Rodney lived. They were railway people. Tom Ralls, son, became clerk to Bushell & Walker, solicitors. He married a Pickard (grocer). Jack Ralls, another son, moved to Bitterne, S'hampton. Arthur v Percy, the sons of Ernest v Tom married into Wittors family (sanitary inspector) v Collins family (clockmaker) respectively.

Mr Griffiths, grocer in High St. 2 daughters - one was "Miss Horns". They came in horse & trap to Sr Hilary getting orders to be delivered 2 weeks later. Every Xmas, Mr G used to come himself v present each customer with 1/4 lb of Indian Tea.

Mr Rovers also delivered tea round the villages, on his bike. Had a trolley hat tied down on his head. His daughter Olive married into Morgan, the farmers family (Sr Hilary)

John Roberts, delicatessen (~~frank~~ Threshers). His mother was a

Pickard. Before he set up his shop (early 60s), there was Campbell's tearoom there - very basic & tiny, at the very front, before you get to the pillar. Mrs Campbell then divorced her husband & married Glyn Roberts, who set up the first real drymarket, with baskets (his sister lived in Barmouth)

Photo of young men at the station exhibiting for 1914-18 War

In centre, very small man is IANTO FREDERICK who worked as Col. Pritchard's porter at Porthgowerch.

Railway families lodged at Bigman (where Sylvia Williams lived now) whilst building the railway.

Reynolds, fishmonger - had 3 steeled tuck delivering striking fish

Church St - Solomon ANDREWS, cobbler, on corner round from 'En Vogue'.

Tiny man like Kumpelstiltskin. Rides the saddle, Irish, head shop where Tombank is, next to the Villiers. He'd make anything in leather - saddles, briefcases, horse collars. Alan Thomas still has one of his briefcases. For a time he lived in a shed in Peterston S Ely, walking into Crutbridge to work. No own water supply but always very neatly turned out.

Bill Thomas thought to have had draper's shop where Mrs Tilley later went. Also shop in Marlboro Major.

Harland Castle - Russian Jews thought to have stayed there. Mr Ebsworth thought to have been a Russian who changed his name, & that he lost his money in Bolshevik revolution & the war.

Crossways - Owen Williams, ship owner, lived there early (20). Very young wife whom he adored & lavished all his money on, ran off with Indian who was staying there. He later dumped her & she ended up down & out in London. She had massive collection of shoes & capboards lined with sandalwood.

O'Connors of Portmeayrick - home called Crosswads or Pinklands. Mr O'K was 6'6" Irishman with long red beard. Rode horse & his legs touched the ground. Married rel. of Alan T. from Wolfe Hse Hysowney. 5' tall. He had 2 daughters - one, Blanche had triplets. Always hanging round the markets & pubs during deals. Son Sydney went to Australia to look after sheep. Returned & used to sit in Campbell's tea room in big hab-versee Police station in Portmeayrick room and from O'K's (Tape H. ...)

Memories of Alan Thomas.

1939 – wartime Cowbridge. All the territorials were called up at the outset of the war in September 1939, and were billeted in Cowbridge (including the school gym, which was newly built). They slept there.

Cowbridge High Street was full of troops at the beginning. The Duke was the HQ. The Pavilion had two storeys, so troops were there. Possibly some in the Town Hall. Sleeping in the Limes Chapel too. Alan remembers looking out of the window in Old Hall when he was a schoolboy and seeing all the troops.

There were sandbags outside the front door of the Duke. In the blackout, at night, you tended to bump into them.

Swimming baths – there were wooden boards at the end of the baths (where you can see water cascading in the photo). Mr Perry, who looked after the baths, had a metal hook on one arm and hooked the boards up with it.

Sports Day once a year – had a swimming gala. Sometimes the baths could not be used because of sheep dipping higher up. Extremely cold water.