

Llanblethian, My Childhood Home 1940-45

I will begin my memoirs at Rose Cottage as you did (*in the book 'Llanblethian Buildings and People'*). I believe a family called Llewellyn lived there. I used to play with a little lad called Alan, known as Giggy – he was in my class at school. My sister Georgina remembers the family, and I believe a baby died there during the war.

In Picton House lived Mr and Mrs Chedzoy, and I seem to remember a very elderly lady being there when I played with Brenda and Shirley (or this may be Lilian, the younger sister). I do remember how sad we all were when their mother Lilian died. She was buried just over the wall in the churchyard. Much later, Mr Edgar Chedzoy married the mother of my evacuee friend Mary Cunningham. She lived at Hill House, and was the housekeeper. I often went to the annexe where Mary and her mother lived. I used to go up to Hill House for tomatoes and other salad items – it was a nursery.

Later, Brenda was engaged to the son of the then vicar, then she met Johnny at my aunt's cottage. He was lodging with Mary Jane (after the war of course). Brenda fell in love with Johnny and they subsequently married, and he took her back to Ireland where I believe they developed a good business growing tomatoes. Mary Jane loved telling me the story of this romance. I hope it had a happy ending. I really liked all involved in these two stories.

The church – my sister Georgina used to pump the organ bellows for Sunday services. I regularly visited the church to put flowers on the graves of Mary and Frank Wyatt's parents. The stories of some of the plots will come to light as I proceed with my narrative.

Ronnie Harris was christened there when he was about 9 or 10, when his sister's babies were christened. Mary Jane was very fond of Enid Harris, who became Mrs Drummond. One of her boys was named Kent. I loved him – he was such a bonnie baby with blonde curly hair, and he always came to find me when I spent my holidays with Mary Jane. He followed me everywhere. I remember some of the family – Audrey, Roy, an older brother (name began with H, Hubert). Mr Harris used to stand at his gate and tell us children wonderful stories of his time in the Great War.

I remember Peggy Jenkins getting married at the church to a very handsome airman. I think Mary Jane must have been involved with making the dresses, because she took me to the house and I was allowed to go upstairs and see the bride in her wedding gown. I thought she looked quite beautiful. I remember that after the ceremony the front gate of the church was tied up, and the bride and groom could not leave until the best man threw some coppers over the gate for the children to collect. I also remember Mr Thomas of Beechcourt being buried there. He was a large, jolly man with a white beard. I thought he was like Father Christmas. Lots of villagers stood in respect of him as the cortege passed through the village. Stallcourt House – I was told a farmer called Mr Davies lived there.

Lady Byass was living at The Cross, and a group of evacuees stayed there. They were driven to school in a big black car. I meet some of the evacuees now at our club called MERG (Medway Evacuee Reunion Group).

The two boys who lived at Ger-y-nant, Clifford and Jimmy Denson, also belong to MERG. They have quite a story to tell. They used to work at Stallcourt during school holidays. (At the last meeting we discussed coming down to Llanblethian for a good wallow in the past. If we do, we'll let you know).

I have already mentioned Hill House. Mary Cunningham and her mother, widowed, as my mother was, lived there. They came from Dover. A brother and sister, Barbara and Brian Wilde, were evacuated to one of the cottages in the Causeway. They were very nice, and I've often wondered what happened to them. They went home quite early. I nearly bought the first cottage when it was under £1000 then, about 1968-9.

The upper part of the village I do not remember so well. Our postman, Mr Burnage, lived there. So did Mr and Mrs Carder from Sunday School, and their son Vivien – they lived near the ford, Factory House. Lillian Hopkins lived in the upper road, I remember – Duffryn. My teacher, Miss Miles, who became Mrs Buchalik, lived in one of the bungalows in Factory Road. On the corner of the road leading to Brynhyfryd lived the Baker family. Colin was in my class, and his sister Josey (?) was friendly with my sister. Another family I remember well were Mr and Mrs James, son of Mr and Mrs James who lived next to the Harrises at the bottom of Llanblethian Hill (the mountain, as we children called it). They had a beautiful little girl. I think she was called Rosemary. I remember seeing a lovely lady, Dulcie Thomas, taking this little girl for walks. Dulcie was the daughter of the Thomas family who lived on the hill going to Cowbridge on the right. I think she married into the James family. She died very young. Her grave is just inside the side entrance to the churchyard. A little group of graves I always visit – Bess Tucker, nee Batten is nearby; also my best friend, Margaret Evans, nee Williams. I will speak of these later. It is a very special corner where I can recall memories of the two beautiful young women who died so young.

Returning to the James family, an evacuee called Mary Adnams stayed with Mr and Mrs James the elder, at the bottom of Llanblethian Hill. They were all very fond of her. She suddenly went home to London and was never heard of again. I kept in touch, as you know, and was always asked if I knew anything, or heard what happened to her.

Another resident of the bungalows, built where the Curland is in Factory Road, was the daughter of the Mr and Mrs Jones where my sister Georgina lived. She was married, and had given up hope of having a child after eleven years, and suddenly she had a girl and a boy.

I am not sure which house she stayed in, but another evacuee, Pat Maltby, lived in that area, I believe with a Mr and Mrs Watkins. He was a solicitor, and he was also the man who chose us at the Town Hall in Cowbridge, and took us in his car to Mary Jane, and my sister to Bridge Farm.

Another evacuee called Mary Briggs stayed at a house next to Llanblethian House (Mr and Mrs Thomas lived in Llanblethian House). I used to go to a music club where Mary Briggs stayed, and developed my love for the classics. I always think of this house when I hear 'Swan Lake'. Mary must have gone home early because the visits here came to an abrupt end. In later years, Margaret Evans used to look after the little boy Thomas from Llanblethian House. She used to take him out in his pram, and I would go with her when I was spending my holidays with Mary Jane. I met him some eight years ago, and I must have embarrassed him telling him of the walks, and washing him when he fell in the mud. I was staying at the Vale of Glamorgan pub in Cowbridge, and he was a customer there. I stayed at the Vale when I gave a talk to the schools.

I remember John Thomas the milkman who farmed New House Farm. He came round the village and delivered milk from churns. My job was to put the milk jugs out on the table. While he put a pint in one, and a half pint in the other, I would put little lace covers, held down with beads to stop flies getting in, over the jugs, and then return the jugs to the pantry. Mr Thomas was a lovely, cheerful man. If we ran short of milk, I would walk up to the farm, through the fields by the Parish Hall. There was a long row of very tall pine trees by the road here, and I recall thinking of them when Mary Jane taught me a lovely little poem ('I remember, I remember the fir trees tall and high. I used to think their slender tops were close against the sky'). It was about remembering the house where she was born.

In Ger-y-nant cottage lived Mr and Mrs Shaw, friends of Mary Jane, and they had two young boy evacuees from Gillingham, and I see them to this day (Clifford and Jimmy, James, Denson). These two had been evacuated up the Rhondda somewhere, and had been badly treated. They settled in with Mr and Mrs Shaw, and loved it. To this day, they speak very fondly of them. Mary Jane was with Mrs Shaw when she died. It was Clifford Denson who put me in touch with you, and lent me his books on Llanblethian and Cowbridge.

I now come to Mynydd and Hillside, and I've already recalled the families who lived here, the James and Harris families. I spent many happy hours outside here. Mr Harris had a very spiteful white cockerel, and we ran for our lives when I went with Anne Ashcroft to visit her grandmother and uncle, who lived in a farm at the end of the lane going along the bottom of the 'mountain'. We also got into the meadows along this lane to pick large kingcups. I remember Herbert James and the little ones, and I've got a vague memory of the scene shown on page 57 (*Llb Bldgs and People* book). Was Pauline the baby Dulcie Thomas loved so much, and not Rosemary?

In Piccadilly lived Mrs Batten at Hilldrop. She had three daughters. The eldest was married and I used to play with her little girl, Pat, when she visited her grandmother's. I remember some confusion over a lost bracelet, and it was thought I might have it. However it was found in the house, and Mrs Batten could not apologise enough, and invited me to visit her and have tea whenever she knew I was visiting in later years. Her second daughter was Bess, a beautiful young lady who married Bob Tucker, our coal

man. He moved into Hilldrop and I can still hear his beautiful Welsh singing when he got home from work and was cleaning up and washing, ready for his meal. They were a lovely, happy couple and it was such a tragedy when Bess died so young. I was fond of Bob because he looked like my own Daddy who had been killed in the navy in 1941. The third daughter, Ethel, married a Westcott (they owned a café and ice-cream parlour in Cowbridge). I remember seeing them walking around the village – he wore a uniform then.

There were three more cottages in Piccadilly. In one lived an old lady called Mrs Boobyer. She used to stand at the cottage gate (with fuchsias growing either side) and watch us skipping or playing hop-scotch in the road. This cottage changed hands, and Lottie lived there. She married late in life to a man in Aberthin, and promptly produced a large family. Then Mr and Mrs John Batchelor moved in. They had a pretty little curly-haired daughter, Pauline, and moved up to Porth-y-Green next to Margaret's parents. Later on, the next tiny little cottage was occupied by Agnes Chisel. When she married, Mary Jane made her dress from parachute silk, and I helped dye muslin the colours of the rainbow to make the bridesmaids' dresses. Next to Agnes lived my dear friend Margaret Williams (Maggie), also a small cottage. She had a brother Gilbert and a sister Mary, both older than she was. I can remember Mary's wedding to Dilwyn (she was friendly with my middle sister) and Maggie was the friend of my childhood. I'm still in touch with her daughters, Julie and Lisa. It was just following her visit with Bill to my wedding that Maggie died in a dreadful accident. I was married on 31/10/87, and they were here enjoying a well-earned break. We put them on the train four days later, and on Remembrance Sunday morning Maggie died having accidentally drunk ante-freeze that had been left in a lemonade bottle. What a lesson to us all – never to use any bottle to distill ante-freeze.

Opposite Rose Cottage (Maggie's house) was a farm run by a Mr Williams. He was very old and bent, but he used to get his horse and cart out, and take us up to a field in Porth y Green to help with the hay making. This field is where the council houses were built after the war, behind Mrs Edwards's farm (her son was Mansel Edwards).

Passing the Baptist Sunday School, a house on the right was where Mr and Mrs Spencer lived. On the left was the mill where Mr and Mrs Stone lived. He was the miller, and she opened a sweet shop there. I lived in Mill Cottage, no 2. The Ashcrofts lived in no 1.

I loved peeping through the corrugated cover to watch the great wooden wheel turn, the drops of water falling off the paddles like diamonds. The mill run was opposite our cottage. I caught tiddlers and Tommy big heads in the run when the mill was not working> It was shallow and all sorts of things could be found. Maggie and I collected broken china pieces, and also water cress. When the mill was working, the water level came up and we sailed paper boats and pieces of leaf and wood down the run. I remember Connie, Walter and Henry, and I believe there might have been another brother who was in the navy. I again remember the family being upset when HMS Hood, or Renown, went down, but I am not sure if I was mixing it up with my father's ship (HMS Wryneck). I

was always playing on the steps shown on the front of your book. I was sitting on them on my 11th birthday (15/08/45) when Mary Jane told me the war was over.

I loved watching the giant horses pulling the corn to the mill to be made into flour. I remember all the cats, one with only one eye. They used to catch the rats in the mill. I played at the old pump by the path to the Mill Fields, and there was an old oak tree hollowed out, which served as a house for us children to play in. It was easy to climb up the inside of the tree to reach the big branch that hung over the river. Some of the tree was burned hollow, but some branches produced leaves and acorns which we used as cups and saucers etc. It was a natural, beautiful place to play as children, and of course at the top of this field stood the great castle keep of St Quentin's, a magnet for the local children, covered in ivy. We used to climb up the ivy to the top of the walls – never thinking of the dangers should we fall.

Down the road from Mill Cottage was the Bakehouse, and a family called Mr and Mrs Rex from Ireland lived here. They had a daughter Violet, and a boy Johnny. I did hear that Johnny died as a child. His mother took him on the chair-o-planes at a visiting fairing Cowbridge. She had him on her lap, and he fell. So many tragedies in one village, but it's all part of life, I suppose.

On the left after passing the old Bakehouse were three cottages. The first was a very little one, and an elderly gentleman with a white beard lived in it, Mr Vaughan. Next door were Mr and Mrs Flanders (Iltyd and Ethel). They had a son Vivien, and an older lad called Ken Vaughan lived here. He was very kind and showed Vivien and me how to catch eels. He was also very handsome (my eldest sister had a crush on him). He went into the navy, I believe. Next to the Flanders was the Jenkins family, where two lads from my home town of Gillingham were evacuated, Peter and Ronnie Dalling. They loved it there. I heard Peter was killed in a motor-bike crash. Their sister Dorothy and my sister Georgina were great friends when the war was over.

Then we come to Greenfields, and an elderly lady called Miss Williams lived there. On the other left-hand side was the little cottage my aunt grew up in, and Maggie's aunt lived there, Miss Royal (Auntie Em). I believe she had a little family in Cowbridge by the name of Hawkins- very nice girls, Josie and another sister. They were at school with Maggie and me. My aunt used to get quite wistful, and say how lucky Aunt Em was to have them. I later discovered that Mrs Hawkins was in fact Aunt Em's daughter – my aunt told me when I was staying with her when I was about 17. It must have been the talk of the village, and I believe the same sort of gossip went about the fathering of the handsome Ken Vaughan.

Opposite where the almshouses once stood, was the little farm where my sister Georgina was evacuated. She loved it staying with Mr and Mrs Jones.

Then over the bridge were some dwellings to the right. All had little bridges crossing a small water ditch into the front gardens. A lady called Rene Vaughan lived here until this

family too moved up to Porth y Green, and I remember several of the families produced twins. It became a joke – don't move up there if you don't want twins.

The big house (Great House) belonged to Bob Morgan, the butcher, who was rather a rotund shape. If I got too greedy and wanted another piece of my aunt's delicious apple pie, she would tease me and say if you eat any more you will get a tummy like Bob Morgan. Many of the walls on his farm were built by Italian prisoners of war. The children used to watch them at work. They wore dark brown overalls, and used to be very friendly, and seemed quite happy and usually sang beautifully as they worked.

I used to walk to school up the hill to the left after passing Aunt Em's. The house on the right was a big one, and a Mr and Mrs Thomas lived there. I believe they were the parents of Dulcie, mentioned earlier. Opposite here were two cottages, and Anne Ashcroft's grandmother moved to one of them from the place at the bottom of the 'mountain'. Further up to the right was Beechcourt where Mr Thomas (the one like Father Christmas) lived.

A lady who played the church organ lived in the house on the junction of Porth y Green and Broadway (Cusop). A farmer called Mr Cox lived in the old farm to the left (Broadway Farm), and I picked a few roses from his front garden and got into deep trouble at school and at home. There were houses to the right as we got to the school and Miss Aubrey lived in the one nearest to the school.

I remember the school so well. Mr Roberts was head-master, and lived in the school house. Miss Aubrey and Miss Cogbill were the infant teachers, Miss Miles (Buchalik) Class 1, Mr Frederick Class 2 and 3. The formidable Miss Thomas had Class 4, and Mr Roberts Class 6. I did not know it then, of course, but they were the best years of my life.

Something I forgot –

Up the hill from the mill, the first house on the left, the Firs, never seemed to have anyone living there. I could see into their garden from my back bedroom window and wondered who lived there. Immediately behind our cottage was the boundary of St Quentin's House. A Miss Homfray lived there. She had a lovely maid called Mary (she gave me cakes and sweets when I went up there).

Opposite was St Quentin's Terrace. In the middle cottage, a lovely young lady lived with her mother. Hilda Hayman used to visit us. She played the organ at a little church on the Cardiff road. She married a nice chap from Maendy and became Mrs Busby.

Next door at the Cairns lived Mr and Mrs Phillips. He was a schoolmaster, I believe. Looking down the hill, was a house belonging to Mr and Mrs Raggett. They had a boy about my age. She was the sister of my teacher, Miss Miles (Buchalik).

The cottage on the right just past the castle had a lovely garden. Anne Ashcroft's maternal grandparents lived there. I sometimes went to see them with Anne and her

mother (Edna). I always think of that lovely garden when I see aquilegia (Granny's Bonnets) growing in my own garden. I remember Ann's gran telling her 'make new friends (me), but keep the old ones. New Ones are silver, but the old are the gold ones'. I always felt I was only a silver friend. Ann had the most beautiful auburn hair. She was quite poorly as a child and I was told not to be too rough when playing with her. We used to collect things – cards and pictures of babies.

Then we come to Porth y Green and Love Lane where the council houses were built after the war. My dear friend Margaret Williams (Evans) lived there, as did many of the people from the village. My aunt Mary Jane had a flat up there. I just can't bring myself to visit the estate – it holds so many memories of people who were a big part of my childhood.

These memories were sent to Jeff Alden, of Cowbridge Record Society, about 2001, when the book 'Llanblethian Buildings and People' was published by the society. They are the memories of Mrs June Faulkner of Sittingbourne, Kent, and she also sent detailed memories of her 'aunt', Mary Jane Wyatt, to whom she was so happily evacuated during World War II.