

Cowbridge Memories of Faith Havard 1930s

Cowbridge and District Remembered 1900-1950 has had a very encouraging response from readers. I mentioned a few weeks ago that just after it had gone to the printers, I received a manuscript of some of the reminiscences of Mrs Faith Francis of Llantwit Major, who before her marriage was Faith Havard. I am sure *Gem* readers will enjoy a selection of her memoirs:

Looking back to an age that seems increasingly distant, yet still easily recalled, when the whole country was in the tight grip of the depression and times were hard for many people, there are none the less many happy memories to recall.

As a very young child in 1932, my family came to live in Cowbridge with my father's job as electrician. We lived in a semi-detached house near the Police Station that was called 'Mittagong', now called 'Ty Dafydd'. I remember there being an orchard of many apple and pear trees at the side of the house, whilst opposite was a field with a horse in it that I sometimes fed with the apples. The owner of the horse was a gentleman by the name of Tom Bond who lived nearby in a cottage at the bottom of Llantwit Road. He owned an old wagon that the horse used to pull along taking household goods, pots and pans etc around Cowbridge and the wider Vale of Glamorgan.

When we later moved to East Downs Cottage at St. Hilary, he used to deliver to my mother. I remember thinking that it must have been quite a climb up Primrose Hill for the poor horse pulling the heavily laden wagon.

Coming back to memories of Cowbridge itself... in mid-week my mother used to take me to the South Wales Power Company building in the High Street for a demonstration of cake-making by a Miss White from Penarth. The highlight of these delightful afternoons was being allowed to sample the newly baked cakes afterwards with a cup of tea. These demonstrations were an attempt by the electricity company to encourage the public to have electricity put into their homes as it was then 'the coming thing' to have electric cooking!

Some time in the mid thirties, I was taken on my first visit to the Pavilion Cinema to see 'The Invisible Man' with Claude Rains. The cinema was of course devastated by a fire some years later although thankfully refurbished. However, I remember performing in a concert in the Pavilion with Miss Pat Stride's dancing school, with two grand-daughters of

Sir Gerald Bruce of St Hilary - and having some difficulty as there were still bumps in the stage caused by the excessive heat. Later concerts were held back in the Town Hall.

My father, Sydney Havard, was an accomplished and talented artist, and when the Vale show used to be held in the Bear Field in Cowbridge, his employers, the South Wales Power Company, had a tent where for many years my father showed his paintings. Later, in the years after World War II, he won the art section in the Royal National Eisteddfod of Wales for three years running.

During the course of his work for the power company, my father had to instal electricity to St Donats Castle that had recently been bought by the American newspaper magnate, William Randolph Hearst. A couple of years later, when we had moved to Llantwit Major, a gentleman from the Hearst Agency in London came to see him to offer the job of resident electrician at St Donats Castle. It seems that they had been very impressed with the

work he had done there in the past. However by this time my father had secured the position of manager of the Strand cinema, and he declined the offer.

In the early thirties, my father took up photography as an interest and during a Sunday afternoon stroll around Cowbridge, he took a nice photograph of my mother beneath the South Gate adjacent to the Grammar School. He later entered the photograph in a competition held by his employers for 'Views of South Wales'. This was published in a calendar for 1939.

After living in Cowbridge itself for the first few years we moved to East Downs Cottage, St Hilary, next door to East Downs farm where the Davies family looked after a pair of hounds from the hunt, as other farms also did. I well remember the Glamorgan Hunt in all their gaiety and vivid colours meeting amongst the yelping and the baying of the hounds outside our gate each Boxing Day.

I recall my grandfather (my mother's father, Arthur Hopkin) visiting us one summer's day carrying his shotgun in hand. He was a good shot - as were many brought up in the countryside in those days. Rabbits were plentiful and a normal part of the diet for country people, and they could be completely free if you were on good terms with the landowners. Having gained the permission of the Davieses, he proceeded to shoot a couple of rabbits in the field alongside the cottage. Needless to say, we had fresh meat that day, and my grandfather took the remaining rabbits he had shot back to my grandmother to cook. I've not eaten rabbit since childhood but to this day remember the rather pungent smell of rabbit blood vividly. Not such a pleasant memory, that one!

My father built me a lovely big swing in the tall trees near the cottage on the Down. One day, an elderly traveller arrived on the common alone in an old-fashioned caravan and set up camp. After several days when no one had seen the old gentleman around his caravan, people began to become concerned for him. I heard that he was subsequently found dead. A little later I remember seeing his caravan being burnt down.

It was lovely living in St Hilary, especially at Christmas time. I attended Sunday School in the church regularly. At this time I made a friend of a young boy who was confined to a wheelchair, and lived in the Manor House in the village. I remember that his family employed a gardener who used to bring us grapes at Christmas time - a rare treat in those days! The only disadvantage of living in St Hilary was when we missed the bus from Cowbridge after shopping and having to climb the hill with laden heavy bags. Very few ordinary people had the luxury of a car then. We learned our lesson though, as later on my mother arranged for most of our shopping to be delivered.

On the A48 where 'Mulligans' fish restaurant now stands empty, there was a very nice tearoom called 'The Honey Pot' where my grandmother and her friend, a lady named Mrs. Uffton, used to have tea. I recall she lived in Cowbridge at 36 High Street and her front sitting room is now 'Woodcocks Boutique'.

I hope this selection of Mrs Francis's memoirs awakes a few memories. Other readers are invited to send their reminiscences in to me for possible future publication. In the mean time, you can always buy *Cowbridge and District Remembered 1900 - 1950!*

Caption for photo: Mary Davies and Faith Havard with hounds at East Downs, St Hilary

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Unfortunately, my father suffered a bad accident on his motorbike whilst we were living there. On a day when the road from the A48 up to the fann was being re-laid, he was returning home along this stretch of newly laid road in the dark one winter's evening with a couple of electricity meters slung across the handle-bars of his bike. On hearing the sound of his machine, the fann dogs came bounding out into the road. In trying to avoid them my father veered sideways and the bike slid from under him and he ended up with the bike top of him. '

He suffered a broken collarbone and severe facial injuries caused by the loose road chippings cutting into his face. Later, I remember very well going up-stairs to see him in bed after the doctor had called to bandage his face and head. He looked just like 'The Invisible Man' I had seen at the Pavilion Cinema!

SNAPSHOT
FROM
THE PAST



*Mary Davies and Faith Havard with hounds
at East Downs, St Hilary.*