



GWYNETH WILLIAMS, COWBRIDGE

Mrs Williams, née Evans, was born in Cowbridge in 1907 and grew up here, living for most of her childhood in Eastfield House. After some time in England she has now returned to the town of her birth. These reminiscences mainly cover the period before 1925.

My grandfather was Samuel David Evans. His family owned weaving mills in Newcastle Emllyn in west Wales, and he moved to Cowbridge to open a drapery business. The shop and house where I was born was in the High Street. If you go down High Street, after Sloper's Alley (Verity's Court), there was Miss Griffiths's shop, then a small ironmonger's shop which was John's, then a house called Ty Hen, to which Thomas, the owner of the Bear, retired. Next to that was the shop which my grandfather started. He had a very large shop, covering 37 and 39 High Street, and which contained a gentlemen's outfitters, a shoe shop and a ladies' fashion shop. Among the tailors were Mr Marks, the church organist, and 'Coity' Williams, the manager. The shoe shop was managed by a man called Sid Knapton, from an old Cowbridge family. In those days, assistants lived in. The building had three floors, and on the top floor were workrooms where the seamsters used to do their work and where a few of the assistants lived. On the second floor were the bedrooms, and the rest of the house was on the ground floor, behind the shops. Many of the maids and servants came from Cardigan, and married local Cowbridge people. One married William David the butcher, and another married Frank Sanders, who looked after a smallholding in fields north of Bear Lane.

When my grandfather retired and moved to Barry, my father, Arthur Stephen Evans, took over the business. I was born in 1907 in our house behind the shop. I remember it was a very large house, with a billiard room.

When the motor business started, my father was very keen on it, and opened a garage next door to Miles the grocers (at what is today the entrance to the Filco car park). He sold two of the drapery shops, only keeping the gentlemen's tailors, and his younger brother, Fred Evans, took that over. We moved when I was very young to Eastfield House, when my father started the garage. He later built the big garage across the river. Here there had been three dilapidated cottages, and a shop, up some steps, which became Tucker's shop. These all had to be removed to build the garage.

My mother was one of the Johns of the Pentre brewery in the Rhondda, and my grandparents on that side originated from Llanharan. My grandfather, who started the brewery, lived in Caercady, near Welsh St Donats. He died after a hunting accident. One of my uncles farmed Marlborough Grange, while my uncle Tom John lived in the Verlands, and married Molly Llewellyn from Heath House; he later moved to the Armoury, and died there. My parents also lived in the Armoury for some time, and one of my sisters, Muriel - who was ten years older than I - was born there. She married William Jones, who was knighted for his work with the colonial service in the Gold Coast. When she was returning from Africa during the First World War for the birth of her first child, her ship was torpedoed off the coast of Ireland. She survived, luckily, and her son was born the following month.

On my father's side, I had three uncles - Samuel David Evans junior, Frederick, and Thomas Edward. Samuel was a solicitor, and lived at Glendare House (71 High Street); Fred, who ran the drapery, lived in Bridge House, (and his son, Dick, who was in the Royal Flying Corps, ran a garage in Llantwit Major after the war); Thomas became a rector in Chester.

I started my education at a kindergarten run by the two Miss Morris of Great House, Llanblethian, in a room of Sanders's house at Town Mill. I went there with Margaret Jenkins and Carol Hopkins (the daughter of John Hopkins the monumental mason), but we soon went on to Miss Culverwell's school in Great House, next door down from 'Billy Pills', Thomas the chemist. They used to have to carry me across the road to school, because I hated going to school. There were boarders there, too, as it was quite a biggish school, but I lived at home. Next I was sent away to school in Richmond, but I came home almost immediately, and then went to 'the intermediate' - the High School.



March Fair, Cowbridge, about 1910

When I was a child, one of the highlights of the year was March Fair day about March 21st, when all the pubs were celebrating, and gypsies always came with their horses and you would see them parading the horses up and down the streets; they used to camp around Cowbridge then. The open market was held in the street outside Woodstock House and the Eagle, with small stalls. Studt's fair was the only 'joy fair', with roundabouts and so on - that was held in the Bear Field. There were terrific carnival celebrations at the end of the First World War.

I can also remember going on family outings by railway to Aberthaw, with picnic baskets, and then walking all the way to Fontygary, spending the day there and then walking back to the station. Freda Mills (of the Cowbridge Garage), with whom I was friendly, used to come with us. Another friend was Margaret Jenkins of Cambrian House. The Jenkinsons had a little brewery where the Vale of Glamorgan pub now is, and the man

running their off-licence was Joe Staien. His father had stables at Coed Hills, near St Hilary.

Entertainments were held in the Town Hall, when the Vicar, Revd Isaiah Roberts, and Revd Davies the curate would run magic lantern shows.

When my parents lived at Eastfield House, we used to have a donkey cart, which would take about five or six of us. My sister and her friends used to go down to the Leys in that. I also liked horses, and enjoyed riding.

My parents were friendly with a lot of people in Llanblethian - Revd WF Evans, the former headmaster of the Grammar School, in St Quentin's, the Dunns in The Cross, the Thomases in Stallcourt (and before them the Williamses of the Bear, before they moved to Penllyn), and the Waymans in Brynhyfryd (they had lived at Brocastle before that). Other friends were the Morrises - he was the county surveyor - in Great House, Dai Cox in the farm on Broadway, Morgan at Cusop (he kept chickens in the field opposite), Gilbert Williams at the Vicarage and the Halls at Hill House.

Minnie Edmondess lived in Old Hall, and Mrs Davies the curate's wife lived in the east end; they and my mother used to meet to have a real good morning's gossip in the Misses Griffiths's shop in High Street, a gathering to get the talk of the town. Minnie Edmondess lived on her own, with staff, in Old Hall. Her sister married Lawrence Williams from Bonvilston, and their son, 'Tip' Williams, later lived in the Verlands.

Fred Williams, who owned the Bear Hotel, had earlier been farming in Penllyn - at Great House. He had six sons, including Evan, the jockey and Grand National winner, and John whom I married. Dr Meller across the road always wanted a son. I vaguely remember a poem in the *Glamorgan Gazette* on the death of Dr Meller . . .

Here lies the body of Charles Booth Meller,
when he was alive he was a hell of a feller
Marriage he left rather late in life,
he wanted a son but got four girls from his wife,
but across the way there were boys a-plenty
or some such rhyme.

There were three doctors here then - Dr Meller, who always wore a top hat and striped trousers, Torney who was living where Sorrento is now, and Dr Moynan who lived in Woodstock House. My brother, 'Dr Dai', took the practice over from Moynan, and my sister Susie kept house

for him there before he married. He was in partnership with a cousin of mine, a John, and when the latter died on active service my brother took over the practice in Bridgend.

My husband and I followed his father in running the Bear; I was there for about ten years, between 1946 and 1956. It was a busy time, with some notable events. The Penllyn murder saw the Scotland Yard detective, 'Manning of the Yard', staying in the hotel, and also Lord Longford (then the Air Minister) stayed at the time of the Llandow air disaster.