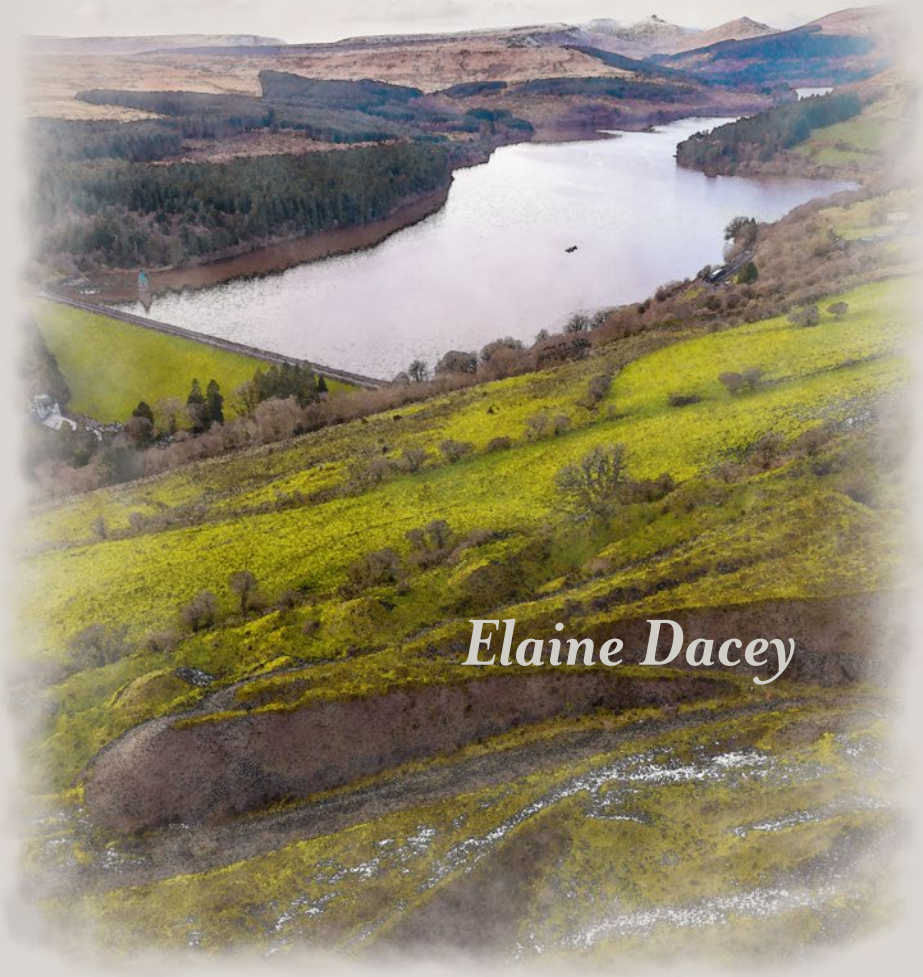
A WELSH CHILDHOOD

Recollections of two families in Pantyscallog and Dowlais, Merthyr Tydfil



Elaine Dacey

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Elaine Dacey (née Crandon) now lives in Sheffield and has worked for many years in different parts of the country as a secondary school teacher of English and also primary school children with special needs. She has a BA (Hons) in English and an MSc in Language and Communication Impairment in Children. She is married to Denis and they have four adult children.

This is dedicated to my late parents who were very proud of their Welsh roots and for my brother Gareth, who like me, spent his first years in Wales and who was taken from us much too soon in 2009, aged 52.

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Cover designed by James Dacey, based on a photograph of Pontsticill Reservoir (Copyright:iStock.com/steved_np3)

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PART 1 THE CRANDONS OF PANTYSCALLOG

1. WHERE IT ALL BEGAN

In writing this account I hope to set down some memories and thoughts about my Welsh roots and tell the story of my fascinating relatives who hail from those parts. These larger-than-life characters often return to my thoughts to comfort, amuse or even haunt me at times and setting down their stories will help me rekindle those memories and maybe see the past and present with a fresh perspective. I will recall people, places and events but especially remember the *voices* from the past as many in my family were great raconteurs and could entertain me for hours with their exploits; their comedies and tragedies.

To begin at the beginning, as one Welsh poet famously wrote – I was born in the early autumn of 1954 in St Tydfil's Hospital in Merthyr. Apparently I was a scrawny little thing, as my Uncle Chris, when he saw

me for the first time, said I looked like a baby rabbit. A nurse held me up to the ward window for him to see. My mother, Helen, had already spent a considerable time in hospital before my birth as she suffered from high blood pressure and the prescribed remedy back then was lots of bed rest and in her case, hospitalisation. She was 24 at the time, having married my father Ernest Charles Crandon, known as Charlie, just over a year before on August 15th 1953. My mother had met my father at a local dance in Merthyr. He said he was so attracted to her that at the end of the night, when he saw that she was on a different bus, he quickly jumped off his bus to join her and escort her home. After he'd left her he said he felt he was walking on air. And the rest is history. They got married when Dad was just 21

Charlie and Helen Crandon on their honeymoon at Butlin's holiday camp, North Wales.

and went on to have four children: Me and then Gareth, Susan and Linda.

My first home was the upper floor of my great uncle Syd and auntie Olwen's house at 18 Gwladys Street, Caeracca, which my parents rented. Caeracca is an area of Pant village composed of two very long steep streets of terraced houses leading upwards. At the very top were the prefabs and along the bottom were the posh semi-detached houses, Caeracca Villas. The steep streets were Edward Street and Gwladys Street and everyone, including the horses who delivered the milk and coal, struggled to climb up them. In fact, if you were unfortunate enough to drop your shopping, you might have seen your potatoes rolling down the hill.

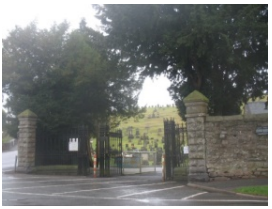
My father at this time was doing National Service with the Air Force and therefore was away from home most of the time during my first two years. I can still remember him making an entrance though in his great coat, which in later years was laid over my bed to keep me warm in the winter. Mam said that I would scream the place down when Dad came home as I hardly knew him. I've only very vague memories from my

early years in Gwladys Street as we soon moved to Pant-cad-Ifor when Dad finished his National Service.

Mam and Dad, baby Gareth and me aged three living in Pant-cad-Ifor.

My family did return to Caeracca when I was aged four, this time to 8 Edward Street, but when I was still a toddler we moved to the cottage at 5 Pant-cad-Ifor, bought by my parents with a bit of financial help from Dad's older brother Chris. My clearest memories survive from this time onwards.

We lived opposite Pant Cemetery and our cottage was wedged in between another cottage and the Pant-cad- Ifor Inn. The other side of




Pant-cad-ifor: The ornate cemetery gates; the Pant-cad-Ifor pub and our next-door neighbour's cottage. Pant cemetery was opened in 1849 originally for the victims of cholera as the Dowlais cemetery was full.

the pub car park was 3 Pant-cad-Ifor, the home of my grandparents on my father's side. Their cottage was attached to another cottage and that was more or less all there was to Pant-cad-Ifor apart from the sweet shop and stonemasons opposite. Pant-cad-Ifor is at the furthest end of the village. It's at the crossroads of four roads including the main Pant Road and Pontsticill Road (pronounced 'Pont***stick***ith') which leads to Brecon.

Our cottages were of historical importance, although I didn't know it at the time. Visiting in later years, I took a photo of the plaque attached to our neighbour's cottage which, as you can see, says that Pant Cad Ifor

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was named after Ifor Bach,[1] a Welsh chieftain who in 1158 is reputed to have crept into Cardiff Castle taking William Fitzcount, Lord of Glamorgan, and his family as hostages, only releasing them when his land was returned with interest. With his exploits, Ifor Bach became known as the Robin Hood of Glamorgan.

But for me, our cottage was just home. I remember my little bedroom, where despite the thick stone walls I could feel the vibrations from passing trains in the night from the railway line at the end of the garden. The front wall of the pub next door jutted out further than our wall creating a sharp corner which I once walked into, no doubt daydreaming, and I still have a small scar on my eyebrow to prove it. My father turned our front door into a stable-door so I could open the top part and look out onto the road and see him set off up the Pontsticill road on his motorbike to his job at the reservoirs. He did shiftwork there for a year testing the water quality and operating the filters.[2] My Dad said that on many a lonely night-shift he'd be joined by members of the

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[1] *Cad* means battle and some claim Ifor had a battle in this area and he is reputed to be buried near the old Pant-cad-Ifor Inn. Bach means small so he was probably short!

[2] The three reservoirs near Pant are the Pontsticill, the Neuadd and the Dolgellau.

mountain rescue team or even the armed forces on training exercises. They'd see the lights on at the waterworks and ask if they could kip inside rather than have to camp out rough in the Beacons!

Not long after we moved into our cottage, my father had a dispute with our next-door neighbour about the property boundary. The older chap condescendingly said it was alright for my mother to hang out the washing near the end of our garden but that it was actually his land. There was also a stone wall built there that our neighbour planned to dismantle and sell the stone. My father obviously wanted to find out if his neighbour did own it and with a bit of research discovered that the extra bit of land belonged to GKN Ltd[3] and was available to be rented for a small annual sum. Dad jumped at the chance and signed the contract. Soon after this my father calmly went out the back and made a point of digging on the disputed land. Our neighbour came rushing out to challenge him but went very quiet when my father confronted him with the truth about the land ownership (and stone!). I think this summed up my father. He never acted in haste or anger but calmly asserted his rights.

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[3] Guest, Keen & Nettlefolds Ltd, founded in Dowlais in 1759 had a huge impact on the fortunes of Merthyr and Britain in general. More about this later.

So he wasn't a dare devil like Ifor Bach and our neighbour wasn't taken hostage but thanks to Dad we were able to enjoy a longer garden. My mother and I were grateful though when the old chap next-door came to my rescue later on. I had closed the door at the bottom of our stairs onto my right hand after I'd stuck it into the crack between the door hinges. My mother panicked, not sure which way to move the door and I was scared and whimpering, so she sought help from our neighbour. He kindly came and released my poor fingers and apart from the spat over the garden, I remember him as a nice man.

Incidentally, our neighbour's cottage with the porch is believed to be the oldest in the area and the name of D.W. Nicholas and 1793 are imprinted above the doorway.

Our little cottage, number 5, was also home to David Davies, born in 1857 and the youngest of ten children. Davies, who started out working in manual jobs, went on to become a Justice of the Peace. A committed socialist, he eventually became Mayor of Merthyr Tydfil in 1925.[4]

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4 *Pantyscallog Village* by J.Ann Lewis, The Merthyr Tydfil Historical Society, 2002.

A view of Edward Street which shows part of the steep walk up. We lived in No. 8, the 4th house on the right. (Courtesy: John Lord via geographic.org.uk)

Left: Pontsticill Reservoir where my father worked. View of the outflow (Courtesy: Stuart Wilding via geographic.org.uk).
Right: Me outside of our old cottage in 2012

2. MERTHYR TYDFIL

Before I describe the village of Pant, I'll say something about the history of my home town of Merthyr, which I've really enjoyed researching for this project. It is named after the Celtic saint Tudful, who was martyred by a band of marauding Picts, hence Merthyr means martyr or saint. Its real beginnings were in the 18th Century, when it grew in less than a hundred years from a small rural village to the industrial capital of Wales and one of the largest industrialised centres in Europe with four of the greatest ironworks. It was known as the Iron Capital of the world.[5]

The Industrial Revolution, however, came with a terrible human cost. When Thomas Carlyle visited Merthyr in 1850 he saw the dreadful conditions first hand. He wrote that the town was filled with such 'unguided, hard-worked, fierce, and miserable-looking sons of Adam I never saw before. Ah me! It is like a vision of Hell, and will never leave

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[5] The four main ironworks in Merthyr were Cyfarthfa, Dowlais, Penydarren and Plymouth

me, that of these poor creatures broiling, all in sweat and dirt, amid their furnaces, pits, and rolling mills.'

View of Merthyr. (Courtesy: Richard Swingler via walesonline.co.uk)

Merthyr was the first town in Wales to be part of the technological and industrial revolution, but also the first place to demonstrate radical dissent and was the crucible of the Welsh working class political tradition. This was caused by the dreadful conditions experienced by workers and their families. The Crawshay family of Cyfarthfa were the main ironmasters and had a huge effect on the welfare of the people of South Wales. Iron production started at Cyfarthfa in 1765 and Richard

Crawshay became the sole owner in 1803, employing 1,500 people and its ironworks was said to be the biggest in the world. On his death in 1810, the ownership passed to his son William. There followed a period of simmering unrest which culminated in the notorious Merthyr Rising of 1831 when workers took to the streets protesting about the lowering of their wages and work conditions. By May the whole area was in rebellion with many other industrial towns and villages joining in. It is believed that this was the first time that the red flag was flown as a symbol of political revolution. The outcome was that 24 protesters were killed by soldiers brought in by the authorities, many more were imprisoned or transported and one man, Dic Penderyn, was hanged for allegedly stabbing a soldier. It has always been believed by many that Penderyn was innocent but that the authorities were determined that at least one protester should die as an example of what would happen to rebels. The Merthyr Rising is still commemorated today in 'The Rising' music and arts festival which takes place in Penderyn Square, Merthyr each year at the end of May.

Richard Crawshay is buried in the churchyard of St Gwynno's in Vaynor, near Pant under a huge stone weighing nine tons. Legend has it

that because of his cruelty to his workers the stone was placed by his workmen so that he could never rise again. It's a good story but his own family placed the stone on their father's wishes. Crawshay also chose to have the words 'God forgive me' inscribed on his headstone. It's been debated ever since whether this was his way of apologising to his workforce but apparently he was a very unapologetic man right to the end of his life and this was probably just a generic epitaph of the time.[6]

Despite its often gloomy history, Merthyr's outstanding achievements and distinctive landmarks should not be overlooked and these include: Trevithick's engine and the first railway line; The Iron Bridge; Cyfarthfa Castle museum and art gallery; the viaducts at Cefn Coed and Pont Sarn; Pontsticill, Neuadd and Dolgellau Reservoirs and Morlais Castle among many others.

Merthyr's coat of arms is the figure of St Tydfil and the motto is *Nïd Cadarn ond Brodyr dde* – meaning 'not strength but brotherhood', which is quite apt

[6] This is very different to the story of Lady Charlotte Guest, 1812-1895, married to Sir John Joshua Guest who owned the Dowlais Ironworks. She was a great benefactor to workers in the area, providing pioneering schools, a free public library and improvements in housing. She loved Welsh culture and is most famous for translating The Mabinogian from Welsh into English, which are the oldest known prose stories in Britain. Extremely well-educated, she spoke nine different languages.

Viaduct at Cefn Coed-y-cymmer. It was built in 1866 to carry the Brecon and Merthyr Railway across the River Taff. (Courtesy: Ray Jones via geographic.org.uk)

considering the cosmopolitan nature of the area.

The Valley has welcomed people from all parts of the globe, notably Italians, Spanish, Irish and more recently immigrants from Poland, Czechoslovakia and Vietnam. It is a pleasure to mention Merthyr's achievements and the warmth of its people as it often gets a bad press. During the interwar period, Merthyr suffered more than most from the economic Depression of the 1930s when there was a staggering eighty percent unemployment. Since then it has had a very chequered history with the rise and fall of industries and employment. However, when my

family lived there in the 1950s and 60s, skilled workers like my father at ICI (Imperial Chemical Industries), earned very good wages.

One abiding memory of Merthyr I have in the 1950s was seeing parts of the landscape dominated by coal tips but although it was hardly salubrious, it was a friendly and busy place. I loved it when I went to the Castle cinema on Saturday mornings for the ABC Minors – the children's cinema club. Along with hundreds of other kids I'd be clutching my sixpence (or a 'tanner' as 6d was known) and join the long queue snaking along the pavement. When the doors opened there would be a tremendous rush to get inside and the noise we made was deafening. We'd all sing a song about the ABC at the start with the words on the screen then we'd be shouting, screaming and laughing all through the cartoons. Mam came to collect me outside once it was all over as no adults ever accompanied us.

My other main memory of the town is that of Woolworth's which was probably the largest shop there. I remember going into town on wet Saturdays by bus with Auntie Donna. On one infamous occasion when we were at the toy counter Donna wanted to buy a plastic model of a cowboy for my brother Gareth. She was standing holding the toy for

ages, trying to catch the attention of the shop worker who was hanging about doing nothing. There were no other customers yet the shop worker steadfastly continued to ignore Donna. Eventually Donna was so annoyed that she said, 'I've had enough of this', dropped the toy into her bag, grabbed my hand and she marched me out of the shop. Knowing Auntie Donna, who was as honest as the day is long, I'm sure she would have left the money on the counter - but at my young age I thought we'd done something terrible. I was too afraid to tell my mother in case we had shop-lifted from Woolies!

Postcard of Woolworth's in Merthyr in the 1950s. (Courtesy: the Francis Frith Collection)

This has reminded me of a much earlier memory of Woolworth's. When I was a toddler I had to be forcibly restrained by Mam because I was having a terrible tantrum in there. The only thing I wanted was the shop assistant's sweeping brush behind the counter and wouldn't stop screaming about it. The assistant was amused but Mam obviously wasn't and carried me out with my arms pinned until we got outside. What was it about Woolies'?

Gareth and me visiting Santa Claus in 1960, probably in Woolworth's!

3. PANT

And now to my village of Pantyscallog[7], which is situated at the northern end of the parish of Merthyr Tydfil and skirted on one side by the Brecon Beacons – that wild and dramatic mountain range with stunning waterfalls and famous for its starry dark night skies. Pantyscallog is known locally by its abbreviated form 'Pant' (meaning Hollow), Pantyscallog means 'hollow full of thistles' while Pant-cad-Ifor means Cad Ifor's Hollow. Pant is next-door to Dowlais and before the Iron Works came there in 1760, the area had remained unchanged for hundreds of years, consisting of nine farms and a few cottages. Following the opening of the iron works, many thousands came to Merthyr for work there in the local quarries and mines and later the railways. Gradually by the start of the 20th Century, the village of Pant had pubs, a post office, stonemasons, police house,

[7] Pronounced 'Pant***scath***log'

grocery shops, the railway, a Fever hospital[8], a school and many homes but still very much retained its identity as a village.

Opposite Pant-cad-Ifor is a large cemetery where many of my ancestors are buried. I often used to wander round it with Auntie Donna as she pointed out names on gravestones. The cemetery rises steeply up a hillside so you get wonderful views of the village and surrounding countryside at the top. One morning, on returning to the tall ornamental gates at the entrance, we spotted a large barn owl perched on a gravestone and blinking at us in the daylight.

Walking along Pant Road, past the cottages, you'd come to Pant church (Christchurch) belonging to the Church of Wales; the Welsh equivalent of the Church of England.[9] This church is at the heart of the village. The Crandon family members were all Protestants and my father attended the church regularly and was a member of the church choir, while Auntie Donna played a big role in the Cubs and Scouts and later

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8 The fever hospital was built for the isolation of cases of Typhus and other infectious diseases. These places existed before the use of immunisation and antibiotics in the 20th century.

The Church of England was considered the main Anglican authority in the UK and the Welsh equivalent is sometimes referred to as the Church *in* Wales, thereby casting the Welsh church in a subservient light.[9]

Pant Road looking towards the cemetery. (Postcard courtesy: oldmerthyrtydfil.com)

served as Church Warden. Family christenings, marriages and funerals all took place here and especially at funerals, the church would be packed with many taking time off work to attend and pay their respects even if they weren't relatives or friends. Everyone knew everybody else and would know all the family history and gossip. The church hall was also well used for clubs, parties and concerts. My uncle Rhydian who married Donna was famous as a pantomime dame. It was said that he never bothered to learn his lines but improvised instead so the rest of the cast never knew what to expect as no two nights were ever the same with Rhydian performing. In later years, Rhydian also came to be known as Father Christmas, as he'd dress up each year to visit schools and parties and never refused a request.

Pant Church (Christ Church) which was built in the 1870s. (Courtesy: oldmerthyrtydfil.com)

My Nanna Pant though was a chapelgoer and played the organ at Beulah Baptist Chapel in Dowlais. My father also remembers going to the little Beulah Chapel school room in Pant with his mother and later doing a First Aid course there. I still have a few of the old hymn books belonging to Esther. (A couple of them have her address in Ohio, from when she and Albert lived in America, so she may even have played there.) Uncle Chris told me that on Sunday afternoons, when he was a child, the adults would want to have a nap after their large dinner and children were packed off to Sunday school. As there were so many

churches and chapels, the kids would do the rounds visiting those that had the best things on offer that week, be it refreshments or outings. At Christmas time, Chris said he would regularly go from one party to another enjoying the festivities. My mother was a Roman Catholic and because of this Gareth and I attended a different church and school in Dowlais, but more about that later.

Further along the road from Pant Church was the Co-op. I was often sent there with a shopping list from Mam. Everything had to be asked for at the counter. Fresh items like cheese and meat were all weighed, cut and wrapped by hand. I was fascinated by the lethal-looking bacon slicer and the wire cutter for cheese. There were no plastic bags of course so everything was wrapped in shiny white paper or brown paper bags. I'd often have to remove blood-stained, dripping bags of meat from the shopping bag when I eventually arrived home after trudging up Edward Street. Something else that was different was that

Pant Coop on the left. (Courtesy: oldmerthyrtydfil.com)

you were not required to pay immediately for your goods. The shop assistant would painstakingly write down all your purchases in a book and you were expected to pay your bill at the end of the week. If the shop assistant needed to give you change, your 10 shilling note ('10 bob') or whatever would be placed in an overhead contraption on wires which would wing its way to a little office where they sent back the change.

The system of having goods 'on tick' could be abused of course. About a hundred yards up from us on Edward Street, on the left hand side, was a little shop run by 'Auntie Edie' as I called her. Edie Jones was the daughter of Fred Crandon, who was one of my grandpa's uncles, so she was really my cousin several times removed. She was a lovely lady, short and rather plump, and very kind-hearted. I often ran up there for odds and ends. She lived a few doors up from the shop but if anyone was desperate for something after closing

The bottom end of Pant Rd: on the right, behind the telegraph pole is the railway bridge that we walked under to go up to Caeracca. (Courtesy: oldmerthyrtydfil.com) Note: The Brecon and Merthyr Railway closed the Pant and Dowlais line in 1960

time she would always reopen for them. The trouble was that certain people thought she was a soft touch and I remember hearing my parents talking about poor Edie being in tears going round houses in Caeracca at night trying to collect the money she was owed and getting fobbed off time and time again.[10]

We only had two bedrooms in Edward St so I shared with my brother Gareth and sister Susan, who was just a toddler. I remember for many weeks one Lent saving all the chocolate I was given in order to eat it at Easter. It was placed in a bowl on top of a cupboard in the bedroom, supposedly out of harm's way. Imagine my horror then when I came into the bedroom one day when young Sue was supposed to be having a nap in her cot and found her face all smeared with chocolate and nearly all my stash eaten! Younger siblings, eh?

Another memory of our bedroom is spending days there in a darkened room in order to protect my eyes from daylight. I had the measles and it was believed back then that it could cause blindness. This was a myth but in rare cases it can cause eye problems. Parents were

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[10] Edith Crandon married Albert Jones and her daughter Glenys married Peter Prosser. J. Ann Lewis, a local historian, has told me that both Edie and Glenys were still referred to as 'Crandons' long after they were married.

quite happy for their off-spring to catch as many of these contagious diseases as possible in order to obtain immunity. Our only line of defence was cod liver oil and rosehip syrup. (I remember looking enviously at the doorstep opposite us where young Stephen Lister lived as he had fresh orange juice delivered in a third-of-a-pint bottle by the milkman. We only had milk.) This was before vaccination programmes, and sadly, not all children pulled through. I was lucky in that nothing serious happened when I caught all the illnesses going round and enjoyed the Lucozade and comics that my mother bought me to cheer me up.

Pant was developed to house Dowlais workers and residential streets like in Caeracca were built for skilled steel workers. Edward and Gwladys Street were built in the early 1900s and it is believed that they were named after the grandparents of Edward Davies who owned the Pantyscallog and Garth Farms and leased the land for Caeracca to be built.[11]

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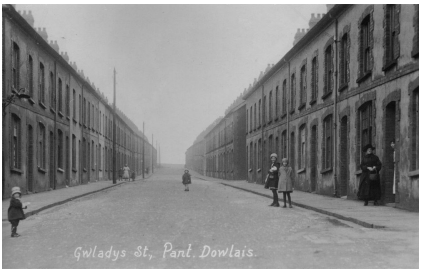
[11] Cf 'Pantyscallog Village' by J Ann Lewis, The Merthyr Tydfil Historical Society 2002 p90.



Looking down at Caeracca (top) and its two main roads: Edward St (left) and Gwladys St, both looking rather grim and not as I remember! (Courtesy: oldmerthyrtydfil.com, on loan from the Keith Caswell collection)

4. MY GRANDPARENTS' COTTAGE

My chief memories of living in Pant-cad-Ifor come from my frequent trips a few yards up the road to my grandparents' home. I loved to visit them and if I could go back in time and relive those idyllic, innocent times, I would go in an instant. I remember their cottage far more than ours, probably because we continued to visit after we moved to our house in Edward Street when I was four years old and later when we left for Bristol when I was aged nine. In fact I have been returning and remembering that cottage all my life. I can still picture exactly what it looked like even though it had a drastic modernisation in the 1980s which caused my grandfather, already suffering from dementia, to not recognise his own home. I understood his pain, as although the place was made much more comfortable and spacious, (my uncle bought the next-door cottage and knocked the two into one),[12] the place seemed to lose a lot of its history

[12] Chris' enlarged cottage became known locally as Crandon Corner!

Me with Auntie Donna at my grandparents' cottage.

and memories in one fell make-over. Still, that's progress and I can see why it was done as the original cottage *was* very primitive. You walked through the front door straight into the 'parlour' which was only ever used for visitors or Sunday dinners. There was a large table and an old dresser with a display of plates. My grandmother, Esther Theodora, or Nanna Pant to me, kept a crafty packet of cigarettes in one of its drawers as Grandpa, Albert, didn't approve of her smoking, even though, he smoked cigarettes and a pipe.[13] I loved the two large porcelain Staffordshire spaniels that stood in the deep window sill looking out onto

[13] It wasn't considered 'nice' for a woman to smoke just like women never entered pubs.

the road. The old wooden door in the corner of the room opened onto a very narrow steep staircase which led up to two bedrooms. You walked straight into the first larger bedroom immediately at the top of the stairs and had to walk through this one to get to the second smaller one where Uncle Chris slept. My grandparents had a double bed in the larger room and my auntie Donna slept in a single bed in the same room as them until she left to get married aged 24. On the few occasions when I stayed over-night there, I slept in the same bed as my grandparents on the end next to Nanna. It was all very cosy and normal at the time. My relatives used to relate tales of many houses in Merthyr where the beds never got cold as people working shifts in the same house took turns to use the beds through the day and night. The bedrooms of course had chamber pots as it was a long way to the lavatory in the middle of the night. Not a nice job to have to empty them in the morning though!

The heart of the house was a much smaller room downstairs with a fire constantly blazing, my grandfather's armchair to the side of it, an old table where most meals were eaten, and eventually a little television propped up on a shelf at one end which you could crane your neck to watch from the various chairs or armrests in the cramped little room.

The room was always stifling, no matter what the season, as the fire was constantly plied with coal and never seemed to go out. My grandfather would be sitting in his armchair, in his flat cap and coat, reading newspapers, smoking his pipe and telling stories. When it was dinner time, he would sit on an armchair rest at the side of the table as there weren't enough chairs to go round. We had white bread and butter with every meal to pad it out. (I remember one visit to Nanna's posher family in Pontypool and was horrified to see the colour of their bread. I said it looked dirty! That was the first time I'd ever seen brown bread.) If Chris served up a mincemeat dish, he'd jokingly refer to it as 'dog's spew', which rather put you off your food. A pot of tea also graced every meal and my grandfather always drank his out of the saucer to cool it.

On Saturdays Uncle Chris, would do the football pools, sometimes asking me to guess the draws or to 'have a flutter on the gee-gees'. They all talked loudly in a sing-song and emphatic way which is typical of the Merthyr accent, probably because so many had worked in foundries or factories where noise levels were such that you would need to shout to be heard. All my Crandon relatives, apart from my father, did shout a lot but it was always in a sociable way, not angrily. They were always relating old

Me with Auntie Cissie (Cecilia) when she visited from Pontypool. Cissie was really my second cousin. She gave me a gilt knife to open envelopes and a golden cat and mouse bookmark. I kept them for years. She was said to be a talented musician and musical ability ran in my grandmother Esther's family.

or funny tales or arguing amongst themselves in exasperated tones that you sensed was never serious, more like an affectionate bickering. And being the first grandchild, I was spoilt rotten. They always took an interest in what I was saying or doing and gave me lots of the attention I craved. My grandmother would give me sixpences to spend in the corner shop opposite run by Miss Evans, who apparently had owned it since the 1920s. Her shop was filled with large jars of sweets that she'd weigh out for you or charge you four for a penny (originally they would have been a farthing each). I especially loved the sherbet and liquorice sweets like the Flying Saucers with a thin rice shell that you would melt in your mouth to release the

sherbet and feel it fizzing. The Sherbet Fountains with a liquorice 'straw' for you to suck up the sherbet were also good. The trouble was though that if the sherbet went down 'the wrong way' you'd end up coughing and spluttering with your eyes watering. Then there were the Black Jack chews that turned your tongue black. All great fun!

Nanna Pant and me in 1954

Nanna Pant was a large lady, even though she didn't eat a great deal and I found out later that she had suffered for years with a hernia and stomach problems. She wouldn't go to the doctors because before the National Health Service started in 1948 you had to pay for treatment. Also she wasn't one to make a fuss. She was always jolly and loving and she made the house a home with her gardening, her chickens, cooking, chatter and loud laughter. I have many happy memories of popping in to see her. I was very sad when she died not very long after my family moved to Bristol. Esther died on 16th May 1963 and is buried in Pant cemetery.

Me looking sulky with Nanna Pant (Pant-cad-Ifor pub in the background)

Behind the main room was the kitchen which my grandfather had added to the cottage, as originally there were only two rooms downstairs. The kitchen was a large square room but there was nothing fancy about it. The floor was bare concrete; there was a pantry, a stone sink with a cold tap and a cooker. As in all the houses where I lived in Wales during the 1950s and 60s, hot water was only obtained by heating it on the gas stove. The weekly bath was a major operation, with every kettle, pot and pan filled with water to heat up and bath water shared between the occupants of the house who took it in turns to have a dip. I had never seen a bathroom until we moved to Bristol in 1963. The toilet or 'lav'

was always outside and wouldn't be a flush toilet. Therefore as well as being armed with neatly cut squares of newspaper to use as loo roll, you would also need a bucket of water to flush away your 'business'.

But my grandparents' garden was wonderful and I would roam around what I thought was a huge piece of land. Near the backdoor (which had nailed to it the obligatory horseshoe for good luck) was Nanna's cottage garden where she grew vegetables and flowers in great abundance. There were always fresh vegetables and herbs for their meals. It was surrounded by a little fence and entered through a gate in order to keep the main menaces of the property from pecking the produce. Chickens! As a toddler they seemed as big as me. Their beady eyes, sharp beaks and claws, terrifying red combs, waggling wattles and their raucous noise would send me running for cover. Donna and Chris would just laugh at me and shoo them away but they strutted about as if they owned the place. They all came to a sorry end though, as when required for a meal, Uncle Chris would simply grab one in the yard, wring its neck or cut its throat. I must admit I didn't feel particularly sorry for the chickens but I was very upset when I found out what happened to the cat's kittens on a regular basis. I remember a large ginger tom cat, called Ginge (a

very original name) but there were female cats too. The she cats would have broods of kittens in the airing cupboard as it was a warm dark place for them to be left undisturbed. Auntie Donna once opened the cupboard door for me to have a peek and I remember the little blind creatures, kneading their mother's tummy for milk. Later, when I enquired what had become of all the kittens, Uncle Chris bluntly replied that they had 'joined the Navy'. I had no idea what he meant and was horrified when Donna explained that they had been put in a sack and drowned in the bath tub. Such was life back then. All the Crandons were fond of animals but took a very detached, unemotional approach to those that they could no longer look after or that they needed to eat.

Me looking worried amongst the chickens.

Now back to the garden… at the end of the yard was the aforementioned whitewashed lavatory and coal house. Beyond that was a very large garage, built by Grandpa, which doubled as a workshop and behind that was a swing

which I played on. Then there was another much larger garden where Chris grew his produce, especially runner beans and towering sweet peas. There was a path all the way round for me to run and at the far end was a wood shed. So for a young child it was like an adventure playground with plenty of space and interesting things to explore. It was quite rough and ready in places though. There was a high gate and stone wall in front of the garage court which had ugly, sharp broken bits of glass stuck into concrete on top to deter intruders at night. (The front door though was always left unlocked all day, like everyone else's back then.) The concrete paths were also pretty rough in places and I had a nasty fall once and cut my knee open. I felt Auntie Donna was rather unsympathetic on that occasion but on Nanna's insistence, she cleaned me up and bandaged my knee before I was sent home. It was still hurting the next day and when my mother unwound the bandage she found there were bits of grit left in the wound. Needless to say, she was very cross about it and took me straight to Doctor Day where I had a tetanus injection in my behind. I still have the scar on my knee to this day but to excuse Donna, I was about six or seven then and she was nearly 14 years older than me. She

may well have had a date with a boyfriend that evening and I was being a nuisance delaying her!

(As regards Doctor Day, this probably wasn't how he spelt his name. He was the only person with dark skin that I ever saw at that time in Merthyr and Mam told me later that he was from Pakistan. He was a very well respected doctor. My mother even expressed her concern to him about me refusing to talk to her when I came home from school. He wisely told her it was quite normal and I was probably just tired…or fed up with answering questions!)

I mentioned before that I sometimes stayed overnight at my grandparents and one time, when my parents went off to Bristol to view the house they were going to buy, they left Gareth and me behind. They took Linda with them as she was a baby and Susan who was two years old. I was up in the bedroom and Donna had left the radio on for me. I was probably listening to Saturday Club on the BBC Light programme when suddenly a song came on the radio which instantly caught my attention. This one was just so different to other pop music of the time when everyone was trying to sound American but I couldn't place the accent and the singing had a beautiful wistful and haunting quality to it. I

Grandpa Pant, Uncle Chris, Dad, Nanna Pant and Auntie Donna.

imagined that it was a French group for some reason. What I was actually hearing for the first time was the wonderful Liverpudlian voice of Paul McCartney singing 'Love Me Do'. It was late 1962, I was nine years old and listening to an incredible little band that was going to change music and culture world-wide and whose influence continues today. One funny memory connected with this is that years later Uncle Rhydian said he'd seen The Beatles performing at a local dance hall before they became famous. I was amazed at this and wanted to know all about it. I was soon deflated though by Rhydian's wry comment that he hadn't been very impressed by them at the time and didn't think they'd ever amount to much. We joked with Rhydian that it was lucky he was never their manager as he may well have become the second Welshman who 'gave The Beatles away'.[14]

[14] The Beatles first manager was Allan Williams who fell out with them. His autobiography is entitled *The Man Who Gave The Beatles Away*.

5. ALBERT CRANDON

My grandfather, Albert was born on 2nd November 1897, and was the second of the eleven children of Henry Charles Crandon and Cecelia Ann (nee Harris). The Crandon clan hailed from Somerset originally. As far back as 1772 they had family living in Paradise Road in Burnham-on-Sea and by 1806 one brother and wife moved to Berrow Road, South Brent. We know that a lot of Crandons lived in Brent Knowle, Somerset as there are a number of gravestones there and even a little bridge called 'Crandon Bridge'. The name Crandon seems to be related to the crane bird. By 1849 though a son called Henry came to Merthyr Tydfil for work, and started his own dynasty there, living in one of the small houses on the Garth Farm in Pant. He worked at the Garth waterworks on the filter beds. (This was closed after WW2)[15]. They had nine children

[15] The Garth Farm is up the lane at the side of 3 Pant-cad-Ifor. It was known on earlier maps as Madoc's Castle. It is part of the Castle farm area which also contains the ruins of Morlais Castle built around 1265.

and eventually, one of those, another Henry Charles (known as Charlie), was Albert's father. Albert, my grandfather was raised in Pant where he attended Pant School and then Dowlais Council School. He told me that he started school aged three as he was simply taken along by some older girls who looked after him.

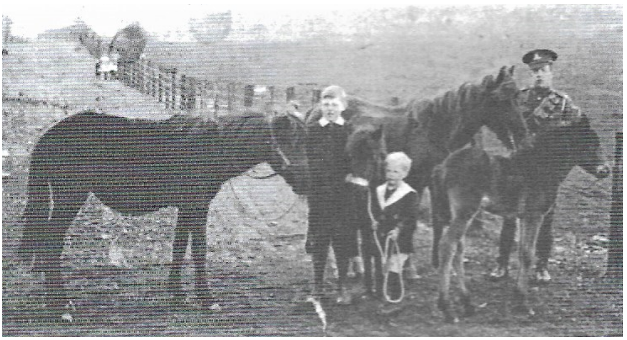
This is the earliest photograph I've seen of Albert when he was aged ten. This would therefore have been in 1907 and he is pictured next to his father who is referred to as Charlie, although his name was Henry Charles, and another young boy with his father. All their faces, hands and clothes are covered in coal dust. Albert's father is holding a pickaxe and Albert and the other child are holding lamps. My own father Charlie was dismayed to be suddenly withdrawn from school at the age of 14 to work with Albert but it looks like Albert was certainly part of the child labour force

Henry Charles Crandon, 1st on the left with Albert, my grandfather next to him.

from a much younger age. (My Dad said that on the weekend after his 14th birthday Albert told him that he wasn't going to school anymore but going to work with him at the quarry. And that was that. He had no opportunity to even say goodbye to his school mates and this was his welcome to the world of work.)

I don't know much else about Albert in his early years but we find out a lot more about him during WW1. Albert wrote a very straightforward account about his time as a soldier and that was passed down to my father and then to me. He sets out the dates and events very methodically and in quite a dispassionate way with the odd bit of soldiers' jargon of the time. This factual approach probably helped him cope with the horror and mayhem that was going on all around him. He signed up on 10th January 1915, aged 17 as a driver with the Royal Field Artillery, Horse Battalion, in Merthyr. He later became a team driver taking heavy guns up to the front line of battle. He had always loved horses so it seemed the best regiment to be in. (Grandpa continued to keep horses later in life. He and his brother Frederick bought a field for grazing horses between the Co-op and Garth fields and I remember going up with him to feed them).

Albert was stationed at various places in Britain including Preston and Salisbury Plain. He set off for Le Havre in France in November 1915 from Southampton. He mentioned that they had to make three attempts



Left: Albert in uniform with boys Jack and Syd in Co-op fields.
Right: Albert Crandon, Royal Field Artillery, Horse Battalion, WW1.

to sail as they were chased back by submarines each time. It took about eleven days to finally reach their destination, a village called Saint-Jans-Capple near Bailleul in northern France where they stayed for a further three weeks before being sent to Ploegsteert Wood in Flanders, Belgium in December. (Soldiers pronounced this as 'Plugstreet Wood'). Albert was part of a wagon line taking the ammunition to the guns in day time.

There are a number of accounts of 'close shaves' and driving back the enemy. He describes one place as 'a pretty warm shop' where they had 'a smash up on the crossroads' nearly every night. These crossroads

Albert 2nd from left, front row in the Royal Field Artillery.

in Kemmel were at a place called 'Suicide Corner'. He records that one night, after a direct hit from 'Jerry', two guns, nine gunners, five horses and three drivers 'went West with that one shell'. It was a 17 inch shell which he says the Germans only used for 'special' targets.

Albert relates that from that day their bad luck continued as they were like sitting targets in their camp. Many more men and horses were killed and the horses were so terrified that one day they stampeded. He records that all of Whit Monday was spent burying horses and men as 54 horses and 28 men had been killed in fifteen minutes on Whit Sunday

with eight planes bombing them. He said they had no need to dig graves as the holes made from the bombs were large enough for four or five horses.

Left: Albert's tag with his name and number, CRANDON RFA 116 770. Soldiers kept this on them at all times for identification. A second tag was kept centrally for burial purposes, if needed.
Right: Albert's RFA badge (Royal Field Artillery).

This bad luck continued for weeks but on June 7th he says 'we were eager to give Jerry humpy'. So at 2.30 a.m. they were all harnessed up, waiting for their advance. At about 3 a.m. the craters were blown up by the Royal Engineers. Albert explains that craters were underground tunnels which the Royal Engineers had dug and then packed with explosives. The craters were about 300 yards long and there were nine of them on a six mile front. When they exploded they 'blew all the German lines to atoms and thousands of Germans besides'. He wrote, 'the whole earth trembled for miles. It was heard in England by Lloyd George'. He

continues with how they successfully went over the top and took hundreds of German prisoners. (On further research, I discovered that this was the famous Battle of Messines which took place from the 7th to 14th June 1917 by the British Second Army, on the Western Front, in West Flanders where the Wytschaete Ridge was recaptured. Altogether there were 24,000 casualties and losses on the British side and 35,000 Germans.)

Aftermath of the Battle of Messines. Photo originally entitled 'GREAT BATTLE OF MESSINES RIDGE. Summer has changed to winter…Last week this wood was beautiful and green.' (Courtesy of Ernest Brooks via Wikimedia commons)

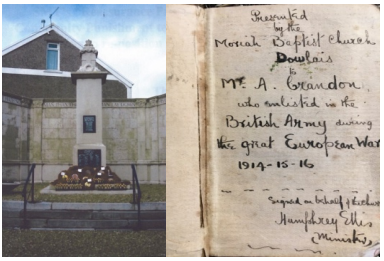
His account continues in this vein with advances, successes and setbacks until September 16th 1917 when he was put out of action at Ypres. He was transferred from one hospital base to another until he was back in 'Blighty' on September 28th to be taken to Sidcup hospital. Shrapnel had caused a serious injury and we learned later that Grandpa had a metal plate inserted in his jaw. This wasn't at all obvious to us so

they must have done a good job. He writes that he was there until January 30th 1918 and finally reported back to duty in February to the camp at Catterick in Yorkshire.

For his war efforts, Albert received two medals, one for taking part in it and one for being wounded. He also received six ribbons for the battles he was in, including Ypres and Balleul (known as 'Hell Fire Corner'; this is the place where he was wounded and taken from the front line).

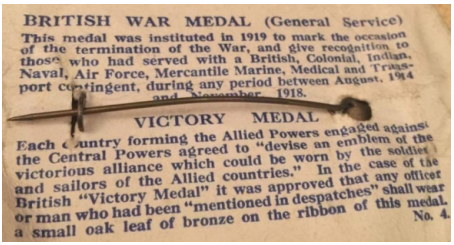
Fortunately for Albert and all his descendants, he survived the war but never forgot his old friends. He'd often walk along Pant Road to the war memorial to read the names of the 14 men from the village who died in WW1 and there were many more from Pant and Dowlais who died in WW2.[16]

So after all that, at the still very young age of 22, Albert married Beatrice May Jones, and had their first child Sarah Elsie (known as Elsie) in



The Cenotaph in Pant and the Bible presented to Albert after the war by the Moriah Baptist Church.

16 Albert also brought home a bayonet from his time as a soldier. It has been passed on down the family.



Albert's Bar Brooch Ribbon (Victory Medal) with details on reverse of card.

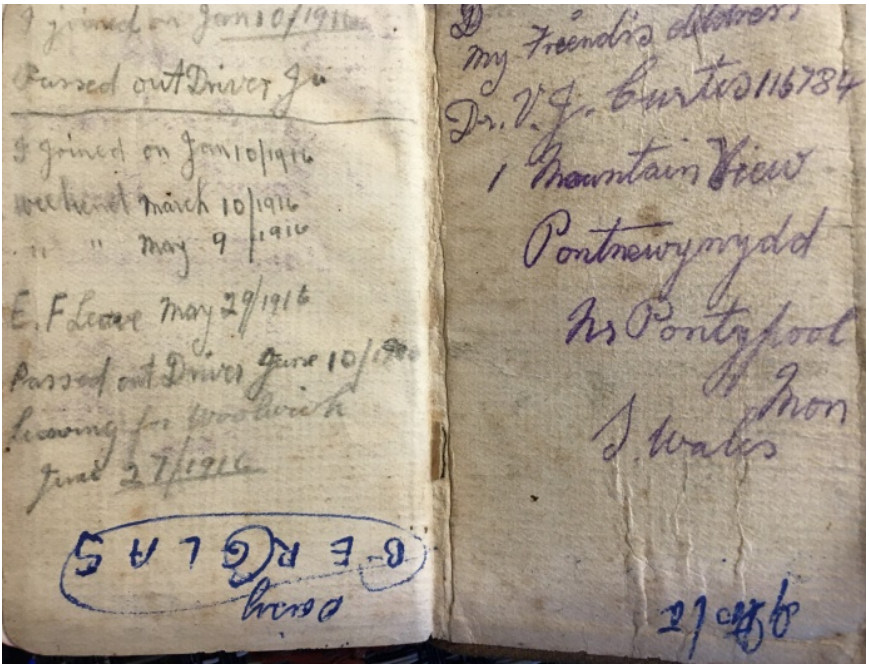
Albert's War Badge (reverse of medal below) and a small button from his uniform.

1920. The Rhodfa'r[17] housing estate in Pant was built in 1922 specifically for servicemen returning from the war and Albert's family was one of the first to move in. In 1922 they also had their second child Glenys Evelyn who sadly died after about ten months. His wife Beatrice died in the same year. The cause of their deaths is now unknown. They were both buried in Pant Cemetery.

At the age of 29, Albert married my grandmother Esther Theodora Curtis from Pontypool. She came from a well-to-do family who lived in a very large house. My father commented that it had so many rooms, you could get lost in it and they all had high ceilings, large windows and window seats. One can only wonder what Esther thought of accommodation in Pant! She never had any airs and graces though and the members of her family that I met were very friendly. Her father (my father's grandfather) had a specialist engineering job in coal-mining. Esther's brother Victor was an old friend of Albert who he had met during the war and this is how he met Esther. On 16th December 1926

[17] Rhodf'a means 'Walk' in English

they had a son who they named Christopher with Victor as his middle name after Esther's brother.

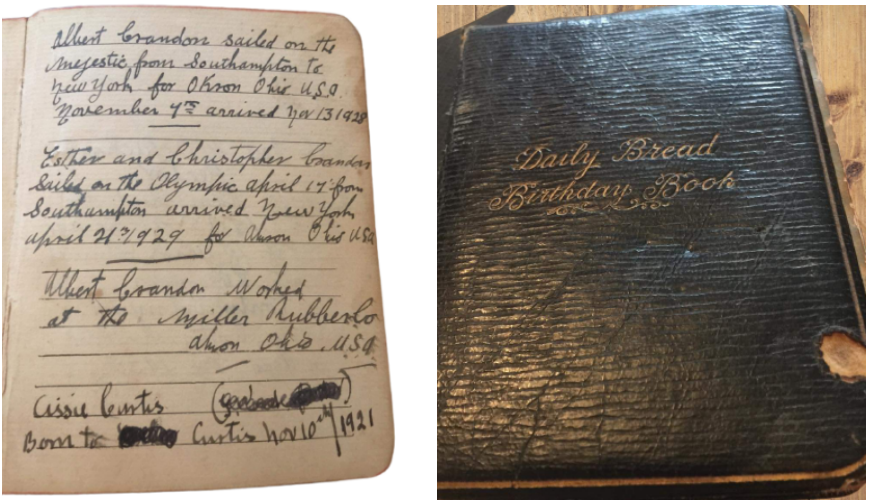


At the back of his Bible Albert wrote the address of his friend Victor, Dr V. J. Curtis.

My father Charlie, as he loved to remind us, was born in America in June 1932. Albert had emigrated there, aged 32, because of the lack of work in Wales after the war. He arrived at Ellis Island, New York on November 7th 1928 after sailing on The Majestic from Southampton for a six day journey. The Majestic was built in 1922 and incidentally was a

sister ship to the Titanic which sank in 1912, so it must have been a very precarious and nerve-wracking journey for all those many people who crossed the Atlantic in the 1920s in search of a better life. We know that Albert then moved to 52 Nash St., Akron, Ohio to stay for a short while with an uncle. (It may have been Esther's uncle.)

A little later Albert moved again to 586 Spicer Street in Akron, as he hadn't been made as welcome at the uncle's home as he'd been led to expect! America at the time was a 'dry' country and the gangsters were in control of producing illegal liquor and running protection rackets. On the first day he moved in to his house, Grandpa was approached by three



A page from Esther's 'Daily Bread Birthday Book' recording their journeys to New York.

gangsters (probably mafia) asking if they could rent his basement at a good price to store illegal liquor. Albert had to think quickly in order to get rid of them so he pretended that he had a cousin in the police who was likely to drop round at any time, so sorry, but he couldn't help them.

Albert found work at the large rubber factory, Firestone. He told us that in America if people couldn't work they weren't paid. He recounted stories of sick people being carried to factories by their friends in order to be seen clocking in. He later went on to start a small business with a partner. They called their company Durkin and Crandon, bought a truck and sold ice and coal.

On the 17th April 1929 his wife Esther (aged 27) and son Christopher (aged 2) sailed on the Olympic to join him in America[18].

My father was born on 10th June 1932 and named Ernest Charles after Albert's brother and father. Dad made news straightaway as the doctor who delivered him was fined $14.8 for speeding at 74 M.P.H. to attend the birth. The event appeared in the local paper headlined 'Doctor Wins Race with Stork!'

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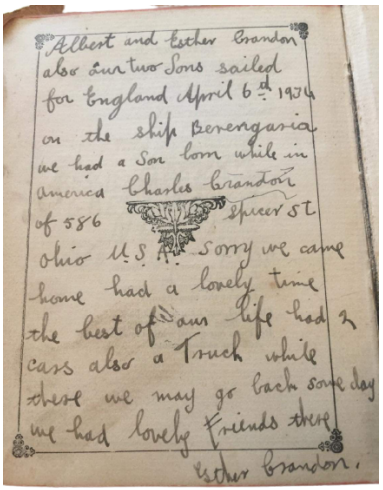
18 Albert's child Elsie from his first marriage was being brought up by his late-wife's family. Elsie chose not to go to America and remained in Pant.

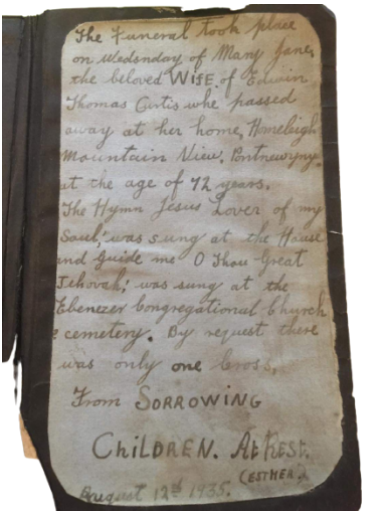
Left: Albert and son Chris with the company vehicle.
Right: Albert, holding baby Charlie, with Esther and Chris in America.

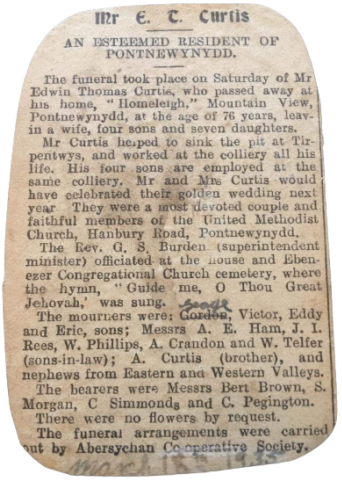
Dad didn't stay very long in America as the family came back to Wales when he was nearly two years old sailing back on the RMS Berengaria from New York to Southampton on 6th April 1934. They returned because of illness in my grandmother's family and feelings of home sickness.

An entry from Esther's notebook recording their return home from America. She expresses regret at leaving the USA and the possibility of even returning one day.



Albert and Esther Crandon
also our two Sons sailed
for England April 6th 1934
on the ship Berengaria
we had a Son born while in
america Charles Crandon
of 586 Spicer St
Ohio U.S. Sorry we came
home had a lovely time
the best of our life had 2
cars also a Truck while
there we may go back some day
we had lovely friends there
Esther Crandon.


The funeral took place on Wednesday of Mary Jane, the beloved WIFE of Edwin Thomas Curtis who passed away at her home, Homeleigh Mountain View, Pontnewynydd at the age of 72 years. The Hymn Jesus Lover of my Soul, was sung at the House and Guide me O Thou Great Jehovah, was sung at the Ebenezer Congregational Church cemetery. By request there was only one Loss, From SORROWING CHILDREN. ATTEST. (ESTHER) August 12th 1935.


Mr E. T. Curtis

AN ESTEEMED RESIDENT OF PONTNEWYNYDD.

The funeral took place on Saturday of Mr Edwin Thomas Curtis, who passed away at his home, "Homeleigh," Mountain View, Pontnewynydd, at the age of 76 years, leaving a wife, four sons and seven daughters.

Mr Curtis helped to sink the pit at Tirpentwys, and worked at the colliery all his life. His four sons are employed at the same colliery. Mr and Mrs Curtis would have celebrated their golden wedding next year. They were a most devoted couple and faithful members of the United Methodist Church, Hanbury Road, Pontnewynydd.

The Rev. G. S. Burden (superintendent minister) officiated at the house and Ebenezer Congregational Church cemetery, where the hymn, "Guide me, O Thou Great Jehovah," was sung.

The mourners were: Gordon, Victor, Eddy and Eric, sons; Messrs A. E. Ham, J. I. Rees, W. Phillips, A. Crandon and W. Telfer (sons-in-law); A. Curtis (brother), and nephews from Eastern and Western Valleys.

The bearers were Messrs Bert Brown, S. Morgan, C Simmonds and C. Pegington.

There were no flowers by request.

The funeral arrangements were carried out by Aberaychan Co-operative Society.

Left: Esther's entry about the death of her mother, Mary Jane Curtis, aged 72 who died just five months after her husband. Esther writes at the end, 'From sorrowing children.' This explains why Albert and Esther returned from America. Right: Newspaper cutting of the death of Esther's father, Edwin Thomas Curtis, aged 76 years. The date is pencilled in very faintly at the bottom as March 18th 1935. It gives details of his mining career and the fact that he had four sons and seven daughters.

They bought a cottage behind the Pantyscallog Pub in Pant which was one room up and one room down and where one outside toilet was shared between three cottages. But Albert, ever the entrepreneur, kept twelve nanny goats in a local field, and supplied goat's milk mainly for expectant mothers and for sick children. Having left America, they must have missed the money and type of life they had there. Albert had owned two cars, a truck and even a fridge which was unheard of in most of

Britain at this time, so their change of lifestyle was quite significant. He was, however, one of the first people in Pant to own a radio and a car.

Later on, Albert and his brother Sydney took over the contract for supplying limestone from the Morlais Quarry on Pontsticill Road for the G.K.N. Iron and Steel Works in Dowlais and had as many as 14 quarrymen working for them.

It seems that in 1938 another child was born into their family called Albert Edward but he died almost immediately. My father discovered later that his mother suffered several miscarriages as well but at the time he knew nothing about it. Children weren't told about these matters.

On September 3rd 1939 the Second World War broke out with Germany. Albert along with his son Chris joined the Home Guard with Albert being promoted to sergeant. My Dad remembered hearing the air raid sirens and the first time it happened his father got them all out of bed on a cold night and into the pantry downstairs with Charlie pushed under the big stone slab for safety. The

Albert's Defence Medal awarded after WW2 when he was part of 'Dad's Army'.

second time the sirens sounded my grandmother Esther refused to get out of bed so everyone did the same!

On 17th December 1940 Donna Jean, my auntie was born and Dad remembered it well because his mother said she had hoped it would be a baby girl and they got her a special gas mask so that she could fit inside. Then in 1948 Albert's family moved to 34 Gwladys Street in Caeracca and Albert and Charlie along with Sydney and son Kenneth left the quarries over a disagreement with G.K.N. and started an Outcrop Coal Business in Pantywyne near Rhymney. However, after about a year things went badly wrong and they all packed it in and went to work in the Nantifien Coal Mine.

Albert was a clever chap in many ways. We found lots of his volumes on the anatomy of horses after he died so he must have taken a great interest in their welfare. He probably would have researched cures for their injuries and ailments as very few people would have used vets then. He also taught himself to write short-hand after the war. No-one knows why he might have needed short-hand but as he also worked as a bookie on the side, taking bets on horse racing and other sports, an element of secrecy might have been required! One can only speculate. He was a

jack-of-all-trades, able to turn his hand to all kinds of jobs, had suffered all kinds of adversity and yet always picked himself up and saw an opportunity to try new things. By all accounts he led an exciting and varied life. Before he retired, Albert had a driving job with the Local Council and I remember seeing him at the wheel of a Gulley Sucker cleaning out gutters and drains. He was still willing to take on anything in his old age.

When Grandpa retired many years later, he was looked after by Chris and Donna, although before he developed dementia, he was still very independent and single-minded. One time when both Donna and Chris were going away, Donna cooked up two weeks' worth of meals for her father and froze them in their huge chest freezer. She explained to Albert over and over how to defrost and reheat them in the microwave. Much to her surprise and annoyance, when she returned home she discovered that none of the meals had been eaten. When she asked how he'd managed for a fortnight without eating he blithely told her that he'd been going round the local pubs for his meals as he couldn't be bothered with any microwave nonsense. Chris then had to go round all the pubs paying off what Albert owed, as because Albert was such a well-known character

around Pant, they'd put all his bills 'on the slate'. Donna was also mortified that people might think that she'd just gone off and left her poor old father to fend for himself. No fear of Albert suffering though as he was a born survivor. He remained a stubborn and well-loved old rascal to the very end.

Albert Crandon

When he was old Grandpa told me that he'd stopped attending his friends' burials as he knew lots of old men who had ventured up the cemetery in the cold weather and then ended up being buried themselves within a short time, having caught pneumonia. This pearl of wisdom obviously stood him in good stead as Albert died at the age of 93, having outlived all his younger brothers and sisters.

This is where I will leave Albert's history as everything that happens from now on is also part of my father's story and eventually mine. So let it begin…

6. MY DAD (CHARLIE CRANDON)

My father Charlie never forgot his Welsh roots and his life before we moved to Bristol. He would regale us for hours with stories of his life and of the Crandon family from the 1920s to the 1950s. When in Bristol, working for ICI, new stories were added to his repertoire, but later in life, especially during his 80s, Dad was more likely to dig deeper into his past: his boyhood in Pant and his teenage years in Merthyr and beyond, rather than more recent times. Dad's memory faded towards the end of his life but it was amazing how he remembered so vividly so many names and events from bygone years.

In 2014, I had the pleasure of recording my father while he retold many of these stories and here is just a taste of the life and times of Ernest Charles Crandon. Dad told us lots of stories about his father Albert but Dad and his father were two very different types of men. Whereas my grandfather Albert was a bit of a loveable cavalier in many

ways, our father, Charlie, was a more cautious character, always extremely reliable and conscientious. He was the sort of person who if he said he'd do something, then you knew it would be done and it would be done properly. Also, he was a stickler for good time-keeping – you could set your watch by Charlie! I did learn some surprising things about his youth though, when Dad was also a bit of a dare-devil and got into a few scrapes too.

Dad went to Pant School as a young child. A story he told us which illustrates those times was that on one occasion as a five year old he didn't go to school one morning as he was feeling ill. By dinner time he felt better so his father walked with him to his classroom. Dad said he felt mortified when the teacher mocked him in front of the class after his father left. She said 'Oh look at little Charlie Crandon, having to be brought to school by his Daddy!' with the other kids all laughing at him. It's incredible to think now that a five-year-old child was thought to be acting like a baby if they were brought to school by an adult. After that, Dad said he never let his parents accompany him again.

My father went to the Castle Grammar school after passing the 11-plus exam but even here the teachers could be rather cruel. The boys

who went there from Pant were often referred to as 'Pant Pit Ponies' and looked down upon. The Pant boys seem to have looked out for each other though. Dad told us a tale about helping his friend John Francis with his Maths homework in return for help with Welsh homework. Dad and his friend got caught out however as John came from a Welsh-speaking family and Dad's homework was just too good to be true. His homework was written in fluent Welsh, using grammar that had not even been covered on the syllabus!

Dad went to the Castle Grammar school which was actually in the mansion that had been built by the Crawshay family, the ironmasters, in Cyfarthfa Park in 1824. This opulent mock-castle was a grammar school from 1913 to 1963 and also became a public museum and art gallery from 1910. (Courtesy: John Wilson via geographic.org.uk)

As well as Dad's school stories, we used to hear about the idyllic life he led as a boy cycling far and wide around his native village. There were many cycle rides to Barry Island with his friend Ceinwen James and others. One in particular stands out where coming home in the dark they

Dad, centre, with his pals.

had no lights on their bikes. (One of the gang actually worked in Halfords so he had no excuse!) Anyway, Dad knew they would have to get off their bikes in Troedyrhiw Square, as there would be lots of police around at that time in the evening. Sure enough, when they arrived there, they saw two policemen boarding a bus. Once the bus had pulled off they thought they were alright so continued cycling. Little did they realise that one of the policemen had spotted them and got off at the next bus stop to catch them in the act and book them. He was especially angry with them as he'd got off the last bus and so now had to walk back the four miles to Merthyr with them! The local newspaper decided to cover the story and ran with the headline 'Night Riders in the Sky', which was a play on the title of the Jonny Cash song 'Ghost Riders in the Sky'. So Dad and his friends were suddenly infamous and fined ten shillings each for their misdemeanor. (And of course this was the second time that his

name appeared in print, following the speeding doctor incident at his birth.)

As mentioned in the account of Albert's life, he and his brother Syd got jobs quarrying limestone and sandstone and our father Charlie worked with them. I also mentioned that Charlie had no choice in the matter as one weekend, after he'd just turned 14, he was shocked to be told by his father that he wouldn't be going back to school. Despite this, Dad found working at the quarry an exciting experience as a young lad. He would help lay the wires to the dynamite then they'd all run to a safe place before the explosion.

Then at the age of 15, Charlie also joined his father down a coal mine but he'd soon had enough of it after only six months. The South Wales coalfield is the largest coalfield in Britain, covering about a thousand square miles. Welsh coal fuelled the Industrial Revolution not just in Britain but around the world. It was used for smelting metals and needed for steam-powered technology. At its peak in 1913, the South Wales coalfield was the most productive in Britain and employed nearly a quarter of a million men. So it was no wonder that quite a few of our family worked down the pit. Conditions didn't improve until coal

production was nationalised in 1947. A couple of improvements brought in by the Labour Government, that my father mentioned, were a shorter working day, allowing men more time to get to work, and the colliery having to provide shower facilities. Prior to this miners often weren't allowed on buses in Merthyr because they were so dirty. While my father may have benefited from these changes, it was still a very hard job. Dad said that once underground they still had a four-mile walk to reach the coal face. When eating down the mine they had to keep the lid on their 'snap tin' as there were cockroaches that might land on their food in the dark. He talked about the pit ponies and horses too. If the lights in the mine failed it would be pitch black and you couldn't even see your hand in front of your face. The horses were scared of the dark and would refuse to move. He said that one day, during a power failure he actually bumped into the back end of a pony that refused to budge. Ponies and horses were stabled underground for long periods and Dad recalls seeing how happy they were when they were taken above ground for their 'holiday'. They'd all gallop round the field like mad, enjoying their freedom. So it wasn't just the men who suffered down the pit although the animals were usually very well cared for by the miners.

When Dad left the mines he got a job with Rediffusion, a company that distributed radio and TV signals through aerials. Many people rented radios back then and you needed an aerial to get a signal. (This was before the mass ownership of television.) So Charlie was up ladders, taking his life in his hands, fitting aerials on rooftops. One tale at this time was that Dad was given the horrible job of removing a woman's aerial because she hadn't paid for it. She claimed she had paid and while Dad was climbing the ladder with no protective gear, she was hanging onto it and threatening to take it away while he was up on the roof. The things teenagers were expected to do back then!

During this time, his father, ever the entrepreneur, bought three houses on The Bont in Penydarren. They were in a bad state and Dad helped his father lay concrete floors in each of them before they were sold on. So Dad's building skills were also developing from an early age. (Dad went on to build two large garages-cum-workshops, one at our house in Edward St and one in Bristol as well as carrying out other building projects.)

In 1949, at Albert's insistence, Dad had to leave his job with Rediffusion to join his family on a farm 'up the country' as he described

it. It was a mountain farm near a little place called Erwood in mid Wales and Dad, his mother, brother and sister felt they had been taken to the back of beyond. To quote Dad, 'It was so remote my mother didn't stop crying until she left the place.' They rented for free a very small hill farm in return for looking after the sheep on the hillside in summer and bringing them down to the valley in winter. Albert also had two cows for milking and Chris, Dad's brother, had to live ten miles away on another farm, milking other cows. His sister Donna went to school by bus but had a long walk to the bus stop carrying a lamp to light the way. Luckily she usually had the company of a girl from the next farm.

Dad told us how he also had to work at another farm four miles away and had to walk home in the dark through a field full of bullocks. Dad was wandering around this field getting lost amongst the bulls, so his father had the brainwave of placing large white-washed stones to mark the path he should take. Any money Dad earned was given straight to his mother and he just had his dinner for free at the farm.

The first time he had to round up the cows for the night he used a sheep dog to get them through the gate of the field and then led them one by one into a position in the barn and tied each of them up with a

rope, as they didn't have stalls. Dad thought he'd done a good job but the next day when he turned up for work, the farmer was most annoyed with him. He said that the cows had been making a terrible racket all night long and he hadn't had any sleep. Apparently Dad should have let the cows into the barn themselves and let them decide where they would spend the night as there is a definite pecking order amongst cows. They know who is the 'boss cow' and the next one down and so on. The senior cow goes on the right hand side and then the others take their rightful place. Because they'd entered in any old order, they were all fighting each other through the night and keeping the farmer awake. So Dad learnt some surprising things about cows and then later on he and Chris had to learn how to lead pigs from one place to another… but that's another story!

However, Dad finally couldn't stand it any longer on the farm and came back to Pant with Chris to live in their Uncle Syd's house in Gwladys Street, sleeping in the attic. It was now, at the age of 16 and a half that he started his apprenticeship at the John Lewis garage[19] in

[19] The John Lewis garage was not connected with the large department store of that name.

Merthyr, as a mechanic. Dad remembered well his boss there called Bill Reece who was strict but fair. Years later, Bill worked at ICI in Bristol with my father as his boss, so the tables were turned but Bill insisted that Dad treat him like everyone else, not as his old boss. (Later still, Bill was killed in the Aberfan Disaster. Dad thought that he had attempted to get into the school to rescue the children trapped inside by the coal tip but that the building collapsed on him too.)

In 1951 Grandpa and the rest of the family finally left the farm when he suffered a stroke from which he eventually fully recovered. They moved into 3 Pant-cad-Ifor, which Dad had organised the purchase of in his father's absence.

Dad had stories about his two driving tests around about this time. He borrowed his brother's Dalton 500 cc for his motorbike test. The examiner told Dad to drive up the steep hill near the Town Hall, but to stop half way up, do a hill-start and then keep driving around the block. He told Dad to be ready at any time to do an emergency stop when he stepped out into the road with his hand raised. Well, at this point, I will have to give you the two versions of this story that Dad has told me over the years. His most recent account was that he saw the examiner hiding

My father as a young man turning heads!

in a little recess, so knew exactly when he'd have to make his emergency stop, and it all went off without a hitch. However, years ago, Dad used to give a very different and far more dramatic ending to the story. He described how he was driving round for ages, waiting for the examiner to jump out. There was no sign of the man and eventually Dad gave up and went back to the driving centre. It was there that he discovered that the driving examiner had jumped out in front of the wrong motor-bike and ended up in hospital! Whether this had happened to someone else on their test and Dad mixed up the two accounts, I will never know, but it made for a good story.

His second driving test took place, not in a car as you'd expect, but an ice-cream van. Dad was aged 17 and working for a chap called Gary

Llewellyn who had an ice-cream business. Dad worked in the van selling ice cream on weekends and his boss allowed him to learn to drive it. He even let Dad take the van for his driving test even though it had terrible brakes! On the test with the examiner, Dad was driving down a steep hill in Penydarren when a bus stopped just in front of him and another bus was coming up the hill. Dad said he put his foot on the brake and nothing happened. He thought quickly and realised his only course of action was to reverse back up the hill until the oncoming bus had passed and he could go around the stationary bus. Dad had to explain to the examiner (who wouldn't have had dual-controls) that the brakes were bad and the examiner of course told him that in that case he shouldn't have brought it on the test. Dad's only defence was that he didn't own the van, which sounds a pretty poor excuse, but amazingly, the examiner passed Dad despite having an unfit vehicle, due to Dad's early attempt to apply the brake and then his quick thinking in reversing up the hill. How times and driving tests have changed!

Dad was even lucky back at the test centre. He had been very nervous about the part where you have to read a car's number plate in the distance as his sight was so bad (even though he wore glasses). So he

thought he'd be clever before the test and memorise the number plate of a baker's van which was usually parked in the area for long periods of time - there wasn't much else on the roads back then. Unfortunately, just as the examiner was about to ask Dad to read the van's number plate, the baker came out, opened the back doors and stood right in front of the plate, so the examiner looked around for another vehicle. Luckily for Dad there was only one other parked car to choose from and, as it was much closer to them, Dad could read it.

Dad seemed to have a few close shaves around this time. While he was working at the garage he was asked to test drive a three-wheeled disability car. Coming down a hill, Dad somehow lost control of the vehicle and it toppled over with Dad spilling out onto the road. He wasn't hurt but he said he was most embarrassed when a group of concerned people came rushing over to help him. They obviously thought he was disabled!

Another story from this time illustrates Dad's proud and very determined resolve which he displayed throughout his life. The story is of a stranger coming to his house, saying that he'd heard Dad was a good mechanic and could he come and look at his car in Penydarren as he had

been having trouble with it for months and no one could put it right. It was on a Sunday, Dad's day off, but he kitted himself out in his overalls, and travelled by his bike and side-car with all his tools to inspect the car. The car was making a banging noise every time it was started up. From Dad's experience, he knew straightaway what the problem was. He took out the distributor, turned it 180 degrees, and put it back in. The car then started perfectly. The man was very pleased until Dad told him the cost for the job. When he heard what it was, the man protested that the job had only taken a matter of minutes so why should he pay so much? Dad told him that he was simply taking into account the time it took him to travel to Penydarren and back, especially as it was on a Sunday, and having to sort out tools, overalls etc. The man still quibbled about it so Dad said to just forget it, I don't want any of your money but never come to me again for help and don't send any of your friends either. The man protested but Dad was adamant as he felt insulted that his time and expertise counted for nothing with this man.

A similar story involved a very good friend of Dad's who he'd known all his life and had been on many of those cycling trips Dad enjoyed in his youth. Unfortunately though, Dad felt that this particular friend

eventually let him down. Dad was in the RAF after the war, having to do compulsory National Service, which he always said was a real waste of time. He was regularly coming home to visit us by motorbike which obviously wasn't great in bad weather, so he wanted to buy a car. His friend had apparently got out of National Service because he was pigeon-chested and had flat feet and instead, had been able to open a garage in Troedyrhiw. Dad went to see his friend one day and agreed to buy an Austin 30 that he was selling at the garage. They agreed a price of £50. Well, the following weekend Dad travelled home again and went along with his father Albert and the £50 to purchase the car, only to discover that his friend had sold it during the week to someone who'd made a slightly better offer. Dad was furious. He said he felt like thumping him, only his father was there. Dad told his friend that he thought his word was his bond, especially due to their long-term friendship. His friend weakly protested that he had a business to run but Dad told him that he never wanted to see him or speak to him again, and as far as I know, he never did. Interestingly, Dad's father Albert never said a word during this altercation; he kept right out of the disagreement

between the two friends. He wisely thought it was best to let his son sort out his own problems.

Gareth and me outside our caravan in Porthcawl in August 1962. You can just see Susan as a toddler over to the left and baby Linda would be in the pram.

When I was little, Dad used to take us to Porthcawl or Barry Island for a whole two weeks in a caravan when the ICI had a 'shut down'. One exciting episode involved my Dad dashing from our caravan early one morning when he noticed someone in difficulty far out in the water and people calling for help. He ran across the sand, swam out and rescued the

young girl and brought her onto the beach where she recovered. Her parents were very grateful to Dad. By this time though the beach was filling up with holiday-makers and Dad said he was most embarrassed walking all the way back to the caravan, as he'd run out in just his skimpy underpants in his haste to save the girl!

Another holiday memory of my poor Dad was when we were at Butlin's at Pwllheli, North Wales. I'd offered him a bit of my nougat bar but when I felt he was taking too long trying to bite into it I yanked it out of his mouth and his front tooth came with it! He often used to remind me of this over the years. More about Dad later…

7. UNCLE CHRIS

Uncle Chris, my favourite uncle, was quite fair-haired compared to the rest of his family and much taller, especially for a Welsh man, and well-built. He was a big man in every sense of the word. He certainly enjoyed his food and drink and was a great talker. I remember him as being usually scruffily dressed around the house and garden, wearing old baggy trousers, sometimes even held up with string. He could be quite a sharp dresser though if he was 'going out'.

Chris with me and my two sisters, Sue and Linda.

He was loud and funny and in later years we used to compare Grandpa and him to Steptoe and Son as they were always sniping at each

other, much to our amusement. He always had time for us children and was very welcoming whenever we visited in later years.

I mentioned at the start of this account that Chris had seen me as a baby held by a nurse looking through the ward window. It was in fact *his* ward window as he was in hospital at the same time that I was born. When my mother left St Tydfil's hospital she must have taken me to the Merthyr General for my uncle to see me. He was there because of an industrial accident which was to affect him for the rest of his life.

Chris had worked at the Dowlais Guest Keen Ifor Works, which was part of the iron and steel industry, spread over a large part of Dowlais and later on, all over the world. It was founded in Dowlais in 1759 and has survived for over 250 years, although it no longer exists in Merthyr. This company originated at the start of the Industrial Revolution and Dowlais was at the forefront of the iron and steel industry involved in many of its major achievements from railways to bridges. Today it's better known as GKN and the story of this company is linked with many of the great Victorian engineers, especially Brunel, and the transformation of 19th century life. Its workers however often paid a very

heavy price for the part they played in the creation of Britain's industrial prowess and wealth.

Dowlais Ironworks 1840 by George Childs. (Painting owned by Amgueddfa Cymru/National Museum of Wales)

Here is the small item from the Merthyr Express giving details of the accident Chris was involved in. I still have the cutting from the newspaper. The other man involved in it was killed:

town," said Mr. Jones.

MAN KILLED WHEN CHAIN SNAPPED

One man died within a few minutes and another was admitted to hospital after the chain of a crane snapped and a moulding box weighing 30 cwt fell on them at the Ivor Works, Dowlais, on Tuesday.

William Thomas Davies, aged 32, a moulder, of Market-street, Dowlais, was manoeuvring the box with Christopher Crandon, aged 27, of Pant-Cad-Ivor Cottages, Dowlais, when it fell, pinning them both to the ground. Workmates dragged them clear but Davies died before he could be admitted to Merthyr General Hospital, where the condition of Crandon is stated to be fair.

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So at the age of 27, Chris spent at least six months in the Merthyr General Hospital to recover. It must have been very hard for a young man in his prime to contemplate the kind of future he'd be facing but even here, he didn't lose his sense of fun. He said he had many run-ins with the matron on the ward as he'd always be either teasing her or trying to escape. On a few occasions he even left the hospital in his wheelchair and took himself off to the cinema for the afternoon!

The accident changed everything for him though as he told me in later years that he had been saving and hoping to emigrate to Australia before it had happened. He had wanted to work on a sheep farm as the Australian government at the time was offering cheap sailing passages to workers. All his plans were now scuppered and he never worked again. He received compensation for the accident and sick pay. He always walked with a slight limp afterwards, stammered a little now and then and his health was compromised. It didn't help that he smoked a lot for years but he finally gave it up when an old lady stopped to help him as he struggled to catch his breath when walking up a hill.

Accidents and death from poor working conditions were very common then and touched quite a number of our own family. Chris' cousin Ken (the son of Syd and Olwen Crandon and Shirley's brother) died tragically in 1961 aged only 29. I remember my father being extremely upset as he had been very close to him. They were the same age and like brothers. Ken had contracted Weil's disease which comes from rats. The story goes that he was working on a building site which was full of puddles. Ken had wellingtons on but they must have leaked and the puddles were foul water from rats' urine. He came down with a

terrible fever and didn't last very long afterwards as the disease leads to organ failure and death. These days apparently death is quite rare from this but back then it was a killer.

Apart from gardening and cooking, Uncle Chris loved his home-brewing. There was always something on-tap when you went around. I particularly remember a bottle of rice wine he gave us once. That was a special treat as he fished it out from under his bed, covered in dust. It had been there for years and when we tasted it, it was like drinking a liqueur or nectar as it was so rich. He usually drank something weaker himself, like ginger beer, which he'd make himself. Another favourite of his was Lambrusco which was very popular during the 1970s and he'd often ask us if we'd like a drop of 'Lambruscy', as he pronounced it.

I always thought that sheep were very timid creatures but Chris used to regale us with stories of gangs of marauding sheep descending from the mountains into Merthyr, terrorising the inhabitants and knocking over dustbins. It seems that even the sheep are larger than life in Wales. Chris had a penchant for embellishment in his stories. Snow wasn't real snow unless it was Welsh snow and came up to the bedroom windows

and we didn't know what real rain was in Bristol. Bristol is hardly a dry city but I have to agree with him about Welsh rain!

His life-long friend was Tom or 'Uncle Tommy' to me. He was a lovely, softly-spoken man, with a gentle sense of humour and the perfect foil to Chris' brashness. As two bachelors with no ties, they often went off on holidays together, travelling to Spain and other far-off places we could only dream of. I kept for years the postcards Chris sent of flamenco dancers with dresses actually sewn in thread onto the card and the other souvenirs he brought us, like castanets. And I will never forget the lederhosen, Tyrolean hats and the cow bells he brought Gareth and me from an Austrian holiday. We looked quite a sight prancing round in those.

They always had tales to tell from their travels. One place closer to home was North Wales. They recounted the time they walked into a North Wales pub and all the locals were speaking in Welsh of course. Now Chris couldn't speak Welsh (as the English had forbidden it being spoken in South Wales schools, even beaten for it)[20] but Chris could

[20] The 'Welsh Not' was a piece of wood with the letters WN hung around a child's neck if they spoke Welsh during the school day. It was used as a punishment and humiliation to dissuade Welsh children from speaking in their mother tongue.

sometimes follow what was being said. So when Chris heard the locals talking about 'bloody tourists' referring to Tommy and himself, he joined in their conversation. They soon reverted to English after that and made them feel more welcome!

I always found it rather comical that the North Welsh would pepper their talk with English swear words like 'bloody'. Surely, they must have had their own profanities! The only true Welsh speaker in the family was Uncle Rhydian who married Donna, as his family had Welsh as their first language.

Even though we didn't speak Welsh, we all knew a few words and phrases and had our own very Welsh way of expressing ourselves. Something was never just 'there' but 'by there' or 'b'there', as we'd say it, as in 'Look over b'there!' Some words were pronounced differently, as for 'comb', we'd say coom (rhymes with room), so 'Go coom your hair!' and 'here' was pronounced 'yer' as in 'Yer it is' (in fact, *here, hear, ear* and *year* are all pronounced as 'yer'!) Lots of Welsh expressions were also in everyday use, like 'cwtch up' (pronounce cutch, rhymes with butch) meaning cuddle up or move closer. Your *butty* was your friend, *cariad* was used as a term of endearment or 'love' and *dwt* (which rhymes with 'put')

was something small, like a child was 'a little dwt'. *Bara a chaws* (pronounced barracowss)[21] we'd say for 'bread and cheese'. A favourite of mine was *ych a fi* (pronounced uckavee, with the 'ck' being a guttural sound at the back of the throat) and meaning 'yuck' or disgusting. *Diolch yn fawr* (pronounced diock-en-vowr) meant thank you and *Nos da* was our 'good night', so one could slip quite easily from English into the Welsh vernacular.

One of Uncle Chris' (English) sayings was 'that kind of stunt' meaning 'that kind of thing' but it always made us laugh as it sounded like a circus trick. He often teased us about our Bristolian 'twang' when we moved away but in Bristol it was our Welsh accent that was always remarked upon.

Back now to Chris and Tom who loved playing tricks. Chris was the first person I knew to buy a new-fangled tape recorder – a large piece of equipment with two spools of tape. He'd place the recorder on the kitchen table, covered by a cloth and when friends and family came round, he'd secretly record their conversations. For all of us, this would

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21 Apologies to Welsh speakers as this is written for the non-Welsh and my pronunciation of these words is probably very bad!

have been the first time that we'd heard our own voices played back to us and you can imagine the embarrassment and laughter it produced.

We were all very upset when Tommy died, but especially Chris, of course, as they'd been so close over the years. We were all taken by surprise though when Chris started courting Tommy's sister. He'd known her all her life and she was now a widow. However, she had a very different personality to Tommy. Whereas he was a small dapper chap and very attentive to others and self-effacing, Gertie had a big character similar to Chris and could be quite loud and brash. She could at times be very opinionated and some of the family didn't take too kindly to her. However, Chris was besotted and thought the world of her. As far as I know, she was the only girlfriend he ever had and at least in his final years he enjoyed her company and their holidays together. In fact Chris had a heart-attack and died on a coach journey with Gertie, so he was with her to the end – the love of his life.

One final memory of Uncle Chris was that on the day of the dreadful Aberfan Disaster, October 21st 1966, he and Uncle Rhydian joined the army of volunteers who travelled to Aberfan to help with the digging. That was such a terrible and senseless tragedy which affected

everyone deeply. We were living in Bristol at the time and I remember how horrified we were to see it on the news. The whole country was in shock and the next day we prayed in school for the victims. It was so terrible that Chris and Rhydian couldn't speak about it afterwards. This tragedy was one of the worst mining disasters in Britain, killing 144 people, 116 of whom were children who had arrived at Pantglas School for just half a day before the half-term break. They stood no chance when the avalanche of coal waste which was piled on the hill behind the school became saturated by rain and liquefied into a thick slurry which hurtled down on the building at 9:13 a.m. The Welsh valleys have suffered many tragedies through ill-treatment and incompetence by industry and management over the years, but this is definitely the saddest and most poignant.

Uncle Chris' grave in Pant cemetery.

8. AUNTIE DONNA

I've mentioned Donna quite a lot as she played a big part in my childhood. She was funny and chatty (or 'chopsy' as Donna herself would say) and the perfect auntie to have a good time with. She often looked after me, taking me for walks in my pushchair with her little Jack Russell terrier, Ricky. When I was older I loved to watch her getting ready to go out on a date or with her friends, doing her hair and make-up and carefully rolling up her nylon stockings to reach her suspender belt before tights were invented. She always had lots of stories and gossip to tell me and as she often went to the cinema, she would tell me almost word for word the stories from the films. I was amused and shocked when she told me

Donna with her father and two brothers in 1966.

that when Eliza Doolittle from My Fair Lady was taken to the races, she was yelling at her horse to 'move your arse!'

I remember one day she took Gareth and me up the road to the ruins of Morlais Castle, a favourite walk, and we started roly-polying down the hillside. Well, Donna being a sport, joined in with us, but was most embarrassed when a man out walking suddenly appeared to see Donna hurriedly pulling down her tight skirt which had ridden right up! It was also on that day that I was startled to see a vivid, electric- blue flower in the grass. I thought it was very beautiful and Donna told me it was a cornflower. Whenever I see these flowers now, I'm reminded of that day.

The remains of Morlais Castle, built around 1265 near Pant. (Courtesy: tripadvisor.co.uk)

At some point during her early years, Donna had contracted tuberculosis and spent a long time convalescing in the Mardy Hospital in Merthyr. TB could be fatal back then. It usually affected the lungs but could also damage many other areas of the body. It's spread through water droplets from an infected person but Donna seemed to blame it on the damp conditions in her bedroom. This may have been the reason why her mother, Esther, went out one day when Albert was at work and bought a new house! This was number 18 Pantyscallog and she moved in the same day. It was said that when Albert was informed on his return from work, he just sat at the table and ate his dinner without saying a word. What he thought about it, we shall never know.

In her late teens and early twenties Donna was employed at the Kayser Bondor nylon stocking factory and then worked at the Hoover Company which had a large washing machine factory in Pentrebach, a few miles south of the town which opened in 1948. (Hoover was one the largest employers in South Wales with nearly 5,000 working there in

Women working at Kayser Bondor. (Courtesy: alangeorge.co.uk)

the 1970s but manufacturing ceased in 2009.)

In later years Donna worked for a care agency and used to laugh that some of the old people were very demanding. Donna had to work to a tight schedule but one old lady complained that she hadn't dusted on top of her wardrobe! Her final role was that of carer for her father, Albert as mentioned in Albert's story, and he could be pretty demanding too.

Going back to her early days, Auntie Donna was unlucky in love for a while. It's ridiculous now to look back at her worrying that she was going to be 'left on the shelf' because she wasn't married by her early twenties but that's how people thought then. I remember one boyfriend called Mostyn who was a good-looking teddy-boy type and Donna was very keen on him. She packed up a picnic for them one day and they both set off with a basket and picnic blanket and little me in tow! I think maybe she wanted me as a kind of chaperone as he looked a bit of a roué. He was probably annoyed that I came on their date but he turned on the charm and tried to be friends. I remember that I refused to hold his hand and told Donna afterwards that I didn't like him. Mostyn ditched her not long afterwards and it turned out he was seeing someone else as well

(who obviously didn't take young nieces on their dates). He told Donna she was 'too good for him.' I knew she was!

Donna needn't have worried though as she was married by the age of 24 to Rhydian from Caeharris, Dowlais Top, who loved her dearly. This was on October 24th 1964 and I was a bridesmaid with Rhydian's sister Gwen and my sister Susan was a flower-girl. In due course, their son Lyn came along. They lived in Caeharris for a few years then came back to Pant-cad-Ifor, living first of all in the house next to the stone mason (the old sweet shop) then finally settling back into 3 Pant-cad-Ifor after Chris died. This was all after we'd moved to Bristol so we didn't see so much of Auntie Donna then although we did make the journey back to Wales every six weeks to visit the relatives and have a blow-out meal in every home. However, Donna and I used to write long letters to each other and even produce little comics for each other with jokes, puzzles and quizzes. In fact, Donna and I corresponded through

Donna and Rhydian.

letters and cards all her life and I've kept most of them. One thing I'll never forget is when I was a student at Hull University she sent me a little parcel. When I opened it I found it contained a box of tea bags. I thought it was rather strange but I put it in the cupboard and forgot all about it. Well, that box remained there for weeks until one day when we'd run out of tea I opened the box, only to discover it was full of Auntie Donna's Welsh cakes, not teabags! They still tasted delicious after all that time and my housemate and I soon polished them off. I phoned Donna then to say how sorry I was that I hadn't opened her present when it arrived but she saw the funny side of it. And after all this time, we still make Welsh cakes here in Sheffield using Auntie Donna's 'secret ingredient' which she imparted to us, swearing us to silence on the matter. We also still make them on the heavy iron bake-stone that Rhydian made for us and sneaked out when he worked at the foundry. They were both

Godparents to our eldest child Sarah and Donna made a little impromptu speech at Sarah's wedding.

When Uncle Chris died I wanted something to remind me of him. I asked Donna if they still had the old nutcracker that Chris had made when he worked at the foundry. It's in the form of a heavily-built dog. You raise its tail and its jaws open wide for the nut then you lower the tail to crack the shell. Donna searched high and low and found it hidden away in the garage. I asked if she'd just put it aside for me but amazingly she sent it by post. I had forgotten just how much it weighed. It's a solid two pound lump of iron and must have cost a fortune to send but that was typical of Donna -generous to a fault.

As she got older, Donna had heart problems and had to have stents inserted and like Uncle Chris, she eventually died from a heart-attack. The church and crematorium and then afterwards the Pant-cad-Ifor pub for the wake were all packed with people to celebrate her life as she was a very popular and a well-known figure in Pant with all she'd been involved in over the years. She'd helped with the cubs and scouts, camping expeditions, pantomimes and concerts, and Rhydian and she had even organised coach parties and holidays over many years for the locals. Her

last role at Pant Church was as church warden and the last time she came to see us in Bristol she slipped it into the conversation so often that I started making fun of her. She saw the joke and joined in by saying every now and then, 'Did I mention that I'm church warden?' Good old Auntie Donna. Gone but never forgotten.

Donna and Rhydian outside their home at 3 Pant-cad-Ifor.

Uncle Rhydian has also died recently, aged nearly 87 in October 2020, after suffering from dementia for many years. It was lovely that we managed to see him in the summer of 2019 when a large family group of us went to scatter my Dad's ashes at a place near where he was born and brought up. Rhydian was as friendly and welcoming as ever. Unfortunately we couldn't attend his funeral because of the Covid 19 pandemic and the restrictions placed on travel. However, we watched it via video and enjoyed the eulogy which reminded us of Rhydian's happy marriage and community spirit.

PART TWO THE GREENWOODS OF PENYWERN

9. FAMILY FORTUNES

Helen, my mother was born in 1930 in Penywern, Dowlais, and was the fifth of six children. My mother's parents were Sarah Jane Collins (known as Jane) and Charles William Greenwood (known as Billy). It seems that many generations of Greenwood males were called Charles William. My cousin Raymond who is passionate about family history has actually traced the Collins side of the family back to the 1500s but I shall just concentrate on the last few generations of Collins and Greenwoods.

My Mother, Helen Greenwood.

My grandmother Sarah Jane was born in Dowlais but the

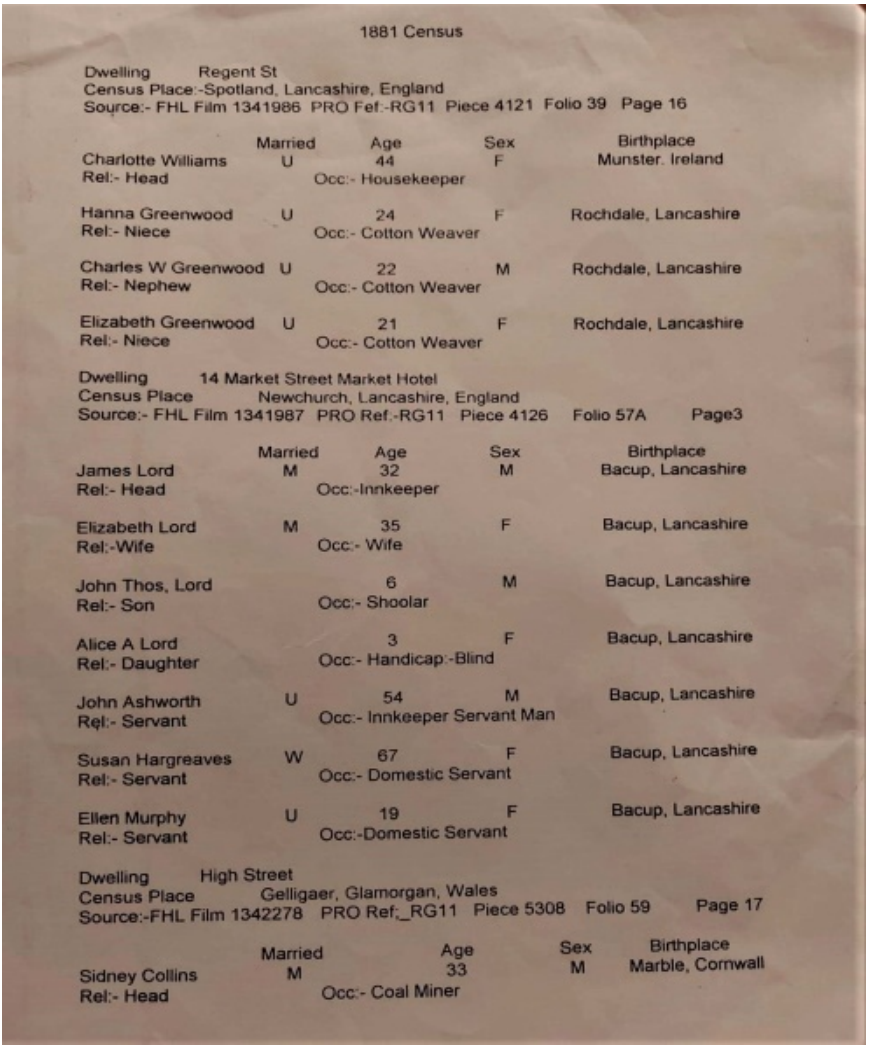
Greenwood family originally hailed from Rochdale (where there are a number of family graves) and they later lived in Bacup in Lancashire.

The Greenwoods in Bacup still own a large family bible but unfortunately it has no record of names and dates. There is a mysterious photograph in it, however, of a group of people in a wood but two figures have been scratched out. It remains a mystery why they were erased. Could they be our ancestors?

What we do know is that my great grandmother Ellen Murphy (our grandfather's mother) met her husband, yet another Charles William Greenwood, in the Market Hotel in Bacup where she worked as a servant. Ellen was originally from County Cork in southern Ireland.

The Greenwoods were prosperous mill owners. (Duncan Greenwood, another second cousin of mine and born in 1951, still owns the mill in Bacup to this day, although they only dye cotton now.) Back then they sounded quite a hard-hearted family because when Ellen's husband died, the Greenwood family apparently disowned her for some reason and paid her to leave and that is how she came to live in Merthyr with her children. Only one of her sons, James, remained with his grandparents and was brought up by them. So our grandfather was uprooted from

Lancashire to live in Merthyr and in later years met Sarah Jane Collins from Dowlais.



1881 Census

Dwelling Regent St
Census Place:-Spotland, Lancashire, England
Source:- FHL Film 1341986 PRO Fef:-RG11 Piece 4121 Folio 39 Page 16

	Married	Age	Sex	Birthplace
Charlotte Williams	U	44	F	Munster. Ireland
Rel:- Head		Occ:- Housekeeper		
Hanna Greenwood	U	24	F	Rochdale, Lancashire
Rel:- Niece		Occ:- Cotton Weaver		
Charles W Greenwood	U	22	M	Rochdale, Lancashire
Rel:- Nephew		Occ:- Cotton Weaver		
Elizabeth Greenwood	U	21	F	Rochdale, Lancashire
Rel:- Niece		Occ:- Cotton Weaver		

Dwelling 14 Market Street Market Hotel
Census Place Newchurch, Lancashire, England
Source:- FHL Film 1341987 PRO Ref:-RG11 Piece 4126 Folio 57A Page3

	Married	Age	Sex	Birthplace
James Lord	M	32	M	Bacup, Lancashire
Rel:- Head		Occ:-Innkeeper		
Elizabeth Lord	M	35	F	Bacup, Lancashire
Rel:-Wife		Occ:- Wife		
John Thos, Lord		6	M	Bacup, Lancashire
Rel:- Son		Occ:- Shoolar		
Alice A Lord		3	F	Bacup, Lancashire
Rel:- Daughter		Occ:- Handicap:-Blind		
John Ashworth	U	54	M	Bacup, Lancashire
Rel:- Servant		Occ:- Innkeeper Servant Man		
Susan Hargreaves	W	67	F	Bacup, Lancashire
Rel:- Servant		Occ:- Domestic Servant		
Ellen Murphy	U	19	F	Bacup, Lancashire
Rel:- Servant		Occ:-Domestic Servant		

Dwelling High Street
Census Place Gelligaer, Glamorgan, Wales
Source:-FHL Film 1342278 PRO Ref:_RG11 Piece 5308 Folio 59 Page 17

	Married	Age	Sex	Birthplace
Sidney Collins	M	33	M	Marble, Cornwall
Rel:- Head		Occ:- Coal Miner		

1881 Census in Lancashire which mentions Charles W. Greenwood in his Rochdale household, described as a Cotton Weaver and Ellen Murphy dwelling in the Market Street Hotel in Bacup and described as a Domestic Servant.

Ellen Murphy (my great grandmother), and then Ellen in later life on the doorstep of her home in Harrison Street, Penywern.

The Greenwoods in Wales were also down on their luck in later years. Our grandfather started work with his brothers at Cyfarthfa steel works when he was about 14 years of age. He later had a job with the railway that was owned by Cyfarthfa Works as they transported steel all around the country. Grandpa then rented a nice house in Rhodf'a, Pant which possibly came with his work. It was here that he and Nanna had their first three children. However, during the economic Depression of the 1930s, he lost his job and the family ended up in a council house in Penywern, which was felt to be 'going down' in the world.

Typical row of terraced houses in Penywern in the early 1900s. Horse and carts were still in use in the 1960s. (Courtesy: alangeorge.co.uk)

Their council house at 7 Rees Street, Penywern is the place that I went to see them as a child. It's difficult for me to write about Grandpa Greenwood as I remember very little about him. He died in 1959 when I would only have been four or five years old and unfortunately I don't even remember his voice. Speaking to different members of the family there are rather conflicting views of the man. To some, he was a lovely sensitive person who was greatly loved and they were very upset when he died. Others saw him as a strict disciplinarian. Perhaps boys and girls were treated differently and that would colour their view. One cousin only remembers Nanna handing out the odd slap on the legs, never Grandpa, whereas a different cousin says that Grandpa threatened them with his belt on a few occasions. Another contrasting story from a family member is that Uncle Vincent was sometimes locked in the coalhouse for misbehaviour whereas a different person says that Grandpa always adored Vincent

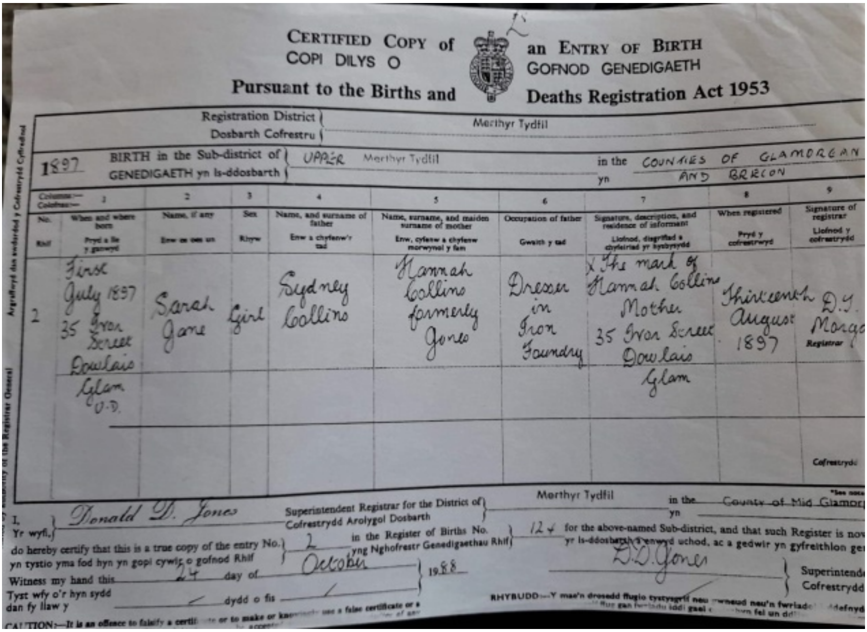
Penywern from the 'Black Coal Tip' above the Slip Road. Note the iron work chimney. (Courtesy: alangeorge.co.uk)

(who has special needs) and on Grandpa's death bed the one thing that concerned him more than anything else was that he was leaving Vincent behind. My mother also never spoke ill of her father and she did say that he walked miles and miles with Vincent to try to find him a job.

I was unaware of any of this as we saw a lot less of family in Penywern as they lived further away than our Pant relatives. I know that Grandpa did suffer a lot from ill-health and had to take to his bed quite often and he eventually died of liver failure, aged 73 years.

I do not know whether he ever felt cheated out of his Lancashire inheritance by his rich relatives. Most family members just believed that choices had been made in the past that resulted in our branch of the family being the 'poor relations'.

Nanna Penywern was always welcoming. She obviously had a hard life but she was a very determined lady. She had had six children over a



CERTIFIED COPY of an ENTRY OF BIRTH
COPI DILYS O GOFNOD GENEDIGAETH
Pursuant to the Births and Deaths Registration Act 1953

Registration District / Dosbarth Cofrestru: Merthyr Tydfil

1897 BIRTH in the Sub-district of / GENEDIGAETH yn Is-ddosbarth: Upper Merthyr Tydfil, in the / yn: Counties of Glamorgan and Brecon

No. / Rhif	When and where born / Pryd a lle y ganwyd	Name, if any / Enw os oes un	Sex / Rhyw	Name, and surname of father / Enw a chyfenw'r tad	Name, surname, and maiden surname of mother / Enw, cyfenw a chyfenw morwynol y fam	Occupation of father / Gwaith y tad	Signature, description, and residence of informant / Llofnod, disgrifiad a chyfeiriad yr hysbysydd	When registered / Pryd y cofrestrwyd	Signature of registrar / Llofnod y cofrestrydd
2	First July 1897 35 Ivor Street Dowlais Glam U.D.	Sarah Jane	Girl	Sydney Collins	Hannah Collins formerly Jones	Dresser in Iron Foundry	X The mark of Hannah Collins Mother 35 Ivor Street Dowlais Glam	Thirteenth August 1897	D.J. Morga[n] Registrar

I, Donald D. Jones, Superintendent Registrar for the District of Merthyr Tydfil in the County of Mid Glamorgan, do hereby certify that this is a true copy of the entry No. 2 in the Register of Births No. 124 for the above-named Sub-district, and that such Register is now legally in my custody.
Witness my hand this 24 day of October 1988
D.D. Jones Superintendent Registrar

My grandmother Sarah Jane's birth Certificate which shows she was born at 35 Ivor Street, Dowlais. Her mother was Hannah Collins, formerly Jones, and her father Sydney worked as a Dresser in an Iron Foundry.

16-year period: Mary, Gwladys, Charles William (known as Billy), Sydney, Helen and Vincent. Very sadly, Sydney died when he was aged five. Cousin Pam has told me the story of how Nanna never got over Sydney's premature death. He caught diphtheria and had an abscess which was blocking his airway. He needed a surgical procedure to lance the abscess and this was carried out in hospital by a very young and inexperienced doctor. The procedure went wrong as the doctor made an error that caused the child to ingest the fluid from the abscess, resulting in

Grandpa Penywern with his eldest daughter Mary and son Billy.

death. The hospital admitted the doctor's error and asked if my grandparents wished to make a complaint which would almost certainly have ended the doctor's career. Apparently Grandpa asked the doctor in charge if he felt that the young doctor would learn from this error. They were assured that he had the makings of an excellent and reflective practitioner and this apparently gave them some comfort and they withheld their complaint.

Uncle Vincent, the youngest, was unfortunately born with the umbilical cord wrapped round his neck which reduced the oxygen to his brain. Because of this he had learning difficulties and back then would have had the horrible label of 'spastic'. He is a lovely, good-natured man, who went to work at the Remploy Company for many years, making bags of all description and he got me my school satchel from there. However, it was Nanna who needed to care for him all her life and try

unsuccessfully to curb his desire to spend all his money on odd items. I remember well him rolling up his shirt sleeve and showing us his many different wrist watches right up to his elbow!

Uncle Vincent and me in 2012 in his new home.

There was also more tragedy to come for Nanna regarding her only other son Billy but more about that later.

Whenever we visited, Nanna would always get out the tinned meat, fruit and cream to make us sandwiches and dessert. (In Wales, it was compulsory to eat at every house you visited and on one trip, my

husband Denis and I were force-fed three large dinners!) Nanna's house was always clean and tidy and everyone always congregated in the kitchen where a permanent fixture was their gentle old cocker spaniel called Flossy. The house was a basic two up, two down terrace, the front room being the parlour and kept for best. I was fascinated by a very Victorian-looking painting hung on the wall of a boy in flamboyant clothing. I think it must have been The Blue Boy by Thomas Gainsborough. I also remember the book shelves. Nanna was very proud of her clever daughters and Mam told me that when she finished her teacher training she wasn't allowed to keep her course books. Nanna kept them in her bookcase in pride of place to boast of Helen's achievement. In fact, Nanna had decided what career each of her daughters were to pursue. Mary became a nurse, Gwladys, a secretary and Helen (who had wanted to be a secretary) was told she had to be a teacher.

When Nanna was very old and wheel-chair bound, she refused to let her daughters take her out for a walk as she was very proud and didn't want the neighbours to see her in that condition. She could be quite blunt as well. I remember on one visit she pointedly told my mother that

she had put on weight! I can picture her now in her kitchen in her final home, still indomitable and giving out orders to the end.

My mother was at her bedside for hours in the hospital when Nanna was dying but she missed Nanna's final moments as a nurse had told her to go and have a break in the canteen. Mam always regretted that.

Like most families there do seem to be a few skeletons in the cupboard. I have half-remembered rumours from when I was younger but I was probably told to go out and play when the adults discussed family quarrels. I know that we didn't see anything of Auntie Glenice after her husband Billy was tragically killed in Bristol in 1965. He was working on the building site in Frogmore Street for the new ice rink when the scaffolding he was on, which hadn't been bolted down properly, gave way and he died from massive lacerations to his head.

He was only aged 44 at the time. His son Raymond, who was 16, told me how dreadful it was for the family and that his mother Glenice was put on sedatives. Nanna Greenwood was also devastated. Cousin Pam has told me that Nanna worshipped her son Billy and collapsed when she heard the news. Auntie Gwladys and Uncle Billy looked after her in their home until the funeral. Unfortunately Nanna blamed Glenice for sending

Billy back to work soon after he had suffered a previous industrial injury. However, Glenice's daughter Evelyn says that her mother didn't want her husband to go to work that day and always wished he would work nearer home. Billy said he needed to go otherwise the men wouldn't be paid on time and often told her, 'when there's no money, love flies out the window'.

Foreman fell to death from beam

Charles William Greenwood, a foreman steel erector with 28 years' experience, fell to his death at the site of the new entertainments centre in Frogmore Street, Bristol, an inquest heard yesterday.

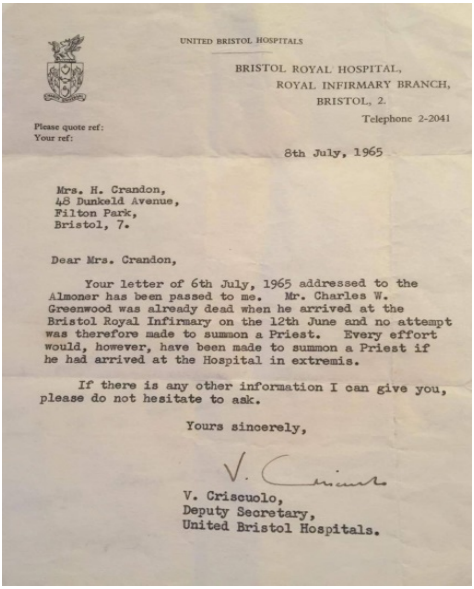
A verdict of accidental death was recorded on Mr. Greenwood (44), of Haydn Terrace, Merthyr Tydfil.

Mr. William Tierney, of 27, Hill Street, Bedminster, said he found it difficult to bolt his end of a beam. Mr. Greenwood said he would come over and help him.

As he was walking along a parallel beam to get over he either slipped or overbalanced, and fell 25 feet on to a concrete floor.

Bristol Evening Post account of Billy Greenwood's death.

There seems to have been a lot of misunderstanding and bad feeling amongst certain members of the family which came to a head with Billy's death. This resulted in angry words and a near-fight occurring after the funeral. It's probably best to draw a veil over the episode. I should think everyone was in such a state of shock and grief after Billy's sudden tragic death that tempers flared. Little was ever said about what happened and what had caused it. Unfortunately though, I never saw anything more of Glenice and my cousins Roy, Ray and Evelyn, as we had moved to Bristol by then but I am very happy to say that Raymond and Evelyn are once more in contact with me and my family.



UNITED BRISTOL HOSPITALS

BRISTOL ROYAL HOSPITAL,
ROYAL INFIRMARY BRANCH,
BRISTOL, 2.
Telephone 2-2041

Please quote ref:
Your ref:

8th July, 1965

Mrs. H. Crandon,
48 Dunkeld Avenue,
Filton Park,
Bristol, 7.

Dear Mrs. Crandon,

Your letter of 6th July, 1965 addressed to the Almoner has been passed to me. Mr. Charles W. Greenwood was already dead when he arrived at the Bristol Royal Infirmary on the 12th June and no attempt was therefore made to summon a Priest. Every effort would, however, have been made to summon a Priest if he had arrived at the Hospital in extremis.

If there is any other information I can give you, please do not hesitate to ask.

Yours sincerely,

V. Criscuolo,
Deputy Secretary,
United Bristol Hospitals.

Letter sent from the Bristol Royal Infirmary to my mother explaining why her brother Billy had been unable to receive the Last Rites from a priest. Mam probably wrote to them on Nanna's behalf.

The somewhat blunt letter my mother received from the hospital may offer some explanation why the day of the funeral was such a raw

experience. No one was with Billy when he died and perhaps Auntie Glenice, being in shock herself, was unable to supply much information to the rest of the family. After all these years, one can only guess.

Some people today scoff at health and safety regulations and claim they've 'gone mad.' But just exploring my own personal family history in the fairly recent past, it's remarkable how many of my relatives in manual occupations, died or suffered life-changing injuries while at work.

I do remember an earlier and happier time when a lot of the Greenwoods and my family all went to Porthcawl and stayed on the same caravan site. It was lovely playing with my older cousins. One story from a family holiday, told to me by Raymond, is that Grandpa Greenwood wanted to demonstrate to them how well-made the caravans were so he punched the caravan wall. Unfortunately, his fist went straight through it, somewhat undermining his point! Talking

Porthcawl 1959: Gareth and me with cousins Raymond, Royston, Evelyn and their dog.

about punches, my Dad, Grandpa and Uncle Enoch all went to see Howard Winstone, the boxer from Merthyr known as the Welsh Wizard, while we were on holiday in 1963. Winstone was in a match in Porthcawl where he defended his European Featherweight title and British title and beat Billy Calvert in 15 rounds, so it must have been an exciting event.[22]

I loved funfairs at the seaside and I remember poor Nanna Greenwood on one holiday being nagged by me for umpteen coins to win cheap trashy toys until all her money ran out. She was a good sport though and even went on the rides with me.

Going back to Gwladys, she was always a lovely auntie to us and I was the happy recipient of lots of immaculate clothes, a lovely big doll and a large tricycle passed down to me from her daughter Pam. Gwladys and Billy also took care of my sister Susan while my mother was expecting Linda and they were quite besotted with her and didn't want to give her back. Gwladys could be very funny at times with her rather dark sense of humour and she never suffered fools gladly.

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[22] In 1968 Winstone went on to win the world championship. However when he lost it in the same year he decided to retire at age 29.

Uncle Billy and Auntie Glenice

At the time of Linda's birth, Gareth and I went to stay with Auntie Mary, Uncle Enoch and our cousin Jane. They lived at 27 Harcourt Place in Rhymney. We had a good time there too as my auntie and uncle both were both very caring. Uncle Enoch had a stammer but that didn't stop him talking a lot and he was a local councillor. I'll never forget Enoch's impersonation years later of my parents' cocker spaniel called Baron who, when my parents were burgled in Bristol in the middle of the night, simply ran up and down the hallway wagging his tail. I know because I

was there when it happened. The burglars had left the hall light on and front door wide open and Baron was probably hoping they'd take him for a walk! Anyway, Enoch did a very camp impression of Baron saying 'Bowsie wowsie' and I was in stitches. When I repeated this to my parents however they were not amused!

Auntie Mary had had a successful career as a nurse, rising up the ranks, and even nursed in India for a short time during the 1940s. She sailed to India as an officer in the British Army nursing service. Her daughter Jane told me that Mary liked the people and the food but was very aware of the poverty. She remembered the old men chewing betel leaf and spitting it out on the road. Jane says that Mary loved the 1970's sitcom '*It ain't half hot Mum!*' as it reminded her of when she was there. Unfortunately though she contracted amoebic dysentery while in India and was given penicillin which caused a terrible reaction. She was so ill that she thought she was going to die and had to return home. She had a kidney removed and was very ill for a long time afterwards. She and Enoch adopted Jane when she was a baby and they were loving parents. I always found it hard to believe that Jane was adopted because to me she looked so much like Auntie Mary.

Left: Auntie Mary, Uncle Enoch and cousin Jane.
Right: Auntie Mary wearing a sari in India. (Photos shared by Mary's daughter Jane Venton, nee Rist)

When Nanna Penywern died in 1981, Uncle Vincent was cared for by Auntie Mary until Uncle Enoch was ill and then he moved in with Gwladys' daughter Pam. My cousin Pam Eyles has very generously been responsible for Vincent's needs for the past fifteen years, providing for his accommodation and care.

Nanna Penywern outside the coalhouse with my mother, brother Gareth and my sisters Susan and Linda. (The outside lavatory was the door on the left)

Two of my cousins: Glenice's daughter Evelyn with Gwladys's daughter Pam.

It seems that there were quite a number of family scandals and dark secrets in the past. Cousin Raymond has done a lot of research into family history and discovered that Nanna's mother Hannah Jones had been sentenced at the age of 14 to a week's hard labour for stealing apples. And her father, Sydney Collins, who had been a fishmonger in Cornwall, and his brother Noah Collins had both served prison sentences for arson! It says in the 1881 Census that Sydney came from 'Marble' in Cornwall, but as there's no such place, it was probably Morval near Liskeard. We don't know why he left Cornwall (maybe because of his prison sentence?) but then he became a coalminer in Merthyr. (Raymond has also discovered that Collins was originally spelt Collings in Cornwall, so was the name changed deliberately?) His wife Hannah Jones was from Merthyr and apart from stealing apples, another story about her is that she used to look after sheep on the hillside from a very young age. She and Sydney went on to have six children and our grandmother, Sarah Jane, was the youngest. Unfortunately there don't seem to be any photos of the Collins family. Either none have survived or none were ever taken.

Religion loomed large in those days as is seen in the fact that Grandpa and Nanna Greenwood refused to go to their daughter Mary's wedding

to Enoch as they were getting married in a registry office. Grandpa was a Catholic and Nanna was a Catholic convert and they obviously thought that a registry office wedding was a kind of disgrace. Pam tells me that her mother Gwladys and father Billy had originally planned a Catholic Church wedding and her father was expected to attend classes as he was non-Catholic. When a comment was made by the priest that without a Catholic blessing any offspring would be considered illegitimate, Uncle Billy took offence and cancelled the church wedding. And so they too got married in a registry office. Nanna and Grandpa didn't attend that ceremony either but they did provide wedding teas for both couples.

My own father was Protestant whereas my mother was Catholic and because my father refused to convert, they were only allowed a very meagre wedding ceremony in the Catholic Church, with no music or flowers. The priest had also been very discourteous towards my father at all the compulsory religious sessions he had to attend before the wedding and it all seems very petty and mean looking at it now from a distance. Back then though, religious differences were a serious business. I may be painting rather a strict and forbidding picture of the Greenwoods but on the whole, they were a very friendly and hospitable lot. Most of them

were better educated than the Crandons but there seems to have been a lot of tragedy and illness along the way and times were very hard.

Pam has told me that Uncle Enoch and her father Billy always laughed when they recalled the comments made by my father's mother, Nanna Pant at my parents' wedding breakfast. My father had made a speech saying that the three men who married the Greenwood girls all thought they had got the 'best' one. Enoch thought Mary was the pick of the bunch, Billy thought he had the best one and now he, Charlie thought he had the best. At that point Nanna Pant jumped up and said 'Well he has!'

Grandpa Greenwood died in 1959 and Nanna Greenwood in 1981 and they are both buried together in Pant cemetery. In the same grave is their young child Sydney and also Grandpa's sister Nora. The story of her tragic death was well known in the family as a cautionary tale. Apparently she was an avid reader and one fateful day in London, she stepped off the pavement into the road whilst engrossed in a book. She was subsequently run over by a taxi. My mother would remind me of this as she used to comment that I always 'had my head in a book.'

Auntie Mary and Uncle Enoch's wedding with Auntie Gwladys next to Mary and Uncle Vincent on the far left. The other men were probably Enoch's brothers.

Left: Auntie Mary and cousin Jane at Porthcawl.
Right: Cousin Pam aged about eight with Uncle Vincent aged about 24. This photo was probably taken at Barry Island.

Auntie Gwladys and Uncle Billy's wedding with Auntie Mary on the right and Billy's brother-in-law (Huw) on the left.

10 MAM

My mother, Helen Greenwood, was born on 17th April 1930. Therefore, like Dad, she grew up during the war years. Times were just as hard when the war was over; rationing didn't end until the year of my birth in 1954.

She was always known as Mam to us but to her family in Wales, Helen was known as Nellie. In fact, she said that she didn't realise her name was Helen until a teacher told her she had to write her 'real name' on an exercise book and told her what it was. However, my father always called her by her proper name, Helen. She had trained as a Primary school teacher and was a great believer in education. She instilled in me the need to work hard in school. When it came to exam time, she always threw a shoe at me before I left the house as she said that if the shoe hit me, I'd have good luck. Fortunately I believed her and she never missed. Although a staunch Catholic, who brought us all up in the faith, she believed in a lot of almost pagan superstitions, like never walking under ladders, never allowing us to open umbrellas in the house and I was quite shocked in later years as I was not allowed to buy my boyfriend a pair of gloves because that apparently meant he might die!

I don't know a great deal about Mam's early childhood except that she passed the 11-plus and went to the County Grammar School in Merthyr. She was always very modest about her academic achievements and told us that girls had to study subjects like cookery and laundry as well as English and Maths. When she went to teacher training college,

her older sisters had to help out financially. One bought her books and the other bought her some clothes. For her first post she lodged and taught in Birmingham as back then, when there was a shortage of teachers, you were told where you had to take your first job. Dad used to visit her in Birmingham while they were courting. After they were married she didn't teach again for quite a while as married women weren't encouraged to work. I remember that she must have gone back teaching for a while when we moved to Edward Street though as Auntie Donna would come and collect me for Nanna Pant to look after me. Mam was more educated than Dad as she'd stayed on at school longer and had a profession. Dad was always a bit self-conscious about his writing skills. He wrote quite slowly and struggled with spelling although he was much better at Maths. I remember when Dad was going to register the birth of my youngest sister Linda, Mam wanted her middle name to be Margaret. It was obvious that Dad didn't like that name. He wanted the name Jean, as his sister was named Donna Jean. Mam was getting angry with him and his final excuse was that he couldn't spell Margaret, so she just shouted as he went out the door, 'Oh, do what you like!' so Linda Jean it was!

Mam and me on Whitsunday 1955 at some location high above the town.

On the subject of names, I've always disliked my middle name Veronica and I couldn't understand why my mother had chosen it. Imagine my disappointment when she told me that as she couldn't decide on a name herself, she'd asked the woman in the bed next to her in hospital what name she liked. So I was named by some random stranger and it held no significance at all for my parents. At least my first name, Elaine, comes from the French version of Helen, my mother's name. (My brother Gareth was given a good Welsh name and his middle name was Charles, after our Dad, and Susan, my other sister, has Helen for her middle name.)

I stayed at home with Mam until I started school at five years of age because there were no nurseries or playgroups then. I used to watch her or help with all the housework which was a far cry from how things are done today. Just as you only had a bath once a week, you were expected to wear the same clothes all week because, apart from the fact that people couldn't afford many clothes, washing was only done on a Monday. This seems to have been an unwritten rule as everyone did it rain or shine and you'd see sheets and underwear flapping in the wind everywhere. Mam had an electric washing machine which churned up the clothes in boiling hot water but items had to be removed from it by wooden prongs and transferred to the sink for rinsing. Everything was then taken out in the tin tub to an outhouse where we kept the mangle. I'd help Mam push the clothes through it as she turned the handle to wring them out and she was always warning me not to get my fingers caught between the rollers. If it

Mam in Edward Street with my sister Susan in 1960.

was too wet outside, the washing was hung from an overhead clothes airer in the kitchen, raised by a pulley. If we were lucky, the clothes would then be ready to iron on Tuesday. Cleaning floors was another major operation; there were no vacuum cleaners back then so everything was done by brush and mop. There were no fitted carpets either, so individual carpets every now and again were taken out and hung on the washing line to be beaten with a broom. That's why women always seemed to be wearing pinafores and had their hair tied up in scarves like turbans. And they did routinely scrub the front step like Hilda Ogden in Coronation Street! Many rooms would just have oil cloth on the floor (before linoleum was manufactured), which was always very cold on the feet, got very dusty and had to be brushed and mopped. Cooking would also take up a large chunk of the day but Mam loved her pressure cooker and we had lots of tasty stews with meat, veg and lentils. My job would be to peel the potatoes and scrape the carrots. She also made lots of puddings, tarts and cakes for us.

The place used to get quite messy with all our toys and clothes lying about or drying on the fireguard but Mam was very house-proud, especially if we were expecting visitors. I remember someone turning up

unexpectedly on the doorstep once, and while Mam talked to them in the passage (the Welsh term for hall) I was well-trained enough to quickly stuff a load of newspapers under the cushions and hide other things out of sight. When Mam and the visitor entered the living-room I could see Mam's look of astonishment and relief as when she'd left the room it had looked like a tip! I'll also never forget that the last night before we left Edward Street to move to Bristol, Mam and I were up in the attic very late, on our hands and knees scrubbing the attic floor. Why she was so bothered about that I'll never know but she didn't want anyone to say that she'd left the house dirty.

My job on a Saturday morning was to brush the stair carpet with a wooden hand brush and little iron shovel (before plastic dustpans and brushes). Apart from going to the shops for Mam, I also remember walking to Gwladys Street, to a certain house where a lady made and sold delicious faggots in gravy one day a week. You would take your own bowl to collect them and then rush home for Mam to add the mushy peas for our tea. (In Wales, dinner was at lunchtime and tea was our early evening meal. We'd often have supper too – Welsh rarebit - before bed-time.)

Other memories include playing board games, reading story books, comics and sections from Arthur Mee's *The Children's Encyclopaedia* (Dad purchased all ten volumes of it) and listening to the radio. We didn't have a television for quite a long time and my earliest memory of one is going to Auntie Shirley's house a couple of doors down and watching a programme with Gareth. (Shirley is actually another second cousin and a lovely lady.) Unfortunately, while we sat there, flames and wreaths of smoke suddenly erupted from the back of the telly and we had to shout for Auntie Shirley to come and switch it off! I don't know what happened then as we were swiftly sent home.

My parents always had a good relationship, which strengthened over time. Times must have been hard bringing up four children and I remember them having the odd argument as my mother, although she didn't talk as much as my father did, she was very strong-willed and had a keen sense of justice. She wasn't afraid to speak her mind and tackle people if she felt they were in the wrong, so in that way she had the Greenwood determination and guts. My brother Gareth related the story of how one day at the seaside they saw a young policeman being attacked by a gang of skinheads on the beach. It was only Gareth and my father

Auntie Shirley, me and Mam in July 1955. Shirley Crandon is the daughter of Syd and Olwen and the sister of Kenneth. She married Patrick O'Neill and they lived at 4 Edward Street, two doors down from us.

restraining her that stopped her from wading in to the defence of the policeman. I also remember that at the time when we were burgled in Bristol one night, it was she who led the charge downstairs to confront them in her nightdress. Luckily they'd gone by then! Mam would always defend us if she thought someone had wronged us but she was also the

main one who would discipline us if she thought we were in the wrong. She'd either threaten us with telling Dad or give us a slap if she thought we deserved it. Dad never touched us as he didn't believe in any corporal punishment. He just had to look at us and speak in his 'serious voice' which brooked no opposition. And if we wanted something he'd usually say 'Ask your mother', just as Mam also often said 'You'll have to ask your father'! They always presented a united front though on important matters so there was no getting round them.

In their later years, it was lovely to hear both of them chatting and laughing together in their opposite armchairs by the fireside. They remained devoted to each other and good friends to the very end.

Mam may have deferred to Dad as head of the household for many decisions but when it came to our religious upbringing she was adamant that we'd be brought up in the Catholic faith. This leads me to the next section about school and religion…

PART THREE SCHOOL DAYS

11. ST ILLTYD'S

I started school in September 1959 aged five at St Illtyd's in Dowlais. It was a large old Victorian Roman Catholic school which taught children through to the leaving age of 15. My mother had attended this school until she passed her 11-plus and went to the County Grammar school. From age five to seven it was co-educational but the juniors and seniors were separated by gender. The Junior girls' school was above the Infants and the boys' Junior school was on a lower level in a large green shed nicknamed The Cowshed. The school has long since been replaced by modern primary and secondary schools.

Courtesy: St Illtyd's church, Dowlais

This old photograph shows the grotto with the statue of Our

Lady with St Bernadette kneeling at her feet. This was just below the main part of the school which you can see in the background. The Grotto was the place we all trooped past on our way to St Illtyd's church or the P.E. hall and our class would be lined up in front of it for school photographs as in the example below:

An Infant class photo: I'm 5th from the left on the front row. Lucy Price (my best friend) is 2nd row, 5th from the right. Patrick, the son of the headmaster of the boys' school is the very tall boy at the back.

Going to school was my first experience of being in a large group of children as I had been at home with my mother and brother most of the

time. I think everything went well for the first week but by the second week, I'd had enough. I remember being outside the Infant classrooms, clinging to the railings and refusing to go in. My poor mother didn't know what to do as I wouldn't let go and was kicking up quite a fuss. I don't know why I suddenly decided I hated school. It was probably the realisation that I had no choice but to come here every week for what seemed like forever. Eventually my teacher came out and managed to prise my fingers off the iron bars, took me by the hand and let me do some colouring in the Infant hall until I settled down. It was also arranged that I could go home for dinners for a while. We lived quite a long way from school but the head teacher of the Junior boys (Patrick's father) lived fairly near us and I know that for a little while he used to drop me off home then collect me afterwards as they also went home for lunch. I must have just accepted my fate after a short while as I quickly grew accustomed to how you had to behave and win approval, unlike some in the class! The girl who sat next to me came from a very poor family (unkind children would call her 'smelly') and didn't seem at all daunted by authority. One day she deliberately turned her chair round so she had her back to the teacher. She refused to budge and sat there

smiling. I can't remember how it all ended but I was more scared about how the teacher would react than she was.

School was very different to how it is now. For a start, in the very first class (the equivalent of Reception) we were all sat in pairs at adjoining desks facing the front. It was almost like a small lecture theatre as the desks rose in tiers. There was no moving around the classroom, except if you were called up to the teacher's desk to read and you were expected to be silent most of the time and get on with your work. Lessons were a lot more regimented than now with little room for originality or free expression. One example of this was an art lesson. The teacher drew a house on the board which we had to copy. It had a front garden, with a little gate and fence with a path, leading up to a double-fronted, detached house. I can remember it to this day as it was so twee with its criss-crosses for the fence and stiff stylised upright flowers. There were four windows with curtains tied back and a plume of smoke rising from the chimney. It was a classic example of an idealised house with very little resemblance to anything that any of us lived in.

We did lots of copying from the blackboard as there were no worksheets or materials except for our exercise books and pencils. We did

learn something useful in the next class up though as I remember practising how to tie shoe laces on a small wooden frame. The only teacher's name I reliably remember was Miss Maureen Fuller who taught us P.E. (It was called P.T. back then, short for Physical Training.) She was definitely the most glamorous with thick wavy hair tied back in a ponytail. I found out later that my Auntie Donna knew her but I certainly didn't get any preferential treatment during P.E., especially when I found balancing across a high bar very challenging and often fell off! I remember Miss Fuller ignoring us all once during a dance lesson in the hall while she was dancing cheek to cheek with the caretaker. We thought that was very daring.

Thankfully I didn't struggle much with academic work. I wasn't too keen on Maths and I was envious of children who were good at Art as some showed a talent for this at a very young age. I used to say I wanted to be an artist when really what I was best at was writing (although, dear reader, I'll let you be the judge of that!) I loved scribbling stories and making up little plays for me and my long-suffering siblings to act out. I can't recall learning to read and write but I do remember reading a series of books about a brother and sister called Dick and Dora (this was before

Janet and John etc.) but I don't know anyone else who remembers those books. There was Nip the dog and Fluff the cat. (It must have remained at the back of my mind as I named the first family cat Fluffy, even though as a smooth-haired tabby, she wasn't remotely fluffy!) In the stories, the children were always running about and having adventures, and of course, with no adults present.

Just like in the Dick and Dora stories, our playtimes were always minus adult supervision, as the teacher only appeared at the end of it to ring the bell. If there was any emergency, like broken bones or profuse bleeding, you'd have to knock on the staff room door and wait in fear and trepidation. The infants had a huge yard (or so it seemed) surrounded by a wall with high netting to stop balls flying over. But apart from that it was devoid of any play equipment except from a metal ring attached to one wall for some obscure reason. We made use of this in games where one child would hold onto it and a chain of children was formed to play games where we passed under the first child's arms and then continued making a loop through the second child's arm and so on. This may have been 'The Big Ship Sails on the Alley Alley O!' And there was a 'slide' that was simply a stone wall down the side of steps that had

been worn smooth and shiny by years of children's bottoms sliding down it. Girls would tuck their dresses into their knickers to slide down the wall or perform hand stands and cartwheels. So we were very much left to our own devices.

We played wonderful traditional games that were passed down from the older kids to the new ones. Most of the games had songs or rhymes attached to them, like *Blue Bells, Cockle Shells*. The ones I remember most are the skipping games. Some of the older girls would bring in long washing-lines which would be turned very energetically by a girl at each end and make a hard slap each time it hit the ground. A long queue of us would be at one end to take our turn to jump in and stay in as long as we could. It was quite thrilling when it was your turn to leap in and there would be lots of us jumping together and belting out the words of a song. When you were 'out' by missing a beat it was your turn to turn the rope.

Other favourites were hopscotch, French skipping, jacks, marbles and ball games. Another great one which, would involve nearly the whole of the playground, was '*In and out those Dusty Blue Bells*', where we'd form long arches for children to run through singing and holding hands. You never knew who had started off the games but everyone would want to

join in. In the junior school we played in a higher playground with the notorious dark arches underneath the senior school where coal used to be stored. They were reputed to be haunted and if you could run from one end to the other you'd prove that you were fearless.

Being a Catholic school, its outlook seemed more Irish than Welsh. I don't think we made a big deal of St David's day, except to wear a daffodil or leek to school, but for St Patrick's we certainly went to town. The whole school put on a big concert and I remember our class performed the comic song 'Mick McGilligan's Ball' as our part of the

A school photo of me in 1960, aged 6.

show one year. As I was considered to have a good speaking voice I was chosen to be the narrator saying the words of each verse accompanied by my classmates on stage acting out the various antics that occur in the song. Then after each verse we'd sing a rousing chorus of:

So they all went down to Mick McGilligan's baaaaall

Where they had to tear the paper off the waaaaall

To make room for all the people in the haaaaall

Oh, the girls and the boys

Made a divil of a noise

At Mick McGilligan's ball!

We wore shamrocks and dressed up as 'Irish Colleens' in green skirts, white tops and little red capes. It was as if Ireland was considered our true homeland and I even remember kids from other schools sometimes being nicknamed 'Welshies', which was ridiculous as we were all more Welsh than Irish! One down-side of being in an Irish Catholic school was that it was very strict about religious matters. It had eased up a bit by the time I went because my mother said that in her day if they found out that

you'd missed Mass on Sunday you'd be punished by being made to kneel on the classroom floor. We still had catechism every single day though, which you were expected to learn off by heart. The teacher would give us questions and answers from it to learn and we'd be tested in class. The priest would put in an appearance every now and again too and I was made to repeat an answer to him once which I'd managed to guess the week before. The teacher had asked why we didn't need to drink the wine as well as eat the host to receive the body of Christ (back then, only the priest drank the wine) and as no one else in class answered I thought up a logical reason which seemed to impress the teacher. I said, as the host represents the body of Christ and the wine is his blood, you can just eat the body as you can't have a body without blood. I thought it was just a smart-alec answer and that I'd get told off but the teacher carried on as if I was some kind of genius and the priest even condescended to smile! The teacher wasn't pleased with me later on though when I questioned why my best friend Lucy Price and the headmaster's son Patrick were chosen to make their First Holy Communion a year before all the rest of the class. It was obviously favouritism regarding the head teacher's son but why Lucy, when I was the eldest in the class and she was eight days

younger than me?! I'm sure it wasn't religious fervour on my part that made me so upset. It was a question of pride. My mother even came into school to ask why I wasn't allowed and the answer she got was that both Patrick and Lucy went to Sunday school every week, whereas I didn't. I thought this was quite unfair as we lived a bus ride and a long walk away from the church and I would have already made that journey on a Sunday morning to go to Mass. I would have liked to have gone to Sunday school with my friends but the one Sunday afternoon when I made the effort to go, the bus didn't turn up. I sensed that the teacher was displeased that Mam had come to see her and she was never particularly nice to me after that. That's what you got for questioning authority. A year or so later I was in trouble again for innocently smiling at a classmate as we queued for Communion in church. The little sneak reported me to our teacher the next day and I had a real ticking off for unholy behaviour. I should think that in churches these days you're probably expected to smile!

Other memories regarding religion are the processions we all took part in especially at Whitsun time. Girls would wear white dresses, white shoes and veils and boys would dress smartly in short trousers, white

shirts and red ties. We'd walk with a partner and process all around Dowlais following the priest and altar boys. It was quite a sight. People would line the roads to watch.

One memory of the occasion was writing up about the event in class and describing how my family was in such a rush to get ready for the afternoon procession that Mam, being flustered, burnt our sausages.

Mam was quite embarrassed when she read what I'd written. It probably wasn't just because the sausages were burnt but the fact that the teacher knew we were only having sausages for Sunday dinner, instead of the usual roast. With a husband and four kids to feed in a hurry after Sunday Mass, who can blame her!

Back then children were rushed through the sacraments to ensure you became a committed Catholic from a young age. Babies were baptised soon after birth, First Confession and First Holy Communion happened around the age of seven and Confirmation took place around the age of eight, unlike in the Church of England where you could make the decision for yourself when you were older. So I experienced the last three sacraments in quick succession at St Illtyds. Unlike Baptism and Communion, Confession is peculiar to Catholicism and is probably quite a mystifying practice to non-Catholics. We were expected to attend Confession regularly to get us into the habit, so I'd troop along about once a fortnight and attempt to vary my usual list of sins which consisted of being cheeky to my mother and squabbling with my brother. The priest must have got bored. However after receiving absolution and saying my penance (usually one Our Father and three Hail Marys) I

could skip out of church as light as a feather with a clear conscience and a sparkling clean soul! There was nothing quite like it until life became far more complicated and doubts set in.

When I was eight I also had a bit of a religious 'phase' where I was constantly reading my prayer book, saying the rosary and during the autumn half-term holiday I even took myself off to early morning Mass two days running. The Masses were to celebrate All Souls Day and All Saints Day, both being 'Holy Days of Obligation'. I think that even my mother was getting worried. She was probably afraid that I wanted to become a nun! This period of devotion didn't last long however and I soon returned to my old self, not bad but not too good either.

This is a photo of St Illtyds church, next to our school which was consecrated in 1846. It was built in the Gothic style and is a very large, imposing building. It was the only church I attended until the age of nine and I remember being rather disappointed when we moved to Bristol and our new church was much smaller, more modern and much plainer in style. It was far less intimidating than St Illtyd's but lacked its grandeur and awe.

Courtesy: oldmerthyrtydfil.com

You can see the splendour of the altar rising to the roof with its intricate carving and the huge pillars and arches throughout the building. I loved looking up at the plaster cherubs with their golden wings who looked as if they were about to fly off. The richly coloured stained glass windows all around the church were also spectacular.

Courtesy: oldmerthyrtydfil.com

When I attended Mass, there wasn't a smaller altar in front, as the priest would turn his back on

the congregation and go up to the high altar. The Mass, of course, was all in Latin and as a present for my seventh birthday I received a children's Missal from Nanna Pant (even though she wasn't a Catholic. It was probably bought for her by my mother.) The Missal was a little book that enabled you to join in all the Latin responses and had the English translation alongside. We just took it for granted that we spoke in Latin and often chanted the prayers off by heart, not knowing what they meant. Either that or we made up the words or mimed. The Missal had pictures and information about every single Sunday of the year, telling you what each of them celebrated, the Epistle, Gospel, prayers for the week and even what colour vestments the priest would be wearing. Even though I no longer attend church, I still have it. And of course, all the religious paraphernalia, be it books, rosary beads, holy pictures, would all have to be blessed with holy water by the priest, which in our case was Father Canon McCormach, a rather remote figure but all priests seemed like that back then. Much to my mother's dismay I remember that as a young child I once managed to drop the heavy wooden collection plate that was passed around during the Mass. I had stubbornly insisted on holding it despite Mam's reluctance. Of course it was much heavier than

I imagined and it fell with a resounding crash, breaking the hushed silence, and the coins and notes scattered in every direction under the pews and down the aisle. We spent the rest of the service picking it all up.

Living in Pant, I did feel rather cut off from friends at school even though we lived only a couple of miles away. Everyone around us went to Pant school which was in walking distance. I did know a few of the local kids and I remember playing in the lane behind our house, roaming the Coop fields, playing hopscotch on the pavements and the occasional trip to Pant open-air baths. (Apparently they opened in 1938 as part of the national 'fresh air campaign' to get the nation fit and healthy. You would have to have been very hardy to swim there throughout most of the year with Welsh weather but I just remember splashing about on warm sunny days.)

Pant open-air baths, which was demolished in the 1980s. (Courtesy: alangeorge.co.uk)

My younger brother Gareth and I were probably the only children from Caeracca who caught a bus to school. (Once an inspector got on

doing a survey and asked who went to the RC school. I didn't know what he meant so I said no. Only when he got off someone said RC means Roman Catholic and I realised he'd meant us.) Most of my friends seemed to live in the Penydarren area, near school, and at the end of the day I'd see them leaving in the opposite direction to me and talking excitedly about the ballroom dancing classes they were all going to which I'd have loved to have joined but it was just too far away.

It's amazing for me to think now that by the age of six I was travelling unaccompanied to school. From Edward Street I walked for about five minutes down the hill and under the bridge to the bus stop. It was about a fifteen-minute journey by bus then I had another longer walk downhill to school. When I was seven I was also taking Gareth with me. There wasn't a school uniform but I wore a gymslip most of the time and had a green Burberry mac with a hood. Gareth would have been in short trousers and a duffle coat or anorak. There were a couple of boys in my class who were bullies and I remember one of them sticking a pin in me. I don't remember the teacher punishing him but she told me not to make a fuss as she washed my finger under a tap! The two of them attacked me later when I was walking home with Gareth. I got punched in the

stomach but I never said a word about it to my parents and certainly not to the teacher, as it didn't seem worthwhile. That was my only experience of bullying that I remember during my school career and only once outside school did I encounter religious prejudice. I heard kids shouting 'Catholic Cats' at a group of us and a few on our side retorted with 'Proddy Dogs'. I didn't even know what 'protestant' meant then, even though my father and most of my relatives were Church of Wales, so I was blissfully unaware of any animosity about religion.

When I was nine years old and had just started Standard Two (Junior 2 or Year 4 nowadays) my father's job at the ICI factory in Dowlais, had come to an end as the chemical plant was closing down.[23] He had secured a job with the ICI factory in Avonmouth, Bristol and had been

My father in his new job at ICI in Avonmouth, Bristol.

[23] The ICI works in Pant were built in 1939 as part of the war effort. Dad's first job was as an Estimator then he became a Supervisor.

commuting between Bristol and our home for some time. We were therefore selling our house and moving to Filton.

I was in two minds about leaving Wales as I was excited about the move but sad that I'd be leaving my friends and relatives. I remember that Mam and I went to say goodbye to my nice Headmistress Miss Foley who gave me a holy picture to put in my prayer book, which I kept for years.

On my final day at school I was amazed that the teacher had organised a surprise farewell party for me, and all my class-mates were in on the secret. There was a wooden screen between our class and the year below us which was drawn back so that both classes could join in the fun and games. There was lots of food too brought in by staff and children and I was quite over-whelmed. My teacher (unfortunately, I don't remember her name) also let me leave school early, which was a real treat too. However, I'm afraid that I rather spoilt it by remembering half way to the bus stop that I'd left my umbrella in class so had to go back for it. When I knocked on the classroom door, my teacher answered it and looked rather annoyed. She hurriedly passed out my umbrella before shutting the door again. I then understood why she was cross because I

could hear a lot of girls crying loudly inside. I wonder if they were crying because I had left them or were simply over-emotional after the party?!

I regret that I didn't keep in touch with friends for very long after I left for Bristol. I exchanged a couple of letters with classmates and that was it. We were all moving on in our respective lives. However, my family still had lots of contact with Wales over the years and I've never forgotten my early experiences there. The older I get the more I enjoy looking back and cherishing those early childhood memories.

AFTERWORD

My life in Bristol is another story so I will end these recollections with my last trip to Pant in June 2019. My father Charlie had often said that when he died he wished to have his ashes scattered at a specific place near Pant, at the side of the Pontsticill Road opposite the Brecon Mountain Railway. He referred to the spot as Arthur's Seat but our cousin Lyn knew it as Prince Llewelyn's Seat and local historians referred to it as Ifor Bach's Chair, or even Cadifor's Chair, just to add to the confusion! Ifor Bach does seem the most probable as it's near Pant-cad-Ifor and this also meant that my father had come full circle on his life's journey. There is even a legend that King Arthur also sat on it, so maybe that's why Dad called it Arthur's Seat.

Anyway, we started calling it Charlie's Chair just to keep things simple. As you can see from the photo, it's not a very impressive historical monument and it took us ages to find it but it had significance for my father and the views of the countryside around are lovely.

Dad died in Bristol on December 8th 2018 and exactly six months later, on June 8th 2019, we scattered his ashes. It was also an appropriate date as it was very close to Dad's birthday on June 10th when he would have been 87. About thirty family members came to Pant for the day from as far away as Sheffield, Cornwall, Essex, London and Brighton as well as Bristol. Lyn Edwards, who is Donna and Rhydian's son, helped with the organisation of the event and acted as our guide. We were all ages, from Uncle Rhydian in his 80s, down to young children and a baby. It was a lovely pilgrimage to South Wales and I chose the following poem to be read on that occasion as it reminded me so much of Dad's youth. I'm sure he would have loved it. We then all retired to the Pant-cad-Ifor inn to toast Dad's life and enjoy a meal together. So Dad's story and my recollections have now come full circle.

Nos da Dad.

WHEN WE WALKED TO MERTHYR TYDFIL BY IDRIS DAVIES

When we walked to Merthyr Tydfil

In the moonlight long ago

When the mountain tracks were frozen

And the crests were white with snow

We had tales and songs between us

And our souls too young to fret

And we had hopes and visions

That the heart remembers yet

When we walked to Merthyr Tydfil

In the moonlight long ago

When the mountain tracks were frozen

And the crests were white with snow

The wind from the furthest mountains

Blew about us as we strode

But we were warm and merry

On that crooked freezing road

And there were lamp-lit homesteads

To the south and east and west

And we saw the round moon smiling

On those little lights of rest

When we walked to Merthyr Tydfil

In the moonlight long ago

When the mountain tracks were frozen

And the crests were white with snow

The moon is still as radiant

The homely hills remain

But the magic of those evenings

We'll never see again

For we were boyish dreamers

In a world we didn't know

When we walked to Merthyr Tydfil

In the moonlight long ago [24]

[24] This version of the poem is the one adapted for song by Max Boyce.

The day Dad showed us where he wanted his ashes scattered in April 2000. We walked up the road with him after Uncle Chris' funeral. Left to right: Judi, Gareth, Mam, Susan, Dad, me and Rhydian

June 8th 2019: Some of us near Ifor Bach's Seat after scattering Dad's ashes

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I am indebted to J. Ann Lewis who wrote the book *Pantyscallog Village*, published by The Merthyr Tydfil Historical Society, 2002. Her book was part of my inspiration to write about my own family and where we came from. She was also a friend of my late Auntie Donna and has known a lot of Crandons in her time! The support and encouragement she has given me has been extremely helpful.

A lot of my research was carried out online and I am particularly grateful to the website OldMerthyrTydfil.com which was founded by the late Alan George and generously allows their photographs to be used free of charge for works such as this.

I shall leave the final words to the poet Idris Davies who didn't shy away from the desolate reality of the industrial landscape of South Wales and yet still could find beauty and inspiration there.[25]

'Dowlais from the Cinder Tips, Caeharris' by Cedric Lockwood Morris (1889-1982) (Courtesy: Cyfarthfa Castle Museum and Art Gallery.)

[25] T.S.Eliot said of Davies' poems 'They are the best poetic document I know about a particular epoch in a particular place, and I think they really have a claim to permanence.'

DOWLAIS TOP

What is there here at Dowlais top to please a poet's eye?

What is there here but ragged earth against a ragged sky ?

A bleak discoloured broken land where only the strayed sheep cry?

So bleak and grim, a waste of stone, rough grass, and weed and slag,

And shabby Dowlais down below, where live the sage and wag,

And miles around the great bare hills, the land of Mog and Mag!

And yet to here my heart returns when softer landscapes cloy,

For here I sang my secret song, my silent psalms of joy,

On the day I felt a poet born within the dreaming boy

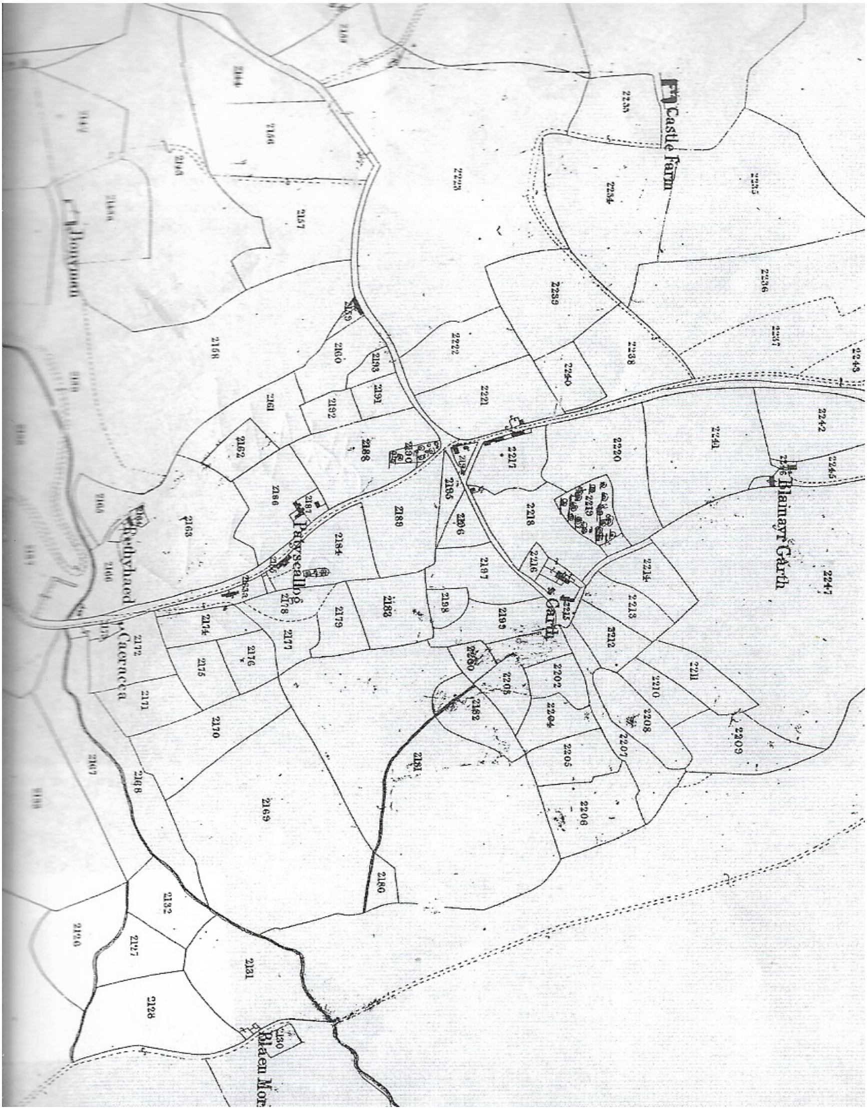
For here I found the soul could sing whate'er the eye could see,

Could sing about the beauty lost and the beauty yet to be,

And probe to the impassioned thought that is the root of poetry.

Ordinance Survey Map of Pant Area c.1948

Ordinance Survey Map of Pant Area c.1875-76 including the Fever Hospital



Tithe Map of Pant c. 1850, from the National Library of Wales

Elaine Dacey was born in Pant on the edge of Merthyr Tydfil and had the joy of living there for the first nine years of her life. Those formative years have always stayed with her. She looks forward to sharing some of her memories and those of her ancestors with younger members of her family and with readers who are interested in the turbulent years of this area of Wales from the early 20th century to the 1960s when she left for Bristol.

Since leaving Merthyr, Elaine's family has continued to visit regularly. Now that many of her older relatives in Wales have died she wants to record their lives and save the stories of their loves, losses, trials and tribulations for future generations to appreciate what they experienced.

'Elaine has expressed her wonderful memories and knowledge of both sides of her family. It brings alive the well-known and respected Crandon family of the village of Pant and I've enjoyed finding out the history of the Greenwood family of Penywern.'

J. Ann Lewis, Membership Secretary of the Merthyr Tydfil Historical Society, author of *Pantyscallog Village*