

# Memories of Llanbleddian



*By Bertram Jenkins*



**MEMORIES OF BERTRAM JENKINS**  
**LLANBLEDDIAN 1920-1936**



*Tom, Peg, Dora and Bert under the Sycamore tree outside Pontfaen school, Broadway.*

I was the youngest of a family of thirteen children. A brother and a sister had died before I was born. The surviving children consisted of six boys and five girls. I was quite often called 'the baby of the family'. My first memory was of when I first began to speak. I used to call cheese 'glu' in my baby talk.

By today's standards, eleven children was a large family, but there was another large family in the village in those days. They were called James and there were ten of them.

#### WASH DAYS

As I look back to my childhood and through my teenage years in to adulthood, I was always very aware as to how hard it was for my mother. I have vivid memories of washdays, which were usually on a Monday. I recall a huge bucket of dirty clothes soaking in rainwater, which had been collected in three huge wooden casks. These casks were sited by the back door where they could catch the water running from the roof. My mother would lift the bucket of clothes on to an open-hearth fire

in the living room to boil. Then she would lift the hot bucket off the fire and pour the contents in to a large galvanised bath on the table in the back kitchen, so that she could hand wash the clothes. Each washday this process would be repeated about three times. After washing, the clothes would be wrung by hand and then put through a mangle. This had a wheel, which turned two wooden rollers. These would press together forcing the water out. The damp washing was then hung out to dry on the clothesline in the back garden. This process would be followed by arduous hours of ironing, using an old flat iron that was heated on the fire. We did not have any electricity in the house, no washing machines, no spin dryers and no electric irons. In those days washing day was physically very hard work.

#### SCHOOL DAYS

I recall that when I was about two and a half years old my mother used to send me to Broadway school on washdays. I used to accompany my brother Dick and his friend Harry Thomas who were then in the standard 4 class. Their class teacher, Mrs Owen Phillips, had told my mother that she could send me to school with Dick on any day when she was busy with her housework. Because of this I must have started school unofficially when I was less than three years old! When war came in 1938 Mrs Phillips used to write to me quite often, especially when I was posted to the Middle East.



When I was about three years old I started going to Sunday school, and also became a choirboy in the church. We also used to go the Baptist school on Wednesday evenings. In those days religion was a shared thing.



***Pontfaen Council School.***

***Bert in second from right in the back row***

I well remember my first proper day in school. I started in the Infants class in The Council School on Broadway. This is now a Welsh medium school. Miss Rees was the teacher of this class. We then progressed to the first class, taught by Miss Aubrey. We were expected to know the alphabet and be able to read fairly well before we entered Standard 1 which was taken by Miss Parker. Class 2 was taught by Miss Davies and later by Miss Gwyneth Thomas who was the daughter of Mr Thomas, the Returning Officer for the Parish Help. Today he would be employed as a social worker.

I was a good scholar and could read and write quite well before I progressed to standard 3 where we were taught by Mr Willy Frederick. He was an ex-serviceman and was an excellent teacher. His family lived in Court Farm in Aberthin. Because I was a good reader Mr Frederick used to put me at the back of the class with three older boys who were unable to read. I taught them every time we had reading periods. I then progressed to standards 4 and 5. These were two classes, which were taught in the same room by Mr Roberts who was also an ex-serviceman. Although he was also a good teacher he was a bit heavy with his use of the cane. This was especially true in the hand writing lessons if we did not write with the pen sloping over our right shoulders. The first we would know of our error was when we would receive a sharp crack across the knuckles of our writing hands. We never forgot those lessons!





*Newspaper cutting showing the Mayor of Cowbridge, (Alderman T.J. Yorwerth) explaining to the children of Cowbridge Council School the significance of the casket which is to be presented to the Right Hon. David Lloyd George*

Mr Frederick in class 3 taught the boys gardening. The school owned a plot of land at the back, which was split up into small plots.

The last one and a half years of my schooling, when I was in the 6th form, my teacher was Mr Sloman. He was the headmaster and lived in the schoolhouse, which adjoined the school. His wife suffered from poor health and I remember that when I was in the infant's class, a few

of us used to go to her bedroom once a week to sing to her.

Once or twice a week during spring and summer, on fine afternoons, classes 2 and 3 would be taken for a long walk along the roads and lanes, where the teacher would show us all the different wild flowers and birds in the hedgerows. We always looked forward to this. These trips were known as nature rambles, and came under the subject of Nature Study. Of course, there was very little traffic about, to spoil the walk.



*The official opening of the Cowbridge Swimming Baths in 1911*

The council had made open air swimming baths on the river Thaw at the back of the Town Hall in Cowbridge. There were covered cubicles to change in but the baths themselves were in the open air. The river water was very cold indeed. They used to say that there were fifteen springs in the water, which made it so very cold. We were taught to swim there. Each school, including the Girls' High School

and The Grammar School, was allocated one afternoon a week in the baths, but no mixed bathing was allowed. If we went with the school we were given a season ticket for the baths free of charge. I have still got mine, and it is still in good condition after all these years!

On St David's Day we had a half days holiday from school. The morning session, between 9 and 12.15 am was given over to the performing of Welsh language plays and the singing of Welsh songs. Of course, all the boys wore the famous leek, which we had to eat at the end of the morning! Needless to say we all wore the smallest leeks we could find.

When I was eleven years old I sat the 11+ examinations. I passed and was allocated a place in Cowbridge Grammar School. Because my parents were financially not very well off, however, I was unable to take up the place. They could have applied for financial help, which was called 'charity' but they would not apply. I did not mind not being able to attend the grammar school.



## LLANBLEDDIAN VILLAGE

The village had a wonderful community spirit. It consisted mostly of small workingmen's cottages with only about three 'toff's' houses. They were the Cross, Stallcourt, and Hill House and were all quite near to the church. By the river, the Thaw, there was a water mill, which was in full operation, a village shop, and a bake house, which baked the bread for the surrounding area.

## THE WATER MILL

We children used to stand by the door of the mill where the huge water wheel drove the millstones for the grinding of the grain, but we were never allowed inside because it was too dangerous. We used to watch the flour come down from the first floor, in to chutes and then in to bags. The local farmers went past our house, with their horses and carts, to take their grain to the mill for grinding. The family Stone ran the mill in those days. They had five children, three boys and two girls. Mrs Stone kept the shop in the Mill House selling sweets as well as the myriad of things usually sold by village shops then. We used to spend our half pence or penny on sweets. The thing that I remember best about the shop is that they sold 'Dolly Mixtures' and we could buy a halfpenny's worth of them at a time. Mrs Stone weighed the sweets out on an old fashioned balance with a brass bowl to hold the sweets. She kept the scales in the middle of the sweet jars, on a sort of platform, which raised them to almost eye level. This was so that she could make certain that, when she weighed the sweets, she never gave one too many.

The Stone family was very industrious. Mrs Stone went to the market in Pontypridd once a week to sell her goods. The whole family used to gather mushrooms, blackberries, dewberries, and elderberries, all for sale in Pontypridd. She also sold her garden produce there. Many of the village women and farmers' wives did this as a way to make a little extra income. My family also grew vegetables. From when I was about seven years old I used to help in peoples' gardens bagging the potatoes and picking apples. I used to weed as well and usually I would be given a penny. The younger children would be lucky to receive a halfpenny.



*Bert with his sister Peg and dog Vicky in the Bake house field Llanbleddian*

## THE BAKE HOUSE

The Bake house was about 50 yards from the mill, and only about 100 yards from my home, 3 Greenfield Terrace.

Johnny Thomas and his wife Jane usually baked the bread twice a week. We children always knew when Johnny was taking the tins out of the oven, using a long handled wooden spade, because of the delicious smell of the freshly cooked bread. At those times we would all gather around the back of the bake house, where the oven stood, and stand just inside the door alongside the big wooden bin watching Jane tap the bread out of the hot tins with gloved hands. She would lay out the loaves on boards laid across the mixing bin, to cool ready for delivery



the next day. When she turned out the bread lovely golden crumbs would fall off, and we children used to take turns to grab them and pop them in our mouths. They tasted wonderful!

The bread would be delivered the next day. Mr Thomas had an old fashioned baker's horse drawn cart. His horse, Tommy, was kept in a field next to our house across Castle Hill. I can remember going to the field with Johnny the Baker to catch Tommy. It was often difficult to catch him but eventually we would harness him up to the covered cart and then load it up with loaves of bread for the delivery round. Johnny's delivery route would always start at the Cross Inn pub, then through Penllyne, Llansannor, Penylan, Newton, and finally to Aberthin. Johnny the Baker would drive the horse and cart, and I would sit alongside him. We would set off at 10.00am and arrive back in Llanbleddian at about 4.30 pm with the bread all sold and delivered. There was very little traffic on the roads in those days, and what there was was slow moving. Johnny the Baker used to stop at each pub in each village for a drink of beer while I waited outside in the cart. These pubs were the Cross Inn, Fox and Hounds, Barley Mow, Coity Inn, and finally the Hare and Hounds and Farmers' Arms in Aberthin. Needless to say, by the time we headed home from Aberthin, the baker would be quite drunk and I am sure that he sometimes dosed off to sleep between Aberthin and Llanbleddian. Luckily Tommy knew the way home so that we always arrived back safely!



*The Hare and Hounds Public House  
in Aberthin*

#### MILK AND WATER

Before piped water came to the village we had to carry all drinking water from a public hand pump near the mill. It is still standing there today. There is also another pump near the church Sunday school hall. Fetching water from the mill pump was a twice daily job, mornings before school, and after school in the evenings. This job was always handed down to the youngest members of the family as soon as they had grown strong enough!

I also had to fetch milk from the cowshed at Kinscombe Farm twice a day. The milk was measured out into a tin in the cowshed. Today this would be thought of as unhygienic. I also used to fetch milk from a Mrs Williams of Greenfield in the evenings. On Saturday mornings I fetched the milk from the dairy in Kingscombe House, as well as a big enamel jug full of buttermilk for my mother's weekly cake baking session. Also, we were given a half-pound of lovely farmhouse butter, which I earned by turning the handle of a gadget called a separator. This separated the cream from the milk, leaving what is known as skimmed milk, and the cream of the milk.

#### GROCERIES

Every Thursday, and quite often on another day as well, myself, my brother Tom and sister Peg had to go to Cowbridge to Miles the Grocer to collect our groceries from his shop. This was next to where the Misa grocery shop is today. The grocery order would be given to the grocer the day before, and the three of us, loaded with shopping



bags, called frails, would make our way home through Church street and across the mill fields home to Llanbleddian.

### CHRISTMAS

At Christmas my mother made a lot of cakes and tarts. She made eleven or twelve yeast loaf cakes. She wet the cake mixture with a bottle of stout and we would each have a stir and a Christmas wish. We then had to fetch twelve tins from the bake house, the same tins that were used for baking the bread. Some cake dough, which consisted of flour, raisins, orange peel, yeast, and all other Christmas things, was put into each tin. We then took them to the bake house for the baker to cook in his big oven alongside the bread. We would collect all the cakes the following day. The finished yeast cake was beautiful.

We nearly always had a lovely Christmas. There were never a lot of presents but we always received books.

### CHORES AND CHICKENS

As we grew older some of the household jobs were passed down from the older children to the younger. We had a bucket toilet at the top of the garden. It was the job of Tom and myself to dig a deep hole in the back garden every Saturday morning to bury the contents of the bucket. We also had to scrub the toilet out with water, soap and disinfectant. We used a scrubbing brush and Jeyes fluid.

We also had to clean out the chickens. We had about twelve, and when replacements were needed, we used to hatch our own eggs with the help of a broody hen..

During the summer term we had to weed the back garden path.

Every Saturday morning it was the girls' job to help Mam to scrub the flagstone floor in the kitchen and the flagstones to the front gate. When they were dry sand was sprinkled on to the flagstones.

After all the Saturday morning jobs were finished we were allowed out to play!

Every day, usually on the way home from school, we collected sticks for the fire from the fields. These would be put in to the oven to dry for use the next morning.

### THE CHURCH CHOIR

On Wednesday evenings, the Church Choir boys went to the home of Mr Fred Knap, the organist, to practice our singing for church the following Sunday. He lived with his sister in one of the cottages behind the Town Hall in Cowbridge. These cottages have long disappeared.

My strongest lasting memory of my childhood days in the village is of long summer evenings. When I was very young I had to go to bed earlier than the older children. I would be put to bed while it was still daylight. During those summer evenings the bridge over the river at the bottom of Broadway was a gathering place for older boys and girls. When I was reluctantly put to bed I could hear those young people on the bridge singing together like a choir. I can still hear the sound of those lovely voices



mixed with the sound of sheep braying and birds singing through the open window as I drifted off to sleep.

In those days the elderly and the youngsters communicated better with each other. It was a common sight to see children leaning on the bridge chatting to a couple of elderly gentlemen.

### COTTAGES

At the bottom of the Broadway, by Greenfield House, were three thatched cottages. These were rented out at 6 pennies a week. I think that they belonged to the Church, and on the front of one of them was a plaque, which said, "Remember Ye the Poor". Nearby was another cottage. This had a zinc roof.

An old man with a long black beard occupied the first cottage. He was not a very clean person and his job was to catch and trap moles in the fields. In those days, moleskin coats and gloves were very fashionable, so he used to sell the skins. We always knew the old man as Mr Groom the mole catcher

A Mr and Mrs Hague used to live in the other thatched cottage. She was an old Irish lady with a very sharp tongue. Her house had a cowshed split door, the top half of which was always open. We used to play ball outside her house and sometimes it used to go over the door and into her living room. She would then come rushing out threatening us with all sorts of things, including the possibility that she would put a knife through our football. She would then keep our ball for a day and a night, but she always gave it back to us after that, on our way home from school.

When we lived at number 3 Greenfield Terrace, some of the older members of the family were working and sleeping away from home. Number 4, the house next to us was occupied by a Mr and Mrs Bill Thomas. He was a local character who worked in the Iron Ore mine in Llanharry. Quite a number of local men would have worked there at some time in their lives. Mr and Mrs Thomas did not have any children. When I was about three or four years old they always used to make a big fuss over me. In fact I spent quite a lot of time with Mrs Thomas. Bill, her husband, used to cycle to work He used to work shifts and I would know what time he was expected home, so I used to be waiting for him. When he came around the corner he would get off his bike and would blow on a key he carried to make a whistling sound. Then he would stand in the road with his arms outstretched and pick me up as I ran towards him. In those days their Mums nearly always dressed little lads like me in white frocks. Of course men used to come home from work dirty and once Bill had picked me up in his arms I would be covered with red iron ore dust! Eventually Mr and Mrs Thomas moved to Penllyne. Because we were such a large family we then rented next door as well.

### ILLNESS

When I was about six and a half years old I became ill with double pneumonia and pleurisy. I was very ill for months. During this time my bed was downstairs in the front room of number 4. I can remember my mother sitting up with me, and every four hours she would put a boiling hot poultice of linseed meal on my chest and back. The ninth day of the illness was supposed to be the critical day. The Doctor was a man named Dr Torney from Cowbridge. My sister Ada worked for him as a



housemaid. He used to call twice a day to check on me. After many weeks I did recover. However, the illness left me with a bad chest, which lasted for a long time. The Doctor gave me a small ebony armchair as a gift. I cherish it to this day.

#### WEATHER, FLOODS and TRAMPS

Winters were long, hard and very cold. Llanbleddian was always flooded because of the river overflowing. All the meadows from the back of the High Street in Cowbridge through the village to Llandough Mill used to flood. I remember Llanbleddian itself being flooded with about twelve inches and more of water, from



*A view of Picadilly, Llanbleddian.*

the bottom of the short steep hill in Picadilly, along the road past the water mill and the bake house, just up to our front gate in Greenfield Terrace. Also the road to the church schoolroom was covered in water!

A van used to call at the village selling general stores and paraffin for the lamps. I think that the firm's name was Hollwill of Bridgend.

During the autumn, we gathered hazel nuts from the woods and blackberries for tarts from the hedgerows.

My mother used to make elderberry wine. She also made carrot wine and beetroot wine, and, during the spring, elderflower champagne. She also made nettle beer, which was known as herb beer. The elderberry wine was drunk warm for the treatment of colds in the winter.

Tramps used to come to the houses throughout the year to beg for food. Two tramps in particular used to come to our house. One of them was a man called Tom Milsom, and another was a very tall man whom we called Mr Big. They carried all their belongings on their backs. My mother used to give them bread, jam and cake as well as tea in their tin. They would sit outside the house on the small green at the bottom of Castle Hill to eat their food, and we children used to sit around and talk to them. They made interesting company and we were never afraid of them.

#### FUN AND GAMES

Bonfire night was always celebrated on the top of Llanbleddian Hill. We would all make our guys and carry them up the hill. Sometimes there would be as many as six or seven guys, a bonfire, and fireworks, - a jolly evening indeed.

Our church choirboys and the Ladies had an end of year outing to Cardiff to see a show. During one of these outings I can recall going to a show starring Harry Landers in 'The Old Empire' in Queen Street, Cardiff.

When I got older and my voice broke I took on the job of Organ Blower in the church. The pay for this was £2.00 a year, and I can remember that my first year's pay was put on a Post Office savings book.



Also, when I was about 16 years old I became one of the team of bell ringers in the church tower. There were six bells in the tower and I rang number 5. My brother Tom rang number 6, the harvest bell. I continued this until I moved away from Llanbleddian, but that is another story!

Llanbleddian village held a flower and vegetable show each year. A big marquee was erected in Great House Field. As you walked through the entrance of the marquee there would be vases of sweet pea flowers being assessed by the judges. The wonderful perfume from the sweet peas would wash over you as you entered. It was unforgettable! After the judging was complete, there were the usual races for the youngsters, the egg and spoon races, the sack races etc. It was always a wonderful day out.

Llanbleddian also had its own cricket and football teams. I played cricket quite often. We used to play on a proper mowed and rolled pitch behind the old hunt stables at Llandough. The pitch was laid out for the team made up of members of the large staff at the castle. Our village team had a good record. At one time we went through two whole seasons without a defeat. The football team, which played in the Barry and District League, also did well.

During the school holidays, we children were able to wander and walk anywhere we liked in the village and on Llanbleddian hill, and play Cowboys and Indians around and on top of the walls of St Quentin's Castle. There was never any worry about children being harmed anywhere. Our parents never even gave it a thought!

On fine days, we boys sometimes used to go down to the Farm Fields and up to Llandough castle wood where there were plenty of rabbits. There was a high stone wall at the entrance to the wood pieced by a small hunting gate. We would pass through the gate and creep through the trees at the edge of the wood, where there was a long boundary fence with a bank, which was full of rabbit burrows. We would always choose a fine, sunny day for these excursions. We would quietly arrange ourselves in a line along the bank between the burrows and the place where we thought the rabbits were sleeping. We couldn't see them, nor they us, although we could see the runs which were through the long grass. On a given signal we would all suddenly stand up clapping our hands and shouting. We could then hear the rabbits tearing through the long grass towards their burrows and us. As they broke cover to get to the safety of their holes they had to pass near to us. We always managed to catch a rabbit each; the number caught depending on the number of boys taking part. Not only was this wonderful fun, but also the rabbit we each took home to our mothers was made in to a delicious rabbit pie. As I usually accompanied my brother Tom on these trips our mother used to receive two rabbits!



*The overgrown ruins of St. Quentin's Castle at Llanbleddian near Cowbridge*

Another popular outdoor activity was fishing. Mr Fred Evans, a retired tailor from Bridge House, Cowbridge, used to fly fish, catching fish with a rod and line. We spent



many happy and interesting hours on the river with him. He fished the Thaw between Cowbridge, through Llanbleddian, and down the farm field to about opposite the Lake farm. He used to catch trout, which were plentiful in those days. There were also otters in the river then. He taught us how to catch trout by hand. We would lie on our tummies by the riverbank with our sleeves rolled up. Then we would slowly and quietly put our hand into the river and under the bank. This was the place where the trout usually lay quietly. Then we would, very gently, stroke the trout's' tummy, slowly moving our hands towards its head where the gills were. As long as we kept stroking the trout they would not move. It was almost as if they had gone to sleep. Then we would grab them by the gills and throw them on to the bank. Some of the boys also fished under the big bridge by Greenfield. We would buy three little black fishing hooks from Williams the Chemist in Cowbridge. Then we would cut a hazel or ash stick about one and a half inches across and two feet long. We split it at one end then pass string through the split. We would tie a hook on the end of the string, and attach an earthworm to this. Then we would take off our stockings and, wearing an old pair of boots, would walk in the water under the bridge where we would slide the stick, hook and worm, in the water under the buttresses of the bridge. We never failed to catch eels there, which we would skin and take home. Mother would then fry them and they would make a good meal.

During the haymaking season the farmers would be up very early. It was usual to be up at about 6 am on summer mornings anyway. The farmers cut the hay with a machine pulled by two horses. The smell of the newly cut grass was lovely.

After Church on Sunday mornings Tom, my sister Peg, and myself would walk over to the Hunt stables where my father was the main groom. There were about fifteen horses stabled there during the foxhunting season, and my father would take us around to see them. He would get one out from its stall and give each of us a ride around the stable yard. The Head Groom was a Mr Chappel. He lived in the House and was in charge of five or six other young grooms who lived in the grooms' quarters. He was a strict, severe old man of whom we children were afraid. Mrs Chappel, his wife, was a really lovely lady. She always made a great fuss of us, giving us lovely cakes and sweets. I remember her very well.

Sir Sydney and Lady Byas owned Llandough castle. I think that there were about forty outdoor and indoor staff employed there. There were about five grooms, three gamekeepers, and the rest were employed as maintenance and indoor staff. The castle had its own cricket team, made up of members of the staff. They played on a well mowed and properly laid pitch near the hunt stables. On Saturday afternoons during the summer, one team would bat first then they would have tea before the other team had a turn at batting. Tom and I, together with a few other children, would always go to watch, and quite often we would keep score for them, using the makeshift score board. The tea was laid out on two long trestle tables by the stable. It was lovely food, cream cakes, and beautiful sandwiches, all from the castle. After tea, when the players were all back on the field, we would watch Mrs Chappel like hawks. When she raised her arm and beckoned to us we would all rush to her and sit down to eat what was left. We had such wonderful food there, things that we could never have at home. It was always a great day when the Llandough Castle cricket team played at home!



## REMEMBRANCE

Although the years have passed and I am now on the wrong side of eighty years old, I have never forgotten my early years in Llanbleddian. It was a hard time to bring up such a large family, but myself, and all my brothers and sisters knew how very fortunate we were to be blessed with such hardworking honest and caring parents. To them the family was everything! They led by example and taught us all to be kind, honest and hardworking. I was so lucky to have had such wonderful parents and to have grown up in such a special environment.

I will always be grateful.

**Thomas David Jenkins**

Father

**Ada Jenkins (nee Johns)**

Mother

*Children in order of age*

Ada Jenkins

William Jenkins

Ernest Jenkins

Rachel Jenkins

Richard Jenkins

John Jenkins

Rebecca Jenkins

Mary Jenkins

*Died in infancy*

Thomas Jenkins

Dora Gwendoline Jenkins

Margaret (Peggy) Jenkins

George Jenkins

*Died in infancy*

Bertram Jenkins



## AFTER

I left home in Llanbleddian a postman in the Post Office until 1936 when I joined the Royal Engineers, (The

The Post Office allowed us each year with full pay to Bovisand Plymouth and camped in Angle at the Haven. After that I did not Office as war was declared The time from then until the a quite different story when very short time.



*On an army training course in Gosport, Hants. 1938*

when I started work as in Barry. I lodged there Glamorgan Fortress Territorials).

two weeks extra leave attend camps at during August 1939 we entrance of Milford return to the Post on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1939. war ended in 1946 tells I grew to manhood in a









*Bert Jenkins, a messenger boy  
for the Royal Mail*



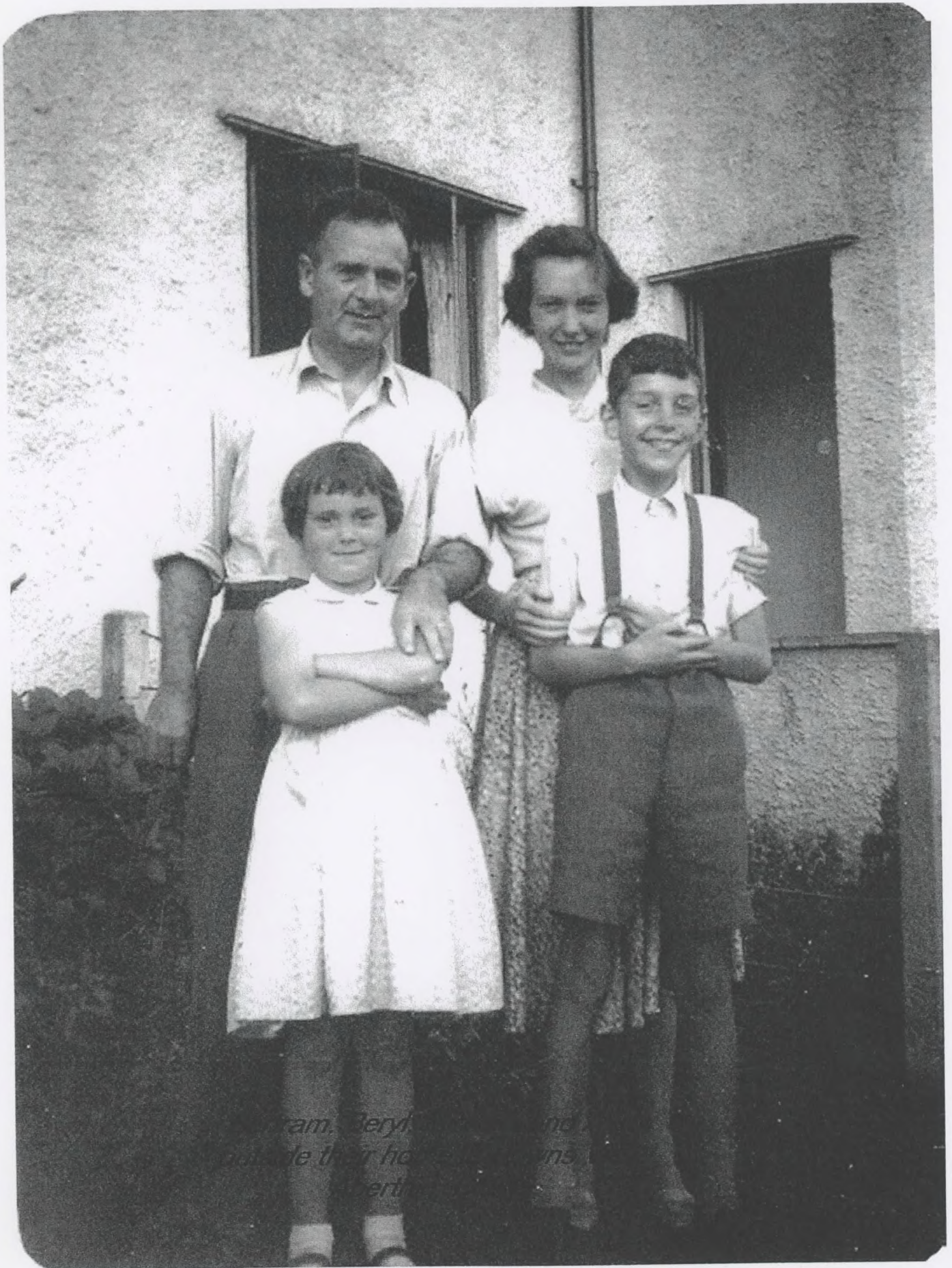


*Ataka, Suez*  
*1941*









Gram, Jerry and  
the three boys  
at their home



*Descendants of Bertram Jenkins*

Bertram Jenkins  
Born: June 6, 1918  
in Llanbleddian,  
Cowbridge.

Beryl John  
Born: May 15, 1926  
in Penylan, near  
Cowbridge

Children

Michael John Jenkins  
Born: April 11, 1949  
in Barry, Glamorgan

Susan Mary Jones  
Born: March 5, 1950  
in East Glam Hospital,  
Church Village,  
Glamorgan

Anne Elizabeth Jenkins  
Born: March 9, 1952

Ted Clarke  
Born: October 7  
1943

Grandchildren

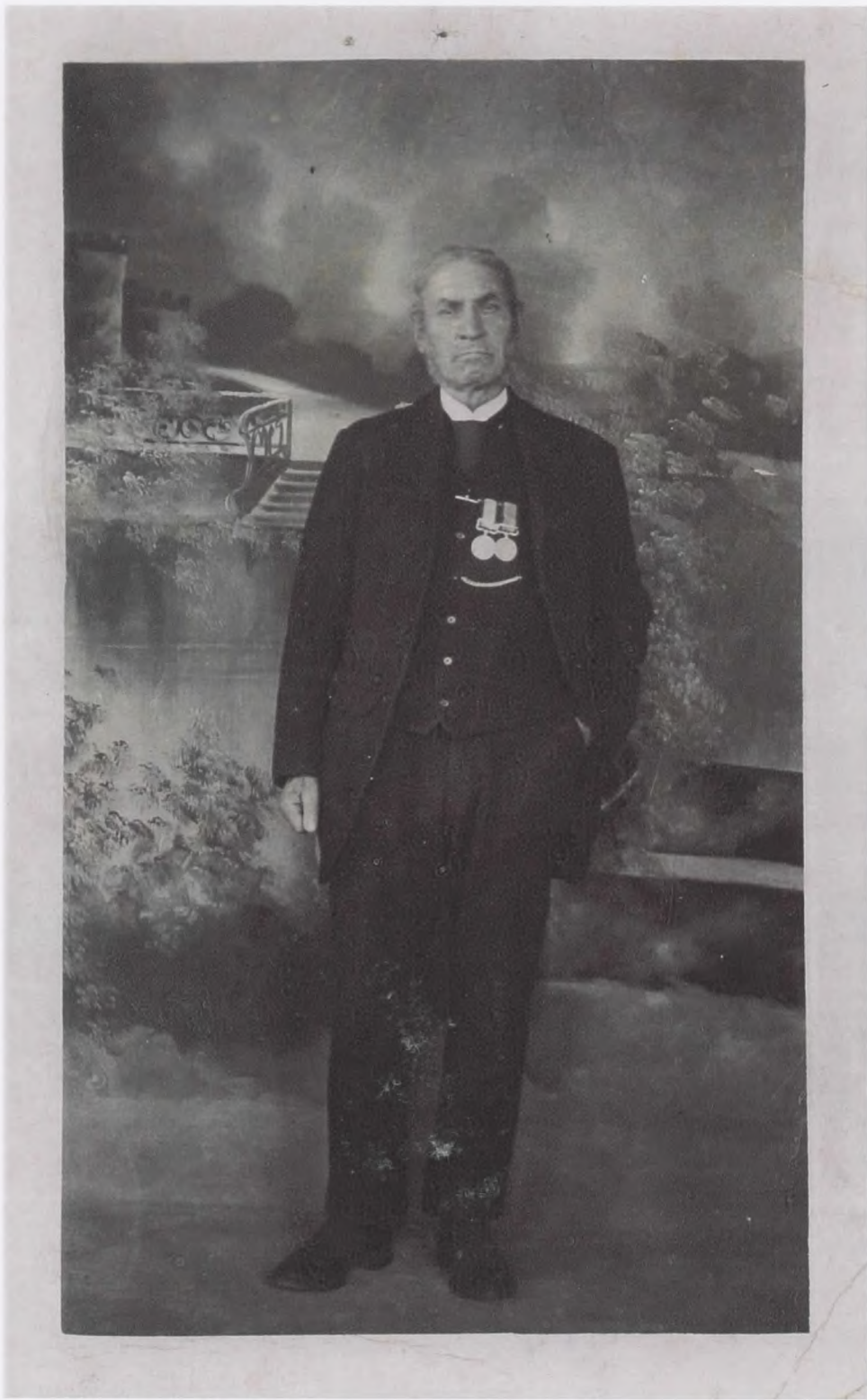
Simon John Jenkins  
Born: November 13,  
1974  
in St Tydfil's Hospital,  
Merthyr Tydfil

Hannah Susan Jenkins  
Born: February 22, 1977  
in St Tydfil's Hospital,  
Merthyr Tydfil

Nerys Clarke  
Born: February 12, 1978  
at Bridgend  
General Hospital

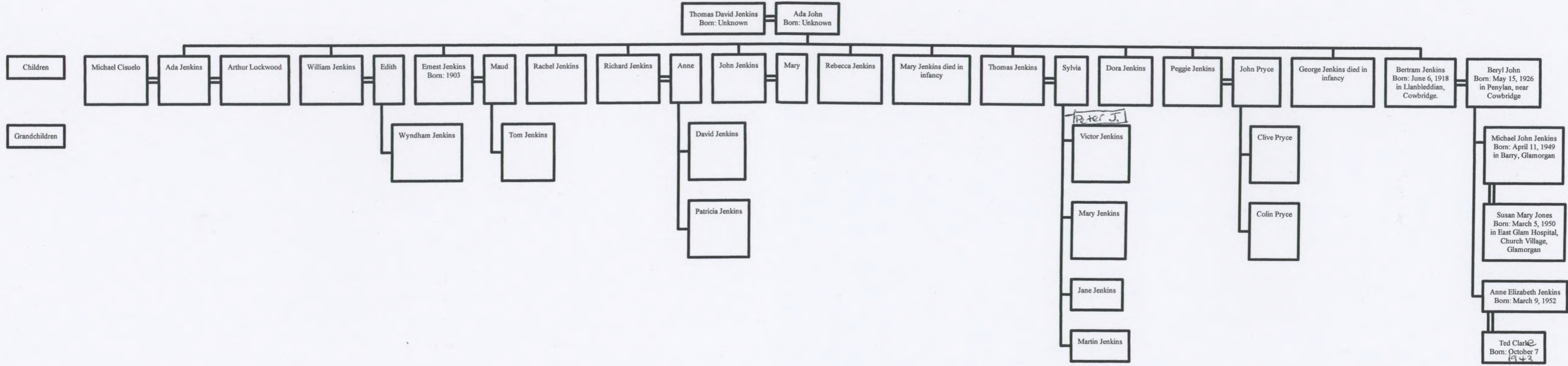
Rhodri Clarke  
Born: July 20, 1980  
at Bridgend  
General Hospital







Descendants of Thomas David Jenkins





## **Memories of Bert Jenkins, Llanblethian & Cowbridge**

I was born on 4<sup>th</sup> June 1918 at 3 Greenfield Terrace, Llanbleddian, the thirteenth and youngest child of Ada and Thomas Jenkins. The nurse present at my birth was Nurse Rymer, and she was asked by my mother to choose a name for me, as she had run out of ideas! The nurse suggested 'Bertram', after a cottage owned by her brother (in the Indian Army) in Simla, called 'Bertram Cottage'.

There were 7 boys and 6 girls in the family, two of whom, Mary and George, died in childhood before I was born, and were buried in Llanbleddian churchyard. My mother was Ada John from Llanharry, and father was Thomas David Jenkins (1872-1932) from Cowbridge. They were married in Bridgend, and my father worked as a groom in the Hunt Stables at Llandough. My grandfather, William Richard Jenkins (1831-1917), was originally from Pembrokeshire and had been a regular soldier with the 23<sup>rd</sup> Regiment of Foot (Cowbridge Volunteers), later the Royal Welsh Fusiliers. He served in the Crimean War (1854-6) with the Cowbridge Volunteers. My grandmother, Rebecca (1840-1924), known to everyone as 'Granny Jenkins', and grandfather, lived in Church Street. He was the verger and 'Granny' cleaned the church.

Nurse Rymer was a very small lady, always prim and proper in her uniform, and always with a white bonnet. She went on her visits in a donkey cart. She kept the the donkey originally in what is now the children's playground, but later she owned a shed on what is now the school cricket field. When she eventually retired she kept a tea shop in Eastgate, called 'Maudie's café'. Maudie was her sister-in-law.

My schooldays were very happy. I started going to school at about 2 ½ years old, but only on washdays. I remember my first proper day at the Council School on Broadway. Miss Rees was the teacher. Later on we were taught by Miss Aubrey, Miss Parker and Miss Thomas. In Standard III and Standard IV we were taught by two ex-servicemen from World War I, Mr Frederick and Mr Roberts. The cane was used a good deal in those days. The top class was taught by the headmaster, Mr Sloman. We did not stay in the classroom all the time. We learned gardening and we often went on nature walks. We were also taught to swim in the swimming baths at the rear of the Town Hall.

I passed the 11+ examination, and was allocated a place at the Grammar School, but my parents could not afford to send me there, and they were too proud to apply for a grant from the council. In my last year at school, I remember Lady Franklen from St Hilary visiting the school. She was a governor, and we all had to stand up when she came in.

I left school in 1932 at the age of 14. I had already done some relief work to allow one of the telegram boys to play cricket, and a full-time job came up as a telegram (or messenger) boy two weeks before I was due to leave school. Mr Sloman, the headmaster, marked me sick for the last two weeks of school so that I could take the job. So I became a Telegram Boy for the GPO, for the area covered by Pendoylan through Llantrithyd to Llandow. There was an average of 300 telegrams a week coming through Cowbridge, and my hours of work were 9.30am to 1.15pm and 2pm to 7.30pm, Monday to Saturday, and 9am to 10.30am on a Sunday. My wages were 9/3d (47p), with 6d (2½d) for Sunday. This was poor even in those days. Our uniform was almost military, with a pill-box hat and a navy-blue jacket and trousers; the buttons of the jacket had to



be shining, and the trousers had to have sharp creases in them. We were inspected by the Post Master.

At about this time I remember Mr Evans of Bridge House in the High Street, who worked in the National Bank, teaching us boys how to tickle trout in the river. There were otters in the river at this time.

I always used to try to go to the cinema on a Saturday night. Joyce Sanders (now Joyce Tonkin) in the ticket office would always keep me a seat on the end of the back row, and if a telegram came in she would get me to go off to deliver it. The Post Office cleaner was Mary Shepherd, whose daughter Lucy was a telephonist. She lived next door to the Post Office and I remember she always made some very good wine!

I remember one Friday evening in January 1934 in particular. At 7.29pm a telegram came in for Brynawel, Llangan. It was snowing hard. I had to go off and deliver it, with only an oil lamp on my bicycle. I complained to Mary Shepherd about having to go, so she gave me two or three glasses of elderberry wine, which made me quite merry before I started. I rode to Brynawel as fast as I could, and there the lady of the house gave me some parsnip wine! I struggled home to Llanbleddian through deep snow. My mother and father were only shapes as I staggered through the door. I went straight to bed, somewhat the worse for my first experience of drink. Mary Shepherd had told me that it would warm me up!

In 1936, I went to Barry, having received a Royal Appointment as a postman. My wages were now 28/- a week (£1.40), £1 going for lodgings. Tom Davies, the Union secretary, got me an extra 2/- for lodging. In 1937, I became a driver, with an extra 5/- a week. I joined the Royal Engineers (TA) in 1937, and we were mobilised in 1939 on the outbreak of war as a Coastal Defence Regiment. In January 1941 we were sent to the Suez Canal and then the Western Desert. In January 1944 we came home, landing in Liverpool. On 7th June, the day after D-Day, we landed on Sword Beach in Normandy, where we were mainly employed on bridge-building. We crossed the Rhine in March, and at the end of the war in May 1945 I was in Bremen.

I was demobilised in February 1946, with seven weeks' leave, and in March 1946 I re-started in the Post Office. Prior to this, on VJ Day (15<sup>th</sup> August, 1945) in Cowbridge I met a friend, Graham Thomas. We went to the Railway Inn and then joined in all the street parties on the way into town. We met some girls near the Horse and Groom, and I noticed a nice girl sitting on the Town Hall steps. She promised to meet me at the dance in the Town Hall that night (as long as I was not drunk!). I took her home to meet the family that night, and we married on 18<sup>th</sup> March 1948, at Llansannor Church. She was Beryl John from Aberthin, and I always called her 'my VJ Girl'.

From 1948 to 1952, we lived in Barry. I returned to Cowbridge in 1952, and we lived in Aberthin. We had two children, Anne and Michael. I worked as a postman in Cowbridge until 1966, when I was promoted to Postman Higher Grade in charge of the sorting office. In those days there were five collections a day in Cowbridge, and all the sorting was done by hand.

I retired in 1976, after a heart operation. My wife, Beryl, died in 1984, and I moved to Porthcawl in 1999 to be nearer my daughter Anne.

*Bert Jenkins – as recorded by Don Gerrard 31/10/2001  
CHS newsletter no 47, December 2001*



**Bert Jenkins** – interview at his Porthcawl home in 2009

**Bontfaen School** – Miss Rees was head of the infants,

First class was taught by Miss Aubrey.

Standard 1 had Miss Parker and Dolly Conway (two classes held together)

Dolly Conway (Mrs) was originally Dolly Williams (Chris Williams's sister) and at that time was living in 3 Croft Street.

Standard 2 had Gwynneth Thomas who was rather a sergeant major. She was very lame, probably had a false leg, after a motor bike accident with one of the sons (Neil or Alan) of Dai Brown the printer. She lived in Glen Cottage, Eastgate, and was the daughter of the 'relieving officer' who gave out money to poor schoolchildren.

Standard 3 had Mr Frederick, son of the farmer at Court Farm, Aberthin. A wonderful teacher. An ex-serviceman of World War 1.

Standard 4 and 5 – same room – Mr Roberts was the teacher, very strict, used the cane.

Bert went to the school at the age of three. He walked there with Harry Thomas of Beechcourt, Broadway, and Bert's sister Becky (12) and brother Dick (13). Mr Owen Phillips of The Cairns, Llanblethian taught Standard 5 then, before Mr Roberts, and he realised Bert's mother was struggling with her large family (11 children in their cottage in Greenfield Terrace), so he said Bert could go into his class and sit with his brother Dick. This worked well until Bert was 5, then he went into the first year of the infants.

Mr Sloman was the headmaster and took the top class. He lived in the house adjoining the school. His wife was an invalid, spending most of her time in bed. Three or four of the boys (including Bert) used to go and sing to her in bed on Wednesdays. She was a lovely woman; she would give them an orange each.

Children usually stayed in the school until 14 years of age. Bert took a Saturday job as a telegram boy when he was in the top class, then was offered a job with Cowbridge Post Office. The postmaster negotiated with Mr Sloman for Bert to finish school two weeks early (he pleaded he was sick) at age 14 so he could start this work. He had passes for the grammar school his mother was too proud to apply for charity for him to go. All the Jameses went to the grammar school as they got charity help.

Bert's grandmother, Mrs Jenkins, lived in Church Street, the cottage now numbered 6. She held the grammar school boarders' pocket money for them and dished it out as they needed it.

In Piccadilly, the first cottage after the baptist chapel, was 'Darky' Summers. He used to go poaching and had a double-barrelled gun. His wife smoked a pipe and wore a 'Dai' cap. Darky would sweep the chimney by shooting his gun up it. You could go into any cottage and warm yourself by the fire.



Next door was Fred Chissell, a year older than Bert. They met up whilst serving in the army (Tobruk and Cairo) in 1942, and both were on leave (the only leave in three years). The journey to Cairo was by lorry and train. That night leave was stopped. Fred had been taken prisoner.

Next door again was Mrs Boobyer. Her son was in the Scottish Regiment and dressed in a kilt.

The Jameses were in Hillside. Oswald James worked in the post office with Bert. His sister Mary was head of Llandow (airfield), married a farmer and became a Nugent. Frank James was the one who sat next to Bert, at the same desk, in the top class in primary school and they did each other's work, Frank being good at maths and Bert at English.

Dulcie Thomas married Ralph James. She died young with diphtheria. She was a relative of Johnny the bakehouse in Llanblethian.

Goats were kept on Llanblethian Hill. The Jameses there won all the steeplechases, running all round the hill, through drinking goats milk.

They were hard times in Llanblethian, but it was a wonderful environment for growing up.

Mr and Mrs Williams lived in Greenfield, Llanblethian. Mr Williams was a stern iold man. Bert collected the family's milk at Kingscombe Farm and always fetched a pint for Mrs Williams.

Bert's family were given use of a part of Greenfield's garden (where the bungalow now stands) for growing vegetables. They got their meat from Billy David.

### **Cowbridge Post Office, Eastgate :**

Bert had a shilling every Saturday as a telegram boy. In 1932 he started his full-time job for the post office. Uniform and boots were provided.

Mr Hidon was the postmaster then. A smashing bloke. He wanted the telegram boys to sit an exam at the age of 16, so Bert went to Cardiff for that. Then at 18, you either went on the telephone side or the postal side in the office. The telegram boy's job was very hard. The office changed over to automatic (there were only two places in Britain doing that at that time, and one was Cowbridge). The Mayor (Mr Yorwerth) came and pulled out the plugs as a closing ceremony for the old system. Lucy Shepherd worked in the office with Bert.



At the age of 21, Bert went into the army, serving with the Desert Rats. In 1936/7 he went to work for the Post Office in Barry, and joined the Territorials. (There was an Irish clerk on the counter in Cowbridge). He was also involved in coastal defence on Royal Artillery and searchlights. He knew all those who were drowned in the Mumbles lifeboat disaster.

In 1929 (?), Lloyd George came to Cowbridge and was given the Freedom of the Borough. Bert and others sang to him in Welsh at the dinner in the Pavilion, Eastgate.

The Glamorgan Yeomanry used to drill in what is now Filco car park. Also, the Maddox bus was kept there (the first bus from Cowbridge to Cardiff). Maddox had a fish and chip shop in Eastgate, where the bookshop is now.

Bert lent me for copying a bus ticket for post-war travel, a programme for the Cowbridge swimming baths, and a ticket his grandmother had given him for the Westgate turnpike.

*Interviewed by Betty Alden & Luke Millar. Typed by B Alden June 22<sup>nd</sup> 2009*