# REMINISCENCES OF LIFE IN THE GARW VALLEY

*This document is an anonymous account of life in the Garw Valley at the peak of coal mining discovered in the digital archive of the Schools and Communities Agenda 21 Network. It was a contribution of a resident/residents of the Garw Valley as part of a training scheme funded by the Manpower Services Commission. The aim was to develop a sense of place to support local economic regeneration of communities in the South Wales Coalfield. This was in the early 1980s and coincident with the reconstruction and reclamation of the Bryngarw Estate to establish a country park.*

# INTRODUCTION

During the mid l9th century,the Garw valley consisted of just a small number of isolated farmhouses and with livestock far outnumbering the human inhabitants. The valley floor at this time was heavily wooded, deer roamed the hills and the unpolluted river was full of large salmon. However, once the pits had been sunk and the coal industry began to flourish there was a large influx of miners and their families in search of work. These people came mainly from the South West of England and North Wales, as well as from the surrounding valley areas and formed a crowded heterogeneous community.

# BEGINNINGS

"My own parents actually came from Treorchy and were supposed to have walked to the top of the mountain, looked at the valley and said 'This is for us'

The North Walians were a race apart to the indigenous South Wales men, their thick guttural speech made it almost impossible for them to be understood. The people from Somerset and Dorset brought with them their own English accents and customs, but the Cornish accent had some similarities with that of the Welsh and as fellow Celts they felt more at home. In the main, they mixed very well with their Welsh counterparts and developed the spirit which was necessary to be able to work together in the appalling conditions down the pit.

Not everyone was taken by the valley when they first arrived. The cramped unhygienic living conditions and the primitive life-style was not to everyone's taste, but even these people soon obtained a growing affection for the place.

"In 1904 a young, discontented cabinet maker with 2 years service in South Africa during the Boer War, stepped off the train at Bridgend and because there was no service for a few hours, walked along the river bank to Pontycymmer. He was to become the village postman and my father. In 1906, he brought a young bride from her home in Cardiff. She was reluctant to stay but came on the promise that in 2 years he would make a move back to the bright lights. The stay lasted sixty-eight years."

The emergence of the coal industry in the valley was initially a direct result of the iron masters search for the raw materials that were needed for the iron-making process. One of the earliest drift mines was established at Shwt, near Bettws, a name derived from the English 'chute'. This was a contrivance used for shooting the coal into the trucks which waited below on the line and which waited below on the line and which transported the coal to a dock at Porthcawl.

The first development in the valley was the open-cast at Llangeinor and later Garw Fechan (Little Garw) on the North and South sides of the valley. Tunnels were driven into the hills and cumbersome wooden trams were used to carry away the spoil. Some of these trams were kept in the old workings higher up on the South side, where they remain to this day, waiting to be rediscovered under the grassed-over tip. The trams were drawn by horses down the road, just above the 'Braichy', to a chute, where the coal was loaded into trucks and then taken down the valley on the descending train.

On the other side, below the main road and directly opposite this track, were the remains of the first pit shaft in the valley. This pit was subjected to an explosion of gas in August 1899 which brought production of coal to an abrupt end. The remains of the head gear and out-buildings were in site for many years afterwards, but have now been removed, leaving a cleared side, as empty as the Ffaldau Square with the removal of the old gear.

One portion of the colliery remained for a longer period, it was called the Stack and was a stone and brick structure on the edge of the road. It served as a landmark for several generations, as a bus stop and more especially as a 'distance' objective. All the people out walking in Pontycymmer on fine days, holidays and Sundays after chapel, were invariably heading 'down to the Stack'. On Sundays in particular, dozens of groups, pairs and singles would walk to it . There was not much else to do on a Sunday. The Stack, therefore, became a well known place and a Sunday walk customary, like a siesta or recollection of the days happenings on a Greek Island. A memory of a more gentle and civilized time.

The Stack itself was the end of a chimney which ran along the side of the bank until it reached the road and then up to about ten or fifteen feet. Out of it came all the stinks, gasses and steam. As an upcast, it was a necessary adjunct to the running of the colliery, but what it did for the people is not recorded.

Another half a mile up the valley on the right hand side a drift mine was established which became known as the 'Duchy'. The mine went straight into the mountain just below the old peoples' home in Cuckoo Street (Anglicized from the Welsh 'Pant-y-Gog'). The mine is on lands held, I think, by the Monarch's son, who has about as much right to own it as I have to own Buckingham Palace. The then owner of the drift also started another level right on top of the mountain above Gloucester Buildings, following which he arranged for a tram road to be brought around the hill to the Duchy Drift.

During the period of the development of the mines, the immigration process was relentless and large numbers of people crowded into the small valley.

"My first memory is moving from the Rhondda Valley, from Trehafod, over to the Garw in 1920, when I was just 5 years old. There was little transport apart from the horse and cart at the time, but my family were fortunate enough to travel over in an old T. Ford converted into a flat-backed lorry, run by a Mr. Jack Morris. The journey seemed to take hours and I remember well riding in the front seat with my mother. We had only a few sticks of furniture, nobody had much of anything in those days since people were moving all the time. There were more rented apartments than privately owned houses at that time and in each house

there would be two or three families who shared all the facilities. We shared our house with one other family and we paid half the money, which came to 5 shillings a week in old money (25p). Our first new house was in Victoria Street, an apartment where we stayed for 6 months. We then moved to another apartment in Upper Adare Street where we stayed for 4 years, following which we moved to 5 different houses in roughly the same period of time.

In some houses there were cellar rooms underneath the road, or first floor storeys, which also housed families. By today's standards the families were quite large, with five or six children being quite common. We had seven, counting our parents, but since we shared with a mother and father with only one son, we were not too crowded. Having fourteen people in one house was not unusual and was accepted as the normal run of things. Everyone lived at peace with each other in relative harmony, the reason being that nobody had anything and so there was no need for envy or jealousy. If anyone had more than the other we shared it. Looking back it was the poverty that brought us closer together, expectations were much less and if you did have something you shared it, a custom which has died out of late."

The houses were constructed in long terraced streets which were hacked out of the steep hillsides. The stone used was obtained from a number of quarries, specifically placed for easy access in conveying the stone in horse-drawn carts to the building sites. The Welsh word for stone is 'carreg' and this is why the west side of the valley is known as the 'Garreg' side, for it is there that the stone was hewn from the hillsides. These quarries can still be seen today and they clearly show how clever the builders were, using a skilled economy of means. The majority of the buildings used dressed stone which was worked on site, but occasionally more expensive bricks were used, being obtained from the brickworks at Bryncethin and Tondu and brought up the valley by horse-drawn cart or rail.

Many of the houses contained 2 storeys in the front and 3 storeys at the back, with the older properties having steps at both the front and back. The toilets were located outside and many streets had no back lane in which to receive the deliveries of coal. These buildings were the result of primitive planning, being mostly 3 up and 2 down, containing a small scullery. Some had tiny gardens in the front, but most had gardens at the back.

Oxford Street was a good example  of this with most of the shops having been converted from dwelling houses. Many were enlarged as business increased, but generally there was no uniformity of design and material used.

One notable house builder was William Tennant, who was also headmaster of Ffaldau Boys School, another was David Evans who was better known as an ironmonger. David Evans built Wood Street, long since demolished, Park Street and a number of other private dwellings and garages etc.

"I worked in the shop for a while and found it to be very interesting. At this time he was doing house repairs and I was glad when I was offered a job labouring with him. He was as strong as an ox and maybe I exaggerate when I say that he had the strength of ten men. Unfortunately for me, for I am no Hercules, he must have thought that every other man must be the same. He drove himself to the limit, so I couldn't hang about either."

Some of the streets that were built at this time now no longer exist, such as Temperance Terrace which led from High Street to Lower Church Street and Windsor Terrace, which was situated near Cuckoo Street in Pant-y-gog and Wood Street, which was situated behind Park Street in Pontycymmer. Another such row of houses was 'Mutton Tump', which was, in fact, part of Victoria and extended from Ffaldau Pit Head Baths up to the premises of Flextank.

"Now stretch your imagination, remove the Rugby Club, the new Police Station, the children's nursery school and Flextank and in their place substitute a row of houses complete with one or two shops at the bottom end, the houses being similar in construction to those now to be seen on the opposite side of the road. Behind the houses was a rising 'tip' of spoil from the colliery and it was a strange experience to enter Mr. Hunt's Butchers Shop and have to walk uphill to the far end."

“Half the 'tump' has disappeared now and with it the notion that this area was to be avoided at all costs. The remaining 'other side' over the years, lived down this reputation and we now see a row of well-kept houses."

(The reason the 'tump' was demolished was subsidence, a menace that plagued the valley in the past.)

## LIGHTING

There was no street lighting of any description during the early days, people had to carry their own lamps with them when they made the usually treacherous traipse along the dark and often muddy streets. House lighting at this time was mainly provided by candles, fixed in brass candlesticks, which were a feature in many houses on the mantlepiece and today some are valuable antiques. These were later superseded by oil lamps and hurricane lamps. The oil used was candlesand oil which was sold by the ironmongers at a cheap rate.

It was brought from Bridgend in horse-drawn tankers and in later years by large motorized tankers carrying a few hundred gallons each. Local dealers would then go through the valley selling this fuel from door to door, using horsedrawn carts.

When street lighting was finally introduced, it was oil lamps that provided the light. There were lamp posts situated all along Oxford Street and at street junctions and in winter the lampman made daily visits, trimming the wicks and refilling the lamps.

"Shoni Peet, the local lampman, was a well learned man with a unique sense of humour. One day I was playing around the old oil lamp post at Sweet Wells with a number of other boys, when along came Mr. Williams with his ladder and oil etc. As we watched him put the ladder against the post and climb up to light the lamp, one of the boys inquired, 'Mr. Williams, why have you got a light here?' Mr. Williams slowly climbed down, he looked at his

questioner first, then the rest of us and said, 'Did you hear that? Now I will tell you, how would you know there was a lamp post there if I hadn't put a light on it?'.

The introduction of gas lighting was a revelation in more sense than one. The gas was supplied by the 'Garw and Ogmore Gas Company' whose furnaces were powered by coal from their own coal seam which was found in the workings behind the municipal baths in Pantygog. The company building itself was situated in the vicinity of the old Co-op yard and the first public gas lamps were sited nearby, at New Street and Gloucester Buildings. By-products such as coke and tar were also produced by the company and were sold for local use.

"I remember as a boy going down there to collect tar in buckets for use around the shop and house. The gas was stored in two huge gasometers, each with their own water filled pit, which rose and fell with the change in pressure as the gas was withdrawn, with the weight of the upper tank apparatus providing this pressure."

Pipes were gradually laid under most of the streets and connections were made to various homes. First, gas mantles and fittings were connected and later gas fires. The lighter would light the street lamps every evening at dusk and would put them out every morning at dawn. These lamps provided boys with ideal play spots, with pools of light around the lamp posts. Some of the youngsters would even climb up and swing on the shoulders of the lamp. Gas was a great improvement on oil lamps since it provided a soft light.

In the 1920's the first electricity poles were erected in the Garw, having been dragged up the valley by horses. In spite of this, every house retained one or two oil lamps in case of the electricity failing and 'Harriet the Oil' of Bridgend Road, who came from a well-known circus family, still came around in a horse and cart selling paraffin.

"At one time, we had gas and electricity in our Garw homes. The gas fittings had become more or less ornaments that we looked upon rather than used, for modern electricity was brighter and had won the day.

I felt sorry for little Nichols the gasman for he could find very little money in the gas meter when he called. Mam used to say that we must put some money in the meter, not only to make Nichols feel better, but because we all had the feeling that if we didn't, our gas system would be taken away.

There was another reason for retaining it, sometimes in bad weather the electric power would fail and it was nice to turn the gas on, with its comforting hiss and its mantle burning bright.

I don't know how much was collected from then on but I doubt whether the

collector staggered under the weight of our contribution. Mr. Nichols called one day and told us he was taking the meter away to be repaired. That must have been 55 years or more ago and he has never brought it back. I'm sure that we laughed and forgave him, but somehow we had lost a friend."

Electricity came to the collieries first, each generating its own power. This was followed by the Rink and Public Hall which generated their own power using oil driven dynamos on direct current. The transformation from one source to another was rapid, from house lighting to wireless and torches and eventually the entire valley was supplied by electricity from the great span above Blaengarw.

"If you've got your glasses on, look up Carn mountain. If you trace the ridge on the right you will notice a small flat piece of ground which is slightly rounded now by the shape of the trees. On that once flat piece of ground a pylon was built with another on the opposite mountain and from it hung the second largest span of wires in the world. (I was told the largest one was in America). I walked that ridge a few times before the trees were planted andI used to stand near the pylon. It used to thrill me to look at those wires hanging in a great loop, sweeping downwards and up to the other mountain. I used to go there sometimes when I was feeling low and the sight of it and the skill of the men who put it up would cheer me up. I would soon feel so elated that I felt there wasn't anything that I would fear to attempt. It was nice that even in the bottom of our valley that we can still look up for inspiration. The Psalmist was right when he said 'I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills from whence cometh my help, for my help cometh from the Lord, the creator, the one who gives strength to us all."

# EVAN LLANDOVERY

Because so many of the newcomers to the valley had similar names, there was an extensive use of nicknames to distinguish between one 'Dai Jones' and another. Sometimes a person's shape, appearance, work or residence was sufficient to warrant a 'non-de-plume' such as 'Harry Fat Lad', 'James Top House' and 'Sam the Post', but more commonly used were the places where people came from, which often took over from the surname. For example, Evan Evans from Pembrey became Evan Pembrey, David Thomas from Penclawdd became Dai Penclawdd and Evan Richards of Llandovery became known throughout the valley as Evan Llandovery.

"Evan was an innocent 'loner' who lived in his own thoughts and ideas. Walking down the street he used to impersonate a steam engine, or gaze up at the sky for no apparent reason, or go down on his knees and measure the width of a road. "He continued throughout his lonely existence as a figure of fun to many but a lovable character to a few."

“We, as boys, told each other that he had once been a jockey, he was small enough anyway and that a plate had been fitted into his unfortunate head, which accounted for his eccentric behaviour, (of course we did not use that word for it)."

"The clothes he used to wear were certainly not 'the in thing' and as a matter of fact, he looked as though he had taken them from the nearest scarecrow. He was a wiry man, pitifully thin, but in his old age he remained remarkably fit."

"He worked for many years at the Ffaldau Colliery and some of the stories told of him are, to say the least, very strange. He also attended Noddfa Chapel for many years, sitting alone in the gallery at every service. When the time to sing arrived, he would stand up with the rest of congregation, not uttering a word, but keeping time with the music by beating his crooked fingers on top of the seat in front of him.

After leaving the colliery, he became much more lively in his reactions. During the later years of his life he followed the coal carts to their several destinations in the 'well-off' sector of the area and 'carried in the coal' for his customers, receiving in exchange, money, clothes, boots, hats etc. The resulting 'Evan' was dressed as incongruously as his actions.

When the cart had dumped the coal in the roadway, Evan would set to work carrying the large, heavy lumps up the steps of houses where there were no back lanes and through the houses themselves. He would then build up a wall of coal and then bucket the remainder, including the small coal behind his wall.

As you can imagine, coal is brittle and however hard one tries, it can fall in the passageway or rooms of the houses as it breaks in your hands or spills over from buckets that too full. And as you come in with the next lot, perhaps you might tread on this loose stuff which would crunch underneath your feet to the despair of some housewives, whose main concern was to see the coal in and get to work to clean up the house. In as way, you could say that Evan was his own boss and no-one could hurry him.

Although Evan was quiet and polite, only a few people realized that he had a deeper side. Some tried to be clever with him, but were surprised to learn that he knew his Bible and that he possessed a rare sense of humour. One day whilst working on scaffolding, the weather was truly bitter, with the wind that whipped up Alexandria Road, making us feel sorry for ourselves, we heard Evan's cheerful voice saying, 'Hello boys, what a lovely day.' When we questioned him about his statement, like a flash he repliedj 'But it is a lovely day for the time of year."

When Evan Llandovery died he was awarded a funeral worthy of the most respected of the valley.

"Evan is once reputed to have said:

'As long as you can breathe,
As long as you can hear,

As long as you can walk about,
Every day is a lovely day.'

I have lived long enough to realize how true these words of Evan Llandovery were."

Following his death, a poem was written about Evan by a Mr. Arthur Jones (Llandyssul). The poem was originally written in Welsh and it loses a certain impact in its translation into English.

A STRANGE CHARACTER

World famous persons like Elfed,
Each has to die when called,
Well, here's one totally different,
A man we shall always recall.

A strange person was Evan Llandovery,
A special character was he,
Today he lies sleeping peacefully,
In a coffin and a grave earth-y.

Evan at all times was ragged,
His appearance was truly a sad sight,
for all that - he was ever out,
In all weathers, were it wet cold or bright.

Everyone in the valley knew him,
Children and adults alike,
Evan was so entertaining with his nonsense,
You never saw smarter day or night.

Evan was always acting,
On the Square or the streets around,
Sometimes he would be walking quickly,
Or lying stiff like a corpse on the ground.

But when he heard the sound of traffic,
Evan was smartly on his feet,
Looking truly like a bogey,
In the midst of dirt, mud and sleet.

Before conveying his body from Cwm Garw,
Friends placed a beautiful cross on his bier,
And the choir of his old chapel sang,
To show all their admiration and hon-our (respect).

If one day I can go to Llandovery,
And shall have some time to spare,
I shall try to see the grave of old Evan,
The strangest man who ever lived here.

## TRADE

In the early days, the ever increasing population called for provisions and general services of all kinds. The trade was controlled mostly by the main street, Oxford Street, where there were draper shops, boot and shoe shops, ironmongers, grocers etc., all run by independent family owners, many of whom lived above their shops. Butchers bought and slaughtered their own animals, bakers made their own bread and provision merchants sliced their own bacon and cut cheeses and butter from large blocks of the produce. In the grocers' shops they had to know how to deal with rice, salt, flour, biscuits and other products, all of which were delivered in bulk packaging, bags or sacks.

In the close community all the bread was produced locally, either privately or in one of the number of bakeries which were then known as 'Bake Houses'. There was one in Blaengarw, owned by Tom Williams, a baritone of great reknown, 3 or 4 in Pontycymmer, 2 in Pantygog and one in Lluest. There was Evan Evans on the hill, James the Baker in Meadow Street, the Tutt family in Pantygog and the Thomas family from Lluest, who owned the bakery and confectioner's shop next door to the public hall. These shops later lost a great deal of their custom to the much larger Co-op bakery, which was situated in Meadow Street. Evan Evans' bake house stood at the junction of Meadow Street and Richard Street, the entrance of which was on the hill. This also served as an entrance to the small yard accommodating the horse and cart which Mr. Evans used to deliver the goods sold in his shop at the bottom of the hill. This shop is now being used as an estate agent's office, but the hill is still known to many as 'E.T. Evans' Hill'.

"Many people used these bake houses to bake their own bread and my mother was one of those people, it being my duty to 'Take the bread up to the bake house will you?'. Much later in the day the order was changed to 'Go up and fetch the bread, here's the money and don't forget the change this time.

It was always a grand sight to see the floor of the bakehouse covered with small bread-tins, filled with brown crusted bread, their rounded tops embellished with the many and varied cuts in the form of figures which the owners had made in their dough before baking, as a means of identification. Another way to show ownership was to imprint on the sides of the tin the initials of the owner with the point of a nail. We collected our tins and carried them home, quietly picking off the crusty bits which always seemed to taste much better than the bread underneath.

At Christmas time, the bake houses would also cook turkeys on a large 'Jack', a spit on the fire driven by a clockwork engine which would be wound up and left to turn.

The workings were made of brass with a flat tin underneath to catch the fat and the whole apparatus hooked under the mantle place."

"The Thomas family from Lluest were affectionately known as 'Bara Heddi'. Thomas Bara Heddi had a melodious voice both in speech and song and when he asked his customers on his bread round, 'Do you want bread today?' it is easy to see how he got his name, especially in a valley that was addicted to the use of nick-names, for as he conversed with them, often in Welsh, he would say 'I'chwl moen bara heddi.'"

"He was a first class musician, playing the piano, organ and violin and he joined in the local singing festival each year in the Garw Valley. His great dream he told me, as he walked outside Nazareth Welsh Chapel in Lluest, was to become a cathedral organist. He not only played at Nazareth for their three o'clock service but also at the evening service in the Church of Wales, Pontycymmer. I loved to hear him play and sing. Anyway, as he told me that God had spoken to him and said 'You stay in the place you are' so he opened bakery at Lluest.

He lived at Tylagwyn, where I was once invited to record a musical evening. In between some of the solos he told us stories without realizing that he was being captured on tape.

In one story he told us of the time he met a young lady on the clearways of the arsenal in Bridgend where he had to work during the War. The girl asked him what he did before working in the arsenal and Thomas suggested that she guess. As she giggled, the girl told him that he reminded her of a broken down vicar, to which Thomas replied that she was not very far wrong since he played the organ for him every Sunday.

He had a delightful sense of humour and said as he looked at me as a baby, 'He's got a fine head and I'm sure he's going to be at least a Prime Minister'. Thomas Bara Heddi was a great wit and charm and as I left he told me to keep the tape for posterity.

Many years later his family were overjoyed to hear his voice on tape, which reminds me of the words that though he is dead he still speaks on and was a man whom everyone would be proud to call a friend".

Outside the butchers' shops, meat was hung up for display and curing. Rabbit and peas were on sale for 2/6d and was a favourite with the local people, with chickens, turkey and geese, when they were in season, out in the open air ready to be sold. Two such butchers were the brothers Griffith and William Thomas, relatives of the prestigious family of Thomas Tynton, who set up their individual butchers shops in the latter stages of the 19th Century, one at Pantygog and the other in Oxford Street, Pontycymmer.

At the local ironmongers there would be picks and mandrills for sale, along with hatchets and shot for blasting. They also supplied the miners with the necessary seal-oil for their lamps, since this was not provided by the collieries and neatsfoot oil for their boots. Also for sale was the 'hardy' patent pick, the handle of which was made out of elm and was trimmed down to fit the head. The handle was then driven home using a hammer and an oak wedge and

finally secured by steel quillets. With the patent pick you merely had to knock out the special wedge at the top of the handle.

There were also a number of grocers shops in Oxford Street, such as those of T. P. Jones and Gwen Edwards and two company shops in the shape of 'Star Supply Stores' and 'Peglars Stores'. Other grocers were situated in convenient places throughout the valley such as Hughes of Albany Road, Williams Royal Stores and P. Hunt of Victoria Street, opposite Dr. Parry's house.

The shop fronts were very different from today's with sacks of produce on the pavement, potatoes, swedes etc. Grocer Dai Thomas having seeds in bags, fruit, veg and game, which produced a very colourful display. Then there was Audi's the Italian ice-cream shop, along with Joe Paledri's Cafe, with its ornate Italian coffee machine. The Italian cafe owners mostly came from the Bardi area of Italy and settled in the valley during the boom years with their Bracki's Cafes and their ice-cream such as Sidoli's and Fulgoni's.

Other tradesmen in the valley included Hopkins (Chemist), W. Farmer, Meadow Street (Fruits and Greens), T. Morris, Oxford Street (Greengrocer and Fruiterer), Mrs. Jones (Sandu), Welsh Wool, Stephen Phillips, Oxford Street (Tailor and outfitter), Morgan Hughes, Oxford Street (Draper and Milliner), John Davies, Oxford Street (Printer), Ben Jones (Painter and Ironmonger), Charlie Hills and Sons, (Barber and Tobacconist), T. 0. Morgan, Oxford Street (Boots and Shoes), Mr. Feivin (Cobbler and Boot Repairer), Mr. and Mrs. T. Jones, Wellington House, Oxford Street (Boots and Shoes), Eastman (Butcher), Frank Price, Oxford Street (Boots and Shoes) and Tom Bale, Oxford Street (Grocer, Wines and Spirits).

"I can also remember John Bull's with its large clothes press and steam, which as children we would watch in use. There was also John's 'The Beehive', a greengrocer with a billiard hall next door, now just an empty space".

Richard Davies, otherwise known as 'Dirty Dick', who owned the chemist and newspaper shop next to Tom Bales was a most eccentric character who lived alone.

"Most of the children were scared of him. He wes very tall, with long unkempt hair, dark bushy eyebrows, dark moustache and a beard, he also had dark swarthy skin and dark brown lashing eyes. His shop was as untidy as others were clean and ship-shape. Old unsold newspapers were so piled up behind the counter, that when he came from behind a large fixture containing bottles and jars, he appeared to be hovering over the customers.

The children and adolescents, having heard so many stories about this strange chemist and having seen him in his dirty and untidy shop, with a cheroot between his lips and towering above them, were naturally afraid of him. In later years many people who remembered him as a mysterious, frightening figure, realized that stories and imagination had created in their minds an image far removed from reality. He was a loner without friends, an eccentric who deliberately refused to conform with the rest of the community. He was and still is a part of the history of the Garw."

In the small shops the word and rule of the owners was final and arbitrary. They ordered their assistants as servants, which of course they were. Many of the large shops such as Morgan Hughes, had their assistants living on the premises, their wages being reduced by the cost to the owner of their forced residence.

"Morgan Hughes, who owned a large shop at the bottom end of Oxford Street, was a short man with a long neck. He wore a long winged collar to match his neck and would stand in the centre of his emporium like the aristocrat he was. He would call out when a customer entered his doorway, 'Forward Miss Jones' and send forward a sad Miss Jones, who had been hiding timidly behind the counter. She would stumble forward in the obsequious manner which was common to the shopkeeper's assistant of that era and attend to the need of the customer.

Morgan Hughes lived in Ffaldau House, another example of the domination of the name 'Ffaldau' in the Garw, a house which was itself a centre piece of the houses in the valley."

The individual shopkeepers worked long hours in order to keep up with their trade. There was competition between shopkeepers of similar products and spies sent to discover what the prices in similar shops were. By common consent the well-known shopkeepers were well respected citizens of the Garw, many were deacons of the several denominations in the area.

These individual shops were gradually replaced by the multiple shops such as 'Peglas', 'Home and Colonial', 'Maypole' and the 'Co-operative Society' or 'Cop' whose popularity created serious competition to the small shops. In the Garw, a very numerically strong and influential 'Co-op' society was quickly built up, this in particular proved to be a powerful threat to the well being of the locals. A lot of people had their money in the Co-op and they were intensely loyal. One would walk a mile or so to shop at the Co-op rather than walk a hundred yards to the local grocers.

In spite of the intrusion of multiple shops, the small, independently run shops were never really suppressed and Oxford Street still retains this family business character today .

In addition to the established shops, 'Cheap Jacks' and trading stalls were set up every Friday night behind the Ffaldau Hotel selling everything from fish to 'cure-all' quack medicine at 1/- a bottle which would raise the dead or correct a squint, you name it, they sold it. The stall holders and traders came from outside the valley and would arrive in their pony and traps. 'You could guarantee that 90% of breakfast meals the following morning would be salted fish (the fish being soaked overnight to remove the salt) which was bought the night before at Ffaldau Market. Some fish were the size of small shark and had to be carried home stiff on your shoulders, something which is too expensive to consider these days.

There were certain tradesmen who were essential to trade in the valley. These were the men who supplied the community with its means of transport - horses, carts, wagons, cabs and brakes. They owned several horses of various types and provided cabs for such things as weddings and funerals. The smarter wagons were the buses of their day. Griffith Jones,

builder, undertaker, carpenter, owner of horses, carts and cabs and in particular, made a valuable contribution to the business of carrying people and goods. Coal was also delivered to homes by horse drawn carts. These horses were often needed to haul heavy loads up the steep roads and the coal was either tipped in the back lanes or dumped outside the front doors to be carried through the houses to the coal 'cwtches' out the back. The most notable of these coal merchants was Hallet and Sons, who took many hundreds of tons of coal to homes throughout the valley.These were also 'ash carts' which cleaned the rubbish outside the houses in buckets, bins, old baths etc. and carried them to the tips. Hungry sheep roamed the streets knocking over these containers in search of something to eat as well as scavenging for food on the tips themselves. 'Nothing was safe from the ravages of these marauding sheep. Their ability to jump walls and fences, batter down garden gates and doors was almost legendary'.

A large number of tradesmen possessed their own horses and carts to supply their customers with 'orders' and there were many greengrocers going around the streets shouting out the quality of their wares. There were also the carts of the bakers, fruiterers, butchers, milkmen and with some enterprising salesman actually possessing his own fish and chip cart - horse drawn of course. The latter was probably the most impressive vehicle that appeared regularly on the streets of Pontycymmer and was owned by a Mr. Morgan who lived in High Street. This small caravan-like van was lowcentred, opensided with small wheels and was drawn about the streets by a small pony. One side was half cut-away to allow for a small counter, on this counter was the usual salt-shaker and a bottle of vinegar. At the back was a chip-pan which was heated by a coal fire and which had a pipe sticking out from the roof. In that confined space he cleaned, chipped and cooked his potatoes whilst moving from place to place.

The cries of the owners touting their wares could be heard from street-to-street, 'Fresh Fish', 'Sand-ho, Sand-ho' (to spread on the kitchen floor), 'Skim milk', 'Milk-ho, Milkho'.

Milk was delivered from a small pail, carried by hand to your door and poured into the waiting jug with a pint-and-a-half measure. There was always a way of knowing the quality of the milkman, the best was the one who, when he poured the milk into your jug, would once more take a few drops from the pail and then pour that again into your jug. When his pail was empty, he would return to his patient horse and re-charge the pail with milk from the churn on his dray. The skimmed milk was sold at a low price, very low, because it was the residue from the milk that had been skimmed off as its cream.

Most of the goods that were sold in the valley were brought in by rail and this required great skill from the workers of the large firms who had to package such a variety of goods. There were large barrels of many kinds of 'Oil Linseed Turpentine', 'Seal Oil', large kegs of paint, large panes of glass packed in straw, with breakages being rare occurrences and very large sacks of flour, meal, bran and oats. There were also plywood boxes containing; tea, round boxes of cheese, large sacks of sugar, heavy boxes of bacon and.even live cattle and sheep for the abattoirs. (The railway station had stables for three or four horses, a goods yard and shed and a small platform for unloading the vans). Daily and evening papers, mail bags, pigeon baskets etc., were all brought in the goods van attached to the passenger trains and

such was the trade that the G.W.R. was one of the most important employers of labour in South Wales.

At Christmas time Oxford Street used to come into its own, creating a warm feeling of excitement and festiveness which is not so much in evidence today.

"There seemed to be more fun and atmosphere then, people would look forward to the season of goodwill with greater anticipation, perhaps because the holiday only lasted two days, Christmas Day and Boxing Day. I can remember people taking up their poultry to the local bake houses at eight to be retrieved at twelve, well-done and golden, with a rich aroma that would almost knock you over. There seemed to be more to the festival then, now it is too commercialized. The shops be would open later and full of light, the 'Marie Lloyd' would come around, as would the Salvation Army Band singing carols. There would be private groups of five or six with a lantern on end of a long pole, like a scene out of a Dickensian Christmas. The shops were lit up and were rich with poultry, ready to be taken home, but today there is little atmosphere in comparison. The toys were more substantial and seemed better value, they used to last longer. It was somehow more of a family affair. On Christmas morning, the bands would play whilst marching up and down Oxford Street."

# COMMUNICATION

In the early days, the traffic on the primitive roads comprised of horses, ponies and traps, wagons, carts etc. which had to struggle up the steep slopes. During the winter time the roads became bog-like marshes and the wheels of the carts used to get stuck fast, making travelling almost impossible. The blacksmiths of those days used to be like the garages of today where repairs were made to the vehicles and to the shoes of the horses.

"Of the many craftsmen of my boyhood days, the one who fascinated me most was the blacksmith. There were a few in the village and their workshops were the focus of wondering boys who must have regarded the smiths as very special. Such a man was William Jenkins (Jenkins the Smith y Gaf). His forge was located at the lower end of Oxford Street. Many were the hours spent watching this smith at his work. One day making a garden gate, another day some iron brackets, then a special show when a horse was shod, or an iron tyre fixed on to a cartwheel. On a beam across his workshop hung rows of horse shoes of different sizes, presumably waiting 'regular customers'.

I vividly remember the glowing fires, the rhythmical ringing beat of hammer on anvil, the hissing sound of red hot iron when plunged into water, the pungent smell of smoke filling the workshop when red hot shoes were fitted to the horses hooves. My most pleasant memory ? When I was allowed to work the bellows and see the coals glowing red."

In due course, motor vehicles gradually began to take over and blacksmiths lost their popularity. Even so, horses were used as transport well into the 20th Century and were often seen in the streets late in the evenings, carrying their drunken owners home from the local

pubs. One person remembered taking his mother on rides in their neighbourhood and having great difficulty in controlling the path of the horse as it approached the well-known pubs on the side of the road since it was used to stopping at these places when being ridden by the father.

Eventually, limestoned roads were constructed which made travel far easier and a number of men were employed to keep these roads in good condition.

"There are a number of old characters who stand out in my mind, such as William Thomas (y Felin) of Llangeinor, who in those days, was employed by the local council as a stone breaker. The roads in those days were limestone and his job was to break up the large stone into rubble so they could be pressed into the roadwork by the steamroller. He was short, not more than five feet tall, but what he lacked in stature, he certainly made up for in wisdom. He worked on the Llangeinor to Bettws lane and on our many tramps to the 'City' as we then called Bettws, we would meet him at his work. He would always take this opportunity to lay his small sledge down, rest himself an'd pass the time of day with us. One or other of the boys would draw him out in an argument, there was no doubting his great knowledge.

He was well read and could refer easily to the Classics. I can remember him very well with his long overcoat ."

There was no new road in those days, this was cut out of the hills by striking miners in 1921. There was no excavators, no tractors, only men's muscle, picks and shovels, dynamite and wheelbarrows. The work was hard and dangerous with some miners losing their lives.

"After it was all finished there was a grand opening, flags, councillors coming down in brakes and leading this lot was Llewellyn Jones, the big noise then. They planted trees along the edge of the road at the top of Pandy Hill. The trees are still there but the men who planted them have all gone and left their efforts as a memorial."

The first bus in the valley was the 'Tonypandy Queen' which later became known as the 'Garw Queen', which ran a service between Blaengarw and Pontycymmer. The bus was owned by a Mr. Jones from Blaengarw, the grandfather of Gwyn Jones, the owner of the bus company in Bryncethin. The 'Garw Queen' had all hard tyres and no established picking up places. All you did, wherever you were, was to step out into the road and put your hand up and when you wanted to get off all you had to do was shout 'Stop'.

Mr. Jones' rival bus proprietor was a man by the name of Wally Carpenter, who was, to say the least, a very large gentleman. He owned a fleet of buses and was an entrepreneur and indefatigable worker. He repaired cars, owned a farm, built his own garage and at one time had his own race horses. In his spare time he also played of all things, the violin, which he played as part of a two-person orchestra in the Blaengarw cinema. 'How this huge man managed this small instrument was a source of wonder to many, but manage he did and very well too.'

Dick Griffiths, who owned and drove one of the first charabangs in the Garw, was no relation or no connection to 'His Satanic Majesty', but he was well known to everyone as 'Dick the Devil'. The charabang had no sides, only doors and panels and was so tall that you literally had to climb into it. Then you had to step up, open the door and sit down. You could lean on the side panel which acted like the arm of the chair and when the weather was wet, a canvas hood was drawn over the top and attached to the windscreen. The best 'chariots' had side pieces of celluloid.

"Dick the Devil was not so much a description of his character, though he was a 'devil of a boy' as we used to say, but a reflection of the manner in which he drove his charabang. He threw it about the road, up hill and down dale, with little regard for other road users, be they carts, horsemen, dogs, cycles, cars (although there were not many around in those days) or pedestrians. 'Duw man, he drives like the Devil' was a frequent expression when he was about.

He regularly drove the rugby team to its several destinations during the season. On the steep hills, he deliberately changed gears in a manner that would strike fear into the hearts of the passengers and especially Tommy Wenni of Llangeinor, a great full back, but poor traveller who had become frightened to death of the driver's pranks. Every time Dick played the trick, Tommy shouted to be let off, because he thought the bus would go back down the hill. He would then walk slowly up behind the hill and resume his seat at the top. Tom knew that he was too good a player to be left out of the team or to be left behind on the journey. In the end I am sure that Dick had to stop his little game."

Not long after the Western Welsh buses had been established in the Garw, or perhaps even before, a stranger visiting Pontycymmer as a passenger on the bus would be intrigued by hearing a local asking for a ticket to Penclawdd."As we all know, Penclawdd is where the cockles come from, but it was also the place from Mr. D. Thomas came to run a greengrocer's shop in Oxford Street Pontycymmer. The bus now stops on its return journey opposite the Midland Bank, which was next to where Mr. Thomas had his shop (at this time the Midland Bank was a tailor's shop)."

It was during the 1920's that the first motoring accident occurred in the valley. There were very few cars here then, but a master baker called Allan owned an Austin Swallow.

"On this fateful day, he and four friends were travelling down lower Oxford Street at a rather fast speed, when they came to the bend near the blacksmith's shop their speed was too great to take the bend. As a result, they hit the railings and all five were thrown out against an old traction engine, which was used in the council yard to drive a motor wheel. Three men were killed instantly, while a man by the name of Saunders was taken to his home only fifty yards away, where he died a few hours later. Allan was the only man to survive. I and a number of others rushed to the scene of the accident where we were met by,Sergeant Evans, the police officer in charge of the area. We were asked to form into parties of four to carry the dead men to their homes and our party took a young man, Mathias, to his home in Bridgend Road."

Whilst on the subject, there can be no more important contribution to transport in the valley than that of the Braund family of Lluest. The family originally came from Bryn near Maesteg, but it was Lluest where they eventually settled and set up their homes. Initially, only two brothers came to work in the Garw collieries, they stayed in lodgings during the week and then walked over the mountains back to Bryn at weekends. In time, the two brothers married and settled in the area where they brought up their families.

"Several Braunds remained in the immediate area following in their fathers' and grandfathers' footsteps. There was Bloom, Dewi and Bill. Bill is the present owner and builder of the garage which takes up the most room in the village of three straggling rows of houses known as Lluest. Everyone knows where the garage is, but not many in the area are aware of its history.

Bill Braund still lives opposite the garage which bears his name, but to start with, it consisted of just a smallish repair shop. He started by the huge mass of rock which must have towered over his small shed and when it came time for the business to expand there was no other option but to expand into the rock face itself. Being a man of unflagging energy and sense of purpose, he together with friends and relatives, set about the rocks with pick axes, dynamite, ingenuity and steadfast endeavour, until they had cleared up the whole face. The clearance then enabled Bill to build the structure now dominating the site.

When it became necessary to set up the tanks to hold the petrol, it turned out that these had to be embedded in the rocky floor, but here again brains and brawn overcame the difficulties. Bill was an ingenious person, he converted an old dough mixer from a local baker. He also made use of a crane which he attached to his lorry and which he used to carry the large rock which he had extracted.

Such were and are, the Braunds of Lluest for both his son and his grandson are being soaked in the oil and petrol of car repairs and we are assured that there will be a Braund in the village until the end of this century at least."

During the early 1880's, the arrival of mail in the valley entailed a laborious journey by foot from Blackmill, which made life extremely difficult for the local postmen, especially in winter. Such hardship was eased when the mail began arriving by train from Bridgend, but the job of postman still remained an exhausting one. The postman had an important role to play in such a growing community, for this reason such men as Mr. Rees, the Postmaster, Joe Woodcock from Blaengarw and Ianto Thomas (who found Christmas a particularly dangerous time since he was offered so many free drinks) all became regarded as local institutions. Another such 'institution' was Samuel Thomas or 'Sam the post' as he was more affectionately known.

"Samuel Thomas the postman was probably the most cheerful gentleman postman the Garw, or even Wales knew. He was a friend to everyone and particularly to all the children of every street he visited daily.

After collecting the mail bags from the railway station and helping in the sorting out at the post office, he would trudge along the main street and deliver the mail from the loaded bags, one on either shoulder. His happy smile and merry quips, endeared himself to everybody.

During the fearful years of the Great War, when so many of the men from the valley had joined up, 'Sam the post' carried many hundreds of letters from sons and husbands to anxious wives and mothers. Such was his kindly nature that he insisted on handing those infrequent, often delayed letters, to anxious wives and mothers personally , whilst adding words of encouragement and hope.

The older people of Pontycymmer still remember this kindly, impish character who played such an important part in the history of the valley."

Being a postman had a way of disrupting and disorientating family life, with irregular hours and very few holidays.

"My childhood in the twenties and thirties seemed to have been geared by my father's occupation. He arose at 5.5Oa.m. to be at the station for the 6 o'clock train. From the age of 7 I would mount my small bicycle and take his breakfast down to the Post Office in the Square. I cannot really remember sitting down as a family for dinner because there were two deliveries and at least four collections, the last collection being at 7.30p.m. Today there is a regulation on the amount a postman carries, but in those days he had.two bags, one slung on each side and he had to carry the full mail, parcels as well. Mail had to be delivered twice a day if necessary to Braichycymmer Farm and the huts on the mountain above Pantygog which were well on the way to Ogmore. My father would appear at certain times of the day to get a change of clothing and it seemed to me that our house, especially in winter, was a place for drying clothes on the rack above the grate.

At 9.00 p.m. each evening, my father would take down the alarm clock from the mantelpiece, wind it and inform everyone, including guests, that it was time for bed. This caused my mother considerable embarrassment but we grew to accept it. I will always remember the pride my father took in his uniform. Each night he would polish the brass buttons and the badge which was worn on the front of his pillbox hat.

I can never remember my father being late for work and the only time he would complain was when he had a Sunday collection and it made him late for his chapel service. My mother's complaint was on Christmas Day when we never knew when he would complete his rounds.

He retired officially in 1940, but I believe he was asked to return for a while because of the war."

## BARBERS

Charlie Hills, the local barber, ran his business of hairdressing, shaving and tobacconist shop from 171 Oxford Street, Pontycymmer, opposite the recently demolished Llanharan Hotel. He was a distinguished looking man who had a rumbeard on his lip.

"In the shop, I've learnt that there was a sofa and a room in which many of the intelligent people of the Garw met week by week merely to settle various arguments that were current at the time. It seemed that they met purely for discussion, with shaving and hair cutting playing a far lesser role.

It is surprising how much we learn from barbers and their customers. Mrs. Hills would not allow a newspaper in the shop because she believed it would lead to betting.

I was not aware until Mrs. Hills told me, that a fish and chip shop run by two Salvation Army ladies near the Oxford Street bus shelter had a notice up saying, 'no bad language allowed here.' How times have changed, we now have state betting as well as tiny children using the most awful of language available.

Henry Hills, his son, was always cheerful as he marched along Oxford Street singing hymns and he would always break off to say good morning to the tradespeople on his way to his shop next to the chemist near the Square. You will notice that I said 'marched' and the significance of this I think was heightened by the style of haircut he provided. He would painstakingly ask each customer what sort of haircut they wanted , some would say nervously just a trim or perhaps just little off here and there. Whatever the reply, he would burst into song or tell a story or two and then give everyone an army short back and sides. To the unwary, I suppose this came as a shock but to us regulars we knew what to expect, at least there was no preferential treatment."

Before Henry Hills, the shop was owned by a man named Al Eddy who used to keep his violin on a high shelf above him, which he possibly during slack times. Mr. Crates and his son Alan also ran a barbers' shop in Oxford Street, next to Tynton the butcher, which was later taken over by Gwyn Evans.

"Gwyn was extremely popular with his customers, but unfortunately for him he had a high pitched voice. Some strangers in the Rock Hotel in Porthcawl once got the wrong idea of Gwyn, they thought he was effeminate and kept pestering him. He was physically tough, or as some would say, a hard man and although he told these creeps to go away several times, they would not listen. So Gwyn the gentlest of people normally, in spite of his squat stature, sorted them out with some of his drinking mates. Actually, put another way, they cleared out the Rock Hotel.

Gwyn was equally at home in Nazareth Chapel and I used to laugh when he would accept all kinds of posters in his shop. It made no difference to Gwyn if it was for chapel, club, dance or fight, he would read them out and say 'oh yes, very interesting' and would enjoy displaying them all.

A man from Maesteg was the next barber there and he once told a rude joke to a customer and was later embarrassed to find that he was a bishop. I increased his discomfort by telling him that I was a lay preacher also. Strangely enough he didn't stay in Pontycymmer very long after that.

By and large, we miss the old barbers of the past and sometimes when I go to Bridgend I find behind the barber's pole, a barber who lived in Waun Bant and I know that he takes off his barber friends of long ago."

## COBBLERS

The village cobbler was a man called Elmo Ash, who conducted his trade from a black painted zinc and wooden hut which stood on some waste ground beside the main road at the top end of Victoria Street. His hut leant into the ground at a slight angle, he worked there for over 50 years, almost until the day he died. After his death, this small shack was unceremoniously cleared away.

Elmo served his apprenticeship with a local shoemaker, but then went to work down the Ffaldau for three years with his father, who was the pit's stone mason. When the depression came to the valley, Elmo found himself out of work, but under a government scheme, he went to work in Canada where he helped build the Canadian National Railway in 1928. Then the depression came to Canada and Elmo had to return home to the Garw. After he had been 'means' tested his dole payments were stopped, so with the money he had left, he bought a hut for £20 and set up business as the village cobbler, work that he continued for the rest of his life.

His workshop consisted of a counter to collect orders, a stool, a well pitted workbench, a last, a buffing wheel, a lathe, leather, tacks, knives and associated equipment, with an oil lamp suspended from the ceiling. 'A cameo worthy of a Dickens novel.'

In later life, Elmo continued work to earn himself enough money to spend on a couple of pints across the road in the 'Half-way' club. He still used the old equipment and old methods, including using his own spit to polish the shoes.

## FUNERALS

Before the creation of a cemetery at the top of Alexandria Road, the dead had to be buried at the parish churches of Llangeinor and Bettws, which entailed a demanding trek for the funeral processions. In those days, the roads of the valley went on an entirely different route

from the ones which they followed now. These parish roads were, in fact, only cart tracks and they all met on Ffaldau Square like spokes of a wheel meeting at the hub. The valley at this time was divided down the middle between the two parishes of Llangeinor and Bettws, with the river acting as the boundary and with each parish having its own road.

Where you were buried depended on which parish you lived in, with those from Llangeinor parish being buried in Llangeinor churchyard and those from Bettws parish being buried in Bettws churchyard. AS the population increased these churchyards became overcrowded and in the early 1890's a new cemetery was established. From then on most of the burials took place at this cemetery, but there was one instance in which a person was buried at both Bettws churchyard and the new cemetery.

"Billy Williams lived in Pontyrhyl and worked as a checkweigher at Lluest Colliery. In a colliery accident, his left arm was completely severed and from that time he was known as Billy Williams-one-arm'. Since the accident occurred on the Braichycymmer Estate, his arm was ceremoniously buried at Bettws churchyard. Billy Williams lived many years after the accident but when he died, he was not buried with his arm. Instead he was buried in the new cemetery in Alexandria Road."

In the Bettws parish, the road went from the Square along Oxford Street and then up to Greenhill and along the mountainside to Braichycymmer Farm. From there the road went down into Pontyrhyl, with the pub being well placed for refreshments for the funeral parties taking coffins to Bettws churchyard. The road ran parallel with the valley side, past Sweet Wells and Ty Coed Farm and onto the church in Bettws.

The other road went to Llangeinor Church, where a public house and stables were also situated and then down to the mill at Pandy. This road did not go up Oxford Street, but followed the Gelli-Wern stream and bridge, past the slaughter house at the back of the butcher's shop and behind the pub and culvert. The road then continued along Meadow Street and High Street to Nantyrychain (Oxen Stream) and down to Pantygog. The track then ran from Pant Street over the mountains to Llangeinor Church, using the most economic means.

At this time, when pigs used to root for acorns beneath the oak trees on Llangeinor Square, a 'wise' old woman used to live nearby who would both deliver babies and also lay out the dead. She lived in a dark, small cottage beside the road going up the valley, now replaced by a modern house and it is said that before a bereaved family called at her door, her keys which hung up on the wall would audibly clatter. She would then know that someone had died and was in need of her services.

During the Great War, a number of military funerals were witnessed in the valley. Usually a military band was imported from the depot of the deceased, complete with an armed escort who marched with reversed rifles and fired three rounds over the grave. In the absence of a military band, the Pontycymmer Silver Band did the honours (a band that for years practiced in the band room attached to the Ffaldau Hotel).

"The lasting impression made by the rare appearance of the bands is that of the steady march up the Squirrel Hill and Alexandria Road, to the sombre sounds of the 'Dead March in Saul', together with the recurring down beat of the big drum and when the funeral had ended, the quick marching almost jaunty, return of the band down the hill. This has lasted with me until this day.

The more common funerals were long, drawn out experiences and the length of the cortege was indicative of the popularity of the dead person. (Perhaps popularity is not the correct word). Dark suits and bowler hats predominated, their owners taking their places behind the undertaker, who sported a top-hat. As the funeral proceeded, he signaled to the people behind and four of them stepped out, two at either side of the line. They stood waiting until the bier arrived at their position and then changed places with the 'carriers' who walked ahead to join the procession, while the long walk continued. It became advantageous when attending a funeral to make a friend of the same shoulder height as yourself, for reasons that seemed to be obvious. The distance you carried was deigned by 'Mr. Top Hat' who was the final judge.

All the house blinds along the route of the funeral were drawn as a mark of respect, until the funeral had passed, though a sudden flicker at the middle or edge of them told of unseen watchers and assessors. It was customary in those days for any casual walker on the pavements to stand with his cap in hand until the funeral had passed and at the house of the deceased, to draw up the curtains and blinds immediately after the cortege had left."

Griffith Jones, the undertaker, was seen everywhere in his bowler hat. His brake was pulled by two large black horses and was used for weddings as well as funerals, the only difference being the fact that the horses wore little white coverings on their rears for weddings. He had a son whose name was David, who, because he followed his father into the burying business became known as 'Dai the Coffin'.

# EDUCATION

Prior to the formation of a School Board for the Garw Valley, the most notable early educational institution was 'Sam the Post's' school under Tom Bale's shop. One of the first monitor-cum-teachers of this school was one Daniel Dylan, an ex-soldier from Blackmill who had only one arm. It was the practice in those days for ex-soldiers, after discharge, to take up teaching jobs, with teaching being regarded as a low status profession. Dylan was a determined and conscientious teacher and on one occasion , as an incentive for his pupils, he even donated his own donkey as an academic prize.

As more and more people crowded into the valley, the Welsh names of 'Jenkins', 'Jones', 'Williams' and 'Griffiths' were being replaced in the classroom by names such as 'Ford' or 'Johnson'. As the coal industry flourished, the internal movement to the Garw was replaced by outside immigration from areas like Bristol, the Forest of Dean, Hertfordshire and the

West Country. The voluntary schools were no longer large enough to accommodate these large numbers of children and eventually new Board Schools had to be built. Just after the turn of the Century, a more comprehensive system of education evolved in which there were three stages to pursue on the 'educational road' to wherever. The first stage was the Ffaldau Boys' or Ffaldau Girls' School and the similar single sex schools in Blaengarw.

Then there was the Garw Higher Elementary School which served as a mixed school but with separate play areas and third in the regime were the out of the valley schools, in the shape of Bridgend County School and Maesteg Secondary School.

Ffaldau Boys' School was originally held in the chapel of the English Methodists and when the school became a Grammar School, in 1910 it was transformed into a gym. Initially, the classes contained between 40 and 45 boys, but when the school was enlarged there were 3 or 4 teachers in standard 4 alone, with perhaps 500 boys in total. The school in those days was a very different establishment from what it is today. Pupils were instructed in the three R's and they shouted out their tables and letters and recited poetry, sometimes together and sometimes singly. They followed with their fingers the written word while one of their number read aloud. Sometimes the class would read aloud in unison and all were also instructed in public speaking by being made to tell stories to the rest of the class - a captive audience if there was. Any boy skilled in this art was in great demand and he passed from class to class testing his talents on the captives.

The first headmaster of the Ffaldau Boys' School was William Pennant, a short, fattish little man with bulging eyes which flashed behind his old-fashioned, steel rimmed spectacles. Pennant was a strict disciplinarian who ruled with a cane and a whistle, both of which he applied with a vigour not allowed today. His contemporaries are now called head teachers but Pennant was a Master with a capital 'M'.

His whistle was like the Ffaldau mine hooter and as keenly observed. He had a downer, in particular, on Bridgend Roaders, Alex Roaders and Waun Banters and his favourite form of address when faced with non-attention was "listen to me you numbskulls'." It was his practice to drive his pupils before him to the Ffaldau School to the loud 'baaing' of his 'sheep ' as he turned them into the gate. (Ironically, the literal translation of Ffaldau is 'sheep-fold'). The marching group would mark time by reciting their tables which, in the long run, resulted in every boy knowing his tables by the time he left school.

"In the morning after the Ffaldau Colliery had hooted for nine o'clock, as it did every day, all late comers to school were lined up in the dungeon-like corridor to await the coming of 'God'. In his bottle-green cut-away coat, carrying his cane, which he never seemed to be without, he would advance on his shrinking pupils and would demand of each as he walked 'why are you late?'. The reasons or excuses were many and varied, but to no avail, each offender would receive one or two 'cracks' as they were called, across his outstretched hand. Some pretended that it did not hurt, others, the hardened ones, walked away seemingly unconcerned. There was a myth pertaining at the time that if you stretched a horse hair across the hand, this hair would lessen the pain, some boys tried it but horse hair or not it still hurt.

As well as being headmaster, Mr. Pennant was also a contractor, landlord and entrepreneur. He had cards and bills printed describing himself as a builder, he would take down old buildings and constructed new houses. Also, when an old boy of the school was going to college, he would try to sell them textbooks.

William Pennant held a responsible position in the community and he constantly maintained an attitude of public respectability. On the one occasion he was taken home in a horse and cart, seated on a chair, held by a pupil teacher, yet he still found time to raise his bowler to people as he was driven by. However , there was one occasion when Pennant's unflappable character slipped and he descended from his 'throne' to become human - or nearly so. On one winter's day, after some snow had well and truly been delivered to the valley, the Ffaldau boys became involved in a battle, as usual, with their neighbours in the Higher Elementary School. Unexpectedly, they drove the Ffaldau forces back into the corridor and cloak room, throwing their stones covered with snow and at the same time shouting with success. One of the snowballs struck 'His Majesty's' door. Out he came with his cane, taking in the situation with a glance and shouting as usual 'Come on boys, follow me., His battle cry and his actions rallied the Ffaldau boys and the intruders vanished."

Pennant's successor as headmaster of Ffaldau Boys' was Willie Watkins, a patient man who taught the top class, or last class if you preferred, which was situated nearest the door that led to the boys' freedom and their place in the world. By this stage of their education, many of the boys were possibly beginning to realize that their lack of education was going to tell on them and Willie Watkins did his best to help them during their last term.

"Every Friday we were allowed to bring in our books to read during the afternoon and later on Willie Watkins would read from 'Treasure Island', 'Coral Island', 'The Last of the Mohicans' or 'Mowgli'. That was the best part of the afternoon and then a few minutes before time he would ask to spell long sounding names and then the one who spelt it correctly could go home early. Another boy and I were always the last two left in the class and in his sympathetic way he would smile and say "Go on home with you." Many would agree that Mr. Willie Watkins was the best teacher of them all and his influence still lives in the lives of those he taught."

"The teacher who taught the scholarship class at this time was John Lewis, a kind man who was very much respected both as a teacher and as a friend. Lewis was a man of great imagination and he believed that all a person needed in their diet was vitamins in the form of jam.

He was known as 'Lewis the Old Soldier' and although he never spoke about his exploits he would continually say they had won the war by eating jam, "So don't forget boys if you can get hold of a jar of jam you eat it." During the war he had had it for every meal, jam, jam, jam, was the only thing that kept him going. No one laughed because they all had the preconception that Lewis was always right, but there were times when he too seemed human."

"To be fair to him, the whole class had failed to write about the day in the life of a fireman, or engine driver or postman etc. except the Postmaster's son and turning to us he gave us one of his famous lectures. 'Never, he said, 'write about something you know nothing of. For instance, why don't you write about a snowstorm because you have all seen one.' Walking over to the window overlooking our valley , he pointed upwards and said 'There comes the first snowflake and is followed by another and look at the pretty pattern of that snowflake on the window.' I thought sadly that the old soldier was slipping. Fancy boys writing about snowflakes, then he said to fit in some snow fights and I thought this is more like Lewis. 'Now' he gleefully said, 'it is coming down thicker, thicker, faster, faster.' I have wondered since was it really snowing or not, for his description was so graphic. Then he said to finish it off something like this, 'And the whole landscape, the mountains, the coal-tips, the house tops, all the ugliness that man has made is covered with a mantle of white snow.' I believe I copied his words and merely added 'and it was very lovely because God made it so.' Years rolled by and he told some new boys that I had written it, so in a way one could say that he had given his medals to me."

"I met him briefly going to Church in Bridgend and he was keen to know how I was getting on. We chatted and laughed and then with a wave he marched away. As I delayed him, I imagined that he would be going up the steps of Rhuamah and into the building to the opening of 'Onward Christian Soldiers, Marching as to War' but 'with the cross of Jesus going on before.' It was nice knowing Lewis and I'm sure Heaven is richer for his company."

To insure that the children attended school there was the 'Whipper In', in 'Wenglish', 'The Whipper-een'. He was the person who called at the houses of all absentees from the school and succeeded in frightening the mothers and children into good school attendances by his short stout figure, his braided coat and his very official peaked cap. Although an awesome person in uniform, out of it he appeared a well respected musician who lived in Blaengarw.

"We had a Mr. Watkins who was the School Attendance Officer, a stern man, who chased us if we did not attend school and you could look out for he would seek you out and find you. The Whipperin, a terror to us kids and for the parents, firm in the knowledge that it is the responsibility of parents to control and install discipline and the shambles that resulted without parental control.

He was strict but with justice, never bumped for the sake of being bumped."

A great deal of emphasis was placed on discipline in school. Any misdemeanour perpetrated by the mischievous schoolboy resulted in the vigorous use of the cane.

"If you did something wrong you knew you were going to get clobbered, either by the headmaster with a cane, or a clip across the ear by one of the teachers. This made sure that if you had it once you wouldn't be caught a second time for the same offence. Nothing like a good clout to install discipline. We respected our elders such as teachers, we no more thought of answering them back as jumping off a cliff.............But not now, you almost expect abuse, I've seen children of seven and eight answering back to policemen."

Although there was a constant flow of children through the schools, for those who broke the rules the punishment was always the same. Even though the times were changing the old myths about minimizing the pain still prevailed.

"I got a lesson from a boy who was often late, he told me on the one occasion I happened to be late that if I took a hair from my head and put it on the palm of my hand the cane which we were due for would not hurt and I believed him. When Tubby the headmaster caned me with all his might he caught me on the finger tips and the pain was unbelievable and the other boy cringed away from him and howled for mercy. I thought he gave him a light tap. My hand hurt so much that I couldn't pick up a pen and Willie Watkins said quietly in my ear, 'I know boy, it hurts.' That was one of those nice touches that you would expect from Willie because he was on your side."

Idris Williams, the headmaster of Blaengarw Junior School, used to keep what he called his 'Head Teacher's Punishment Book', in which the date, name of offender, nature of offence and punishment meted out was meticulously recorded. In 1916, a typical case would read 'March 8 - Evan David Rees - smoking in the toilet - punishment, two strokes with the cane.' The usual offences were, coming late to school, climbing up to the roof to retrieve a football, swearing and the usual misdemeanours.

"There was one entry which seemed grossly unfair, 'May 10 Cyril Davies - in possession of fag ends plus cigarette holder and displaying smoker's fingers.' The evidence was fatal, two strokes and smoking materials confiscated. It was certainly tough luck on Cyril Davies, he had not actually been smoking, but he got his medicine just the same."

Another notable entry was, 'September 11 - Ivor Parry, Winston Heycock, Haydn Sugg, Godfrey Young, Thomas Davies and William Robinson - absconded from school during playtime'. The usual punishment was issued, two strokes, four for Ivor Parry, a persistent offender.

The boys had absconded because news had earlier gone around that there was to be a military funeral in Pontycymmer that afternoon and they had all decided to leave school at playtime to see. This funeral was one of the first of its kind in the valley, but as the war went on it became more common. Soldiers who died of wounds after being brought to a home hospital were then given a military funeral in their local cemetery.

"The cortege started on its way from Bridgend Road headed by the band playing 'the Dead March from Saul'. Then followed the troops marching in solemn step with arms reversed. Then the bugles for the last post at the graveside and a party of riflemen to fire the salute. The coffin, of course, was draped with the Union Jack. Then came the mourners. The sad procession wound its way along the old route, Squirrel hill up to the cemetery. Crowds of people watched the funeral go by and amongst them were Ivor Parry, Winston Heycock, Haydn Sugg, Godfrey Young, Thomas Davies and William Robinson."

The Girls' School in Pontycymmer was run by a Miss Thomas, known to everyone as 'Fanny Bloomers', who ruled her school with a rod of iron. She was distinguished by being the first

woman elected to the local council, for being the first to ride a motorbike. Following a trip she had made to America, Fanny Thomas returned with modern, feminist ideas which were quite advanced for their time. She became an ardent suffragette and when Emily Pankhurst spoke in Bridgend, she stayed with Fanny Bloomers at Ffaldau House. She would readily put forward her views at public meetings and sold the newspaper 'Woman' in school for 2d each.

Miss Thomas was good on English Grammar and gave very analytical lessons. In the old school with the galleries, she would take a class of 150 children in English, with the assistance of two other teachers and she herself would be positioned on a high chair at the centre of the proceedings. The children would use jotters and pencils to take down the work, there was no messy filling of inkwells and pens. The jotters were divided into columns such as Subject, Predicate, Object etc. She was stern and fair, she was also very British and made sure her classes remembered such things as Empire Day. When entering her class she would make a grand entrance reminiscent of her performances in the local production of such plays as 'The Tempest' in which she acted in a highly mannered style which was fashionable at the time.

The successor to Miss Thomas headmistress of Pontycymmer Infant School was Miss Williams, who used to summon her pupils to lessons each morning by ringing the main school bell. This bell was always an enigma and temptation to the pupils of the nearby boys' school.

"My greatest ambition was to ring the main school bell which was in the adjoining bigger girls' school building. Time after time others got there before us, so we made a special attempt and arrived early.

We asked some older girls for permission and soon three little boys climbed onto a desk to reach the bell rope which hung invitingly above us and as we hauled on the rope together we were having the time of our lives, until Miss Williams, the Headmistress who lived nearby came charging in like a wild bull and nearly frightened us to death, because we had rung the bell 15 minutes too early. We were marched into the main hall of our school and made to sit three to a desk.

Miss Williams, though short, was powerfully built and looked as though she would like to do us an injury. We were lectured, but took manfully until Sal Morgan, another teacher, joined in and finished off her contribution by saying directly to me "I am ashamed of you." So I started howling and the other two joined in and perhaps that is why this stern headmistress let us off. I can see her now, with her jet black bun of hair tied up in a business-like kind of fashion glaring at these three little ex bell ringers. Perhaps it is little wonder that I hated the sound of bells ringing for many years to come.

The Garw Higher Elementary School was situated on high ground overlooking the Ffaldau Boys' School. To enter the school a child had to pass an examination and entry was restricted to thirty boys and thirty girls. The school contained an entirely different group of pupils, including some of the 'black pats' that the Pontycymmer boys used to sing about from Blaengarw, Pontyrhyl, Llangeinor, Bryncethin and Tondu, most of who travelled to school by

train. For the Ffaldau boys the change of school was simply climbing up another flight of steps into the adjacent building in the complex. All the 'aspiring youngsters', of the district were therefore brought together under one roof. The children could leave at 15, or if they wished, could stay on until 16, if the family could afford it.

There were 6 classrooms in the school including a science laboratory, a woodwork room and sporting facilities etc., with the pupils being divided into classes of IA, IB, IC etc. The teachers at this school were 'degreed' teachers, mainly imports from various universities. How they managed to find their way to this back-water of Welsh valleys was difficult to understand. The headmaster was a Mr. J. J. Morgan, a tall man, who remained very remote from his lesser mortals, except for special occasions. He was accompanied to school each day from his home in Church Street, by a little toy dog that was coloured white and blue and not unnaturally called 'Pansy'.

"George Baker was partly a cripple who limped to school with his leg curled around a crutch and as it is with those who are used to the crutch, was able to use it with great dexterity.

For one reason or other, George had incurred the anger of the Headmaster, Mr. Morgan and had been rewarded with the usual response that was forthcoming from the wrathful pedagogue. George brooded over this hurt to his pride and resolved to have his revenge, but the problem was, how? The boys entrance to the school was situated at the top of a second flight of steps, overlooking the yard towards the tennis courts. George was aware of the fact that Pansy was fond of sitting on the top step and staring into the distance. One day, the innocent animal was sitting, as usual, on the step and George, coming out of the door, saw the dog. In a flash he whipped his crutch from under his arm and using it as a hockey player, he whipped Pansy over the step into the vista into which she had been gazing. George was never found out, Pansy recovered quickly and honour was satisfied. George himself received a wooden leg in his later life and rose from the position of clerk in the Water Board to be its Head of Office in Bridgend. Such was the value of a valley education."

There was also at the school a non-degreed person by the name of Fred White, who initiated the boys into the mysteries of woodwork and was an enormous influence on many who came into his orbit. In the woodwork class he pursued his teaching with a sure and meticulous energy. In every stage of his work each had to be presented to him for his appraisal - planning, marking out, squaring lines, measuring etc. A boy might come up to him with his work, 'Please Sir, I've gone below the line, I've planed too much off', to receive the sardonic reply 'Then perhaps you had better go and stick it on again.' Not very helpful to say the least. He had a strong cockney accent and had arrived in the Garw from what was, in those days, referred to as a 'Truants School' in Quakers' yard. In spite of all this he became a well respected member of the community and retired to St. Brides Major where he later died.

The 'History man', Mr. Rowlands or 'Rollie' was a degreed teacher. He lived in Lower Adare Street and always jumped over the wall to come to school every morning, where he spent much of his time looking out of the window.

There was also a Mr. E. J. Saunders, or 'Sandy' whose hair was actually a wig, a fact that was never really appreciated by his pupils. Wig or no wig, he was far above his classes and had several books to his credit and eased his way through the trial of teaching with a gracious manner. He was a gentle soul thrown into a den of 'non-tryers'.

"He was the first person, in my experience, to suggest that the name 'Garw' was not the proper name of the valley. As we have all been taught to believe the name 'Garw' means 'rough' or 'turbulent' which is quite true and it refers to the river which runs through it. 'Sandy', however, thought otherwise, stating that the name 'Garw' was derived from the word 'carw' (plural 'ceirw'), this being the Welsh name for deer.

He based his assumption on the fact that the Garw was once the home of many deer and it is a short step from 'Carw' to 'Garw'. Strange to relate, a few years ago the name 'Ceirw' appeared on the factory producing woodwork at the one time residence of David Evans, a carpenter, of Oxford Street, as 'Ceirw Products'."

Following a short time at the Higher Elementary School, scholarships were made available to pupils to attend Bridgend County School or Maesteg Secondary School. It was a long day for those who attended the Bridgend School, they set out at 8.20 a.m. and did not return until 5.50 p.m. At this school the pupils were forbidden to wear what the headmaster, J. Rankin, called 'stable affairs', referring to the flat caps. When Rankin administered corporal punishment, which was not very often, he would demand the pupil to 'make a tight one', which meant tightening your trousers over your backside before he struck it with a cane. The Latin teacher treated the Garw boys as if they had come out of the caves and often as if they did not exist. She scolded them for eating apples in the street and even occasionally refused to teach them.

If a boy wished to become a pupil teacher the examination was free, but with the provision that when qualified the student would stay in the employ of the county. The examinations were Junior C.W.B. (Central Welsh Board) and senior C.W.B. To achieve matriculation and enter university you had to pass mathematics and Latin, however many other subjects you might have passed.

Although many were regarded as tyrants, the teachers of the valley did their jobs well and all who passed through the education system in the Garw, certainly benefitted from their teachings.

"They were all good teachers, I'll say that for them, you listened to them or you had a clip, which did us no harm. 99% of the boys I knew could read, write and do arithmetic when they left school and that was all that was really asked of them. Real education starts after you leave school and without the three 'R's there was no hope for you."

# RECREATION

In the old days children seemed to play more. They played in the streets, by the river and on the mountainsides, but always only after their home chores had been done. Girls had dishes to wash after family meals and boys had to prepare sticks and coal for lighting the morning fire.

"When I was in school I had the chore of taking the dough to 'Hunts' the baker in Victoria Street in the morning and bringing home the bread in the evening. The crust was delicious, it kept us going and I never saw a fat child, you couldn't get fat since we walked and ran everywhere and riding was unknown. I remember when times were hard our diet was basic and simple, but it kept us nourished . On Friday and Saturday nights we would help to deliver goods for up to 6d, our time was full."

The three major influences on the lives of Garw children at this time were their homes, their Chapels and their schools, but outside their spheres of influence a great deal of emphasis was placed on their 'gangs'.

"Playing in the valley as children we were all in gangs and our gang would clash with other gangs, it was fair fun. Some would be limping, whoever won and there would be a few bruises which kept our mothers busy. We would go out in the morning tidy and clean and nine times out of ten we would return looking a little tattered. If there was any place to fall or any river to fall in we would find it. Our favourite place was the old levels, a real adventure, we would crawl in until you couldn't see and our imagination ran wild. There were rats about, but they never bothered us."

The gangs were generally determined by whatever area of the valley you came from, with each gang having its own area of effective control, all be it, a very tenuous one. The Oxford Street gang did not have many members since most of the street comprised of shops. The High Street gang, on the other hand, was a large body, there were less shops, more children and therefore more children.

"Our most hardy opponents were the Bridgend Road gang from the other side of the river. Our battleground was a slope leading down to the river on our side and the railway track on the other side. Our weapons were stones and voices. There were a few real casualties, a great deal of noise and our encounters did not last very long. There was no bitterness, for we always 'discussed' the result next day in school. Perhaps discussed is not the correct word."

"The gangs always used to venture up and down the two 'tu nnels' under the roads, one at Ffaldau Square and the other at the end of Oxford Street with its exit near the Boy's Club. The Ffaldau Square exit can still be seen peering down towards the river from the bus stop. "In my days the road dived straight down to the top of the tunnel and was a frequent way

down the river to the 'huts', a group of very old buildings built on the edge of the river, just a little higher than Blandy Park."

'Let's go down the river' was then the invitation to play in and along the banks of this 'dirty coal-sodden river'.

The other playgrounds of the gangs were the pit tops, the workings and the rough areas of the Ffaldau, the Balarat, the Ocean and the Carn.

"During our school days the position of the Bala yard, so near to our school, made it a natural playground with its wide open colliery yards and its timber, trams etc. It was situated behind the old cinema and it was a place where we would meet to fight, usually beside the washery.

Across from the Bala was the Station Street level, with the Capt. David Drift, a drift that was at an angle of 45 degrees, the coal seam being the 2' 9" house coal. There was also the screens for cleaning the coal and trams carrying the rough and cleaned coal to its destination. In the 'screen' buildings injured miners who were unfit for face work and 14 year old boys just starting their working lives, worked on the screen belt picking out the rubbish and stone from the slow moving belt which ran parallel with Station Street and James Road. In the afternoon we would stack timber and if there was no school we would ride the trams and walk the horses down to the mouth of the drift. A dangerous practice at the best of times, even with sharp youthful reflexes. One luckless individual names Walter Pike lost half his foot when it was trapped between the haulage rope and the tram. Another practice was to ride the overhead rope and waste buckets, ride the buckets on its aerial way and jump off before the big pulley wheel was reached. However, on one occasion a boy by the name of Franky Milton did not jump off in time and was sadly killed."

Another area of potential danger which was used as a playground was the railway line.

"We as children, were often involved in the dangerous practice, not dangerous to us of course, of placing pieces of metal, tins, rarely half pences, or farthings, on the lines as the up-coming, or down-going trains (passenger or coal) were approaching and when the train had passed we eagerly compared our flattened prizes with each other. The shouts and curses of the drivers and their threatening gestures made little impression on us. We knew that they could not stop, so we ran off cursing and shouting back."

"We were careful of the police, if you were caught in an ordinary garden you would have a clip, a sharp, short punishment, far better than those headshrinkers they've got today, a good clip did a world of good."

"We, the potential delinquents, never referred to the keepers of the peace as policemen, but as 'Cops' or 'Coppers' and after having been chased into the darkness of the gullies, we would chant in unison, 'Copper, copper, skinny hopper, skinny hopper."

"We also played on the roads and streets. One of our games was called 'cabbage' which involved a line of caps being placed on the pavement at the foot of a wall. A soft ball would then be rolled along the pavement by one boy and if it rolled into a cap, its owner would run and retrieve the ball. In the meantime, the other boys ran away as fast as they could go, until they heard the cry of 'cabbage' which the boy, who now had the ball in his hand, shouted. At once each boy stood still. The boy with the ball then threw it at the nearest lad and should he miss, all the boys scattered again, until one was hit. The game was then restarted.

I recall this game with pleasure because when I went to England, to a college I introduced it as an item in a P.T. lesson to a German instructor and so the 'League of Nations' was born."

There was also singing games such as 'I sent a letter to my love', 'The farmer and his dog', 'Oranges and Lemons' and 'Granny Grey', not to mention the ball games, hop scotch, hook and wheel, hoops, hop, skip and jump. Also, games of skill such as buttons, marbles and cigarette cards and improvised swinging on the arms of gas lamps and lastly cattie and dog.

One notable gang leader was a boy the name of Aneurin King who was tall and athletic with shoulders like a barn door. If a teacher wanted to leave the classroom they would always ask Aneurin to look after the class and though he was very good natured and always saw the funny side of life, no-one took advantage of him. There was always an air of peace in the class when he was in charge.

"To get into Aneurin's gang you had to do something daring to prove yourself worthy of such an honour. Our minister's son, who became Dr. Evans, told me that his particular task was to climb over the fence of Pontycymmer Bowling Green and dig a hole in the well kept green itself, in fact, he was caught doing it. I'm sure that later on he also got another lecture from his father.

The bowling green, with its adjoining tennis courts and playgrounds was the 'Shangri-La' of their dedicated groundsman Fred Moody. The Pontycymmer Recreational Ground as it was known, was, in fact old Moody's heaven upon earth, but we altered that.

I don't know what we did to upset Moody in particular but we were not very popular with him. I know that now and again we would get tired of playing on the big swings and would sit on the little children's swings and also whizz round on their joy wheel, which usually resulted in Moody coming charging down in a very threatening way.

We noticed from a safe position that he used to retire to a wooden hut where he took the money for the use of the tennis courts and bowling green. We then used to shut the outside gate and sing to the tune of 'John Brown's body lies a mouldering in the grave' - 'we'll hang old Moody on a sow apple tree'.

Instantly, he would come charging out of the hut and struggle to open the gate, whilst we, for our parts, would be running for our lives. I was the most fearful of them all because I had a slight limp, a legacy of polio and he nearly used to catch me. Fearing the worst, I would look back and on Moody's weather beaten face there would be a smile and even more magically,

a twinkle in his eye as he would stop and watch us disappear very thankfully through the main gate. With all the work and the running he did with us, I think Moody was a very fit old man.

After Aneurin King left school he delivered bread for Mr. Tutt of Pantygog, with a single horse pulling a slender shafted bread van around the valley. Although we must have thought this was a menial task, we always shouted as loudly as we could, 'Aneurin O!' and as he went by he would look back and wave, happy to be the centre of our admiring glances. He invited me to ride in the front with him one day and it was nice and cool looking out through the open fronted van with the smell of fresh bread behind and the clip clopping on the tarmac road. I was amused by the swaying walk of the horse as it pulled us by the Ffaldau Hill when the Ffaldau Colliery steam siren blew. At that point, Aneurin took out his rather handsome looking watch, then noticing it had stopped again he said 'I think I'll throw out and smash it on that wall.' I said 'Oh no, don't do that' and with an exaggerated look of affection at his watch he said 'I think I'll give it another chance' and he carefully put it back~~nto his pocket. At the same time, he was still controlling the horse with the reins in his other hand, which proved to me that this rather pleasant job needed more skill than I had first thought.

During the 1939-1945 war, Aneurin was in the Welsh Guards and here I felt sure he was a man amongst men. Maybe he guarded Buckingham Palace, but you can be sure of one thing, if we'd have seen him we would have shouted 'Aneurin 0'. Today, we are grateful to him and many others who paid the price of our freedom. As far as we were concerned he was king not only in name but by nature as well."

"Although there was mischief involved with all gangs there was much fun but no malice or vandalism. After knocking doors, the fun was in the chase, not that I would appreciate being disturbed in such a way now."

One major focus of the mischievous activities of the gangs were the local cinemas, where the children used to dream away their Saturday mornings in front of the big screens. These silent matinees were usually serials such as 'Pearl White', 'The Star' and 'Cliff Hanger' which ensured that the children would turn up the following Saturday morning without fail. There were also the main features which starred such heroes as Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton, with the entire audience reading the plot from sub-titles that appeared on the screen. The cinema in Blaengarw was run and owned by a Mr. Bently and was situated in the space now occupied by the old peoples' bungalows.

Not every member of the gangs could afford to attend every Saturday, which posed a considerable dilemma to an excitable youngster eager to see how the serial ended.

"The problem was how to get in. This was solved by a few of us pooling our 1/2d together so that one or two of our numbers could get in at the ticket office.

Once inside they would go to the 'Gents' and its side exit door, lift the bolts quietly and let the rest in. You had to be careful for the cinema staff had keen eyes and once inside we would spread out so that they would not cotton on to what was happening, but they soon got wise

to our method, so we had to find another way to get in. We discovered that during an evening of snow a gang of kids was not so noticeable amongst the grown-ups, but Mr. Bently was a canny man and he knew exactly what was happening, so we tried to go just once a week to follow the serial.

The adventure pictures broke up the monotony in the winter, it was rather boring hanging around the house all day, the answer was the picture house."

"The only alternative was going to each others houses to play cards, play games, play the piano and sing. 'One of the Reeses from the Post Office was too shy to sing in company, so he did his singing out in the passage, but in spite of his shyness he became a well-known actor of the English stage".

During the summertime, another great focus of attention was the outdoor swimming pool in Pantygog.

"It was three feet deep at the shallow end and six feet deep at the other, about fifty feet long, perhaps more and about eighteen feet wide. A walking space about four feet wide on either side and at the deep end was a diving stage about six feet high, all surrounded by a brick wall with a small cabin for the attendant at the top end. The south end was divided into cubicles just high enough to change in. The opening of the cubicles was a sheet of sailcloth and the customer sat on a plank which had been fixed into the wall. After changing you took about two steps and you were in the water. Then you nearly died because it was so cold.

The water came straight from the mountain stream which ran outside. The stream had been trapped higher up the valley and piped into the bath. Although there were some tough people who learnt to swim well it was impossible to stay in for very long and there were a great many good divers or 'in and outers' as they were known. One visiting preacher to one of the churches described his early dip as being 'steely', he was dead right and is still alive.

No-one paid any regard in those days to the fact that the valley farms were on the side of the stream. You can work that one out for your selves."

The Baden Powell Boy Scouts were introduced into the by Fred White, the woodwork teacher from the Higher Elementary School, who saw the opportunity of organizing the gangs of boys into one well-disciplined troop and so make sure that their spare time was spent on more worthwhile activities.

"He taught us to pass at map reading, cooking, first aid and many other subjects for which we received badges that we sewed onto our scout shirts, all vying with each other as to the stage and number of our successes. At the same time, he also trained and prepared a drum and fife band and we all used to parade and march up and down Oxford Street. I cannot say whether the quality of music was very high or low because I was too busy mixing the 2/4, 6/8, 3/4 rhythms to notice .

He took his scout campaigns to Merthyr Mawr sand dunes for several years, having been granted permission by the then owner, Colonel Nicholl who was also a 'scoutman'. We scouts dragged all our paraphenalia, flags, tents, food etc. in our trek cart all the way to the dunes and after a week or a fortnight, all the way back again.

Fred White was one of the most remarkable men to live during my lifetime, which is a long one."

# LEAVING SCHOOL

For most, the education system lasted only until their 14th birthday when the girls would leave school and generally go into domestic service and the boys would almost certainly start work in the collieries. On Friday before a boy's 14th birthday he would often come to school with the uniform he would wear underground, with boots and moleskin trousers, ready for the Monday morning when he would work with an established miner to learn his craft. 'A coming of age, or rite of passage, but sad in a way, since the boy was so limited of choice'.

"I started work in 1929 at the age of fourteen in the 'Bala', not exactly a pit but a drift which you walked into for about two miles and about one thousand feet underground to the one yard seam. Here you worked the coal, but with some difficulty since there was water everywhere. In those days a boy would wear short trousers until he was fourteen and then long trousers to work and down the pit. We would be fully fitted out with moleskin trousers, but the boots always seemed to prove a problem. I bought mine from an old chap down the road who tapped them for me and I paid 2/6d for them, on that Monday I was off to work with many others. I also wore clogs which lasted two and a half years, they were pretty noisy along with the hob nailed boots."

Working underground, the young boys encountered an environment totally unlike anything they had ever imagined, the work was hard and the dark, almost insufferable conditions often proved a frightening experience for a 14 year old.

"Frankly, I cried my eyes out, when I went home on the first morning after working all night I was frightened to death by the smell, the black pats, the mice and the darkness, it was a lot worse than I had been led to expect."

By this stage of their lives most boys already had an experience of working, for as young children they often tried to earn a few bob to add to the family income.

"When I was six going on seven I would wait on Pontycymmer Station during the evenings to see the train coming from Bridgend, if I was lucky people would let me carry their bags to anywhere in Pontycymmer. It would take fully fifteen minutes to reach the destination with their bags on your back for the bargain payment of 2d. Then on Saturday mornings we

would go to the shops or barbers, such as Al Eddy, asking them if they wanted sawdust and if they did, we used to borrow a barrow and bags and go over the sawmill at the colliery. We would then fill the bags with sawdust and wheel them back for 2d and sometimes 3d if we were lucky, to make a copper or two. All in the family did their bit, when there was no work of any kind, it was up to the tips with a bag, hunting for coal amongst the rubble and with a good bag, 1/- was the going rate.

Poverty and hardship were accepted as part of life and we never even thought of stealing or dishonesty of any kind."

Very few boys escaped the seemingly automatic transition into the mines. One such person was Griffith Thomas, who became an apprentice to the butcher's trade, or in other words, he worked for his father as a butcher. In those early days, at specified dates, the butchers of the area met at the Millers' Arms in Brynmenyn, near the Abergarw Brewery. There they would meet drovers from the Vale of Glamorgan who had brought cattle to the 'Millers' for sale to the local butchers.

"We walked down from Pantygog with our dogs, going up over Pandy Hill, across the Cwm at the top and then down to Abergarw Hill. The drovers were already there and after a long discussion over prices and the usual slapping of palms to seal the deal, we started out on the return walk to the Garw. We drove the cattle along the road, up the hill and down the other side to LLangeinor as far as the Green Meadow where the dogs kept watch outside. Then another long walk up to Pantygog, where our cattle were driven into the stalls in the slaughter house, they didn't call them abattoirs in those days and my Uncle took his lot up to his slaughter house in Oxford Street.

To deal with a recalcitrant bullock the drovers would fasten a thick rope to his horn and then the other end to his front hock. The poor old bull would then have to walk on and pull his horn down at the same time. Several times I saw a bull fall over as he went and on occasions I saw the skin all ripped and torn on the fastened leg. You can easily turn a bull over by turning his horns but it takes a lot of strength and a lot of guts."

A number of the various traders in Oxford Street employed apprentices at this time. They worked long hours and were paid small wages.

"In the good old, bad old, days of long ago I worked as a boy in Cash and Co. shoe shop, where boots and shoes, miners working hob nailed boots, clogs, etc., hung on strips of wood outside the shop. We worked, if my memory serves me right, each Friday and Saturday from 9 o'clock in the morning till 8 o'clock in the night and for the last few hours my main job was to stand on the doorstep and watch that noone stole the boots and shoes. There were four such shops in Oxford Street - Prices, Olivers, ours next and T. 0. Morgans and they all played games with one another, all being as cunning as each other.

It would be time to close and my boss would say to me "Has Olivers or one of the others started taking in shoes?" Being truthful I would often reply 'No' and then much to my annoyance because I wanted to finish, he would say 'we'll wait until one of the others start'.

Gleefully I'd say 'They have started and what would annoy me more was the fact that when we had taken in a few strips of shoes he would tell me to stop, 'let's see if they will get all theirs in'. My blood would boil because I was not too highly paid at 2/6d a week, but then Owens the inspector would occasionally march into the shop and demand according to law, that the shop be closed on time. He was my friend from then on. He would often then move on to the butcher's shop where he would examine the state of the meat etc."

Prior to marriage, the majority of young women and girls from the valley went into service acting as servants, cleaners and cooks in the houses of the wealthy and the better off.

"In our family I was in service as were my aunties and sisters, mainly in London and the Home Counties, but my Auntie Mary was a servant in the coal manager's house in Llangeinor. She worked long hours for little pay. The first task of the day was to lay fires and then prepare breakfast. After breakfast, the rest of the day would be spent preparing meals and keeping the large house tidy and well ordered. She lived in the then servant quarters in the roof. She was paid a pound a week and dressed in a clean starched uniform which had to be kept spotless. She was grossly underpaid, but being a minor it was left to our father to see the coal manager to ask if she could have more money and after much discussion he agreed to up her wages by a small amount. A gardener and a cook were also employed there, but this wasn't much for a house of that size between the wars. She would not work on Sunday, spending the time with our family or at Chapel. The food for the coal manager and his family would have been prepared the day before, so that no work was done on Sunday."

## DOWN THE PIT

When a young boy entered the mines at the age of 14, he began a working life that was both hard and uncertain, not to mention dangerous. In the early days, all the work was done by hand and in conditions which are really unknown today. The working day lasted 8 hours, the day shift lasting from 7 a.m. to 2.30 p.m. with only a twenty minute break for food. Most miners would have had only a cup of tea for breakfast, but they often chewed tobacco underground. This was known as 'shag' and was a foul, black substance with a sharp, acid taste.

The conditions underground were such that the white, hardwearing moleskin trousers did not remain white for very long and although the miner did not wear a helmet, the fireman or official could order him to keep his cap on. As well as the moleskin trousers and cloth cap, a new boy would also be equipped with a lamp and tools, which he had to buy himself. From the moment he entered the mine, the boy would be under the supervision of a more experienced miner who would teach him the ropes and instruct him in the life underground. The miner or 'butty' just took the boy down for the first few days and then embarked upon teaching him his hard trade.

The day would start with the blast of a ship's hooter which was connected to the colliery boiler. This was the signal that the shift was about to begin and that it was time for the men to walk to the pit head. There they picked up their 'chits', exchanged them for brass lamps and just prior to them going down in the cage they were all searched.

"The men were searched for lighters, matches or cigarettes, a man could be sacked for smoking down a pit since it was a dangerous and stupid thing to do. I was going down to warn one man about this stupid habit, but he was sacked by mine official before I could reach his place of work."

The men would then enter the cage and draw the safety bars across and descend at speed to the level or face that they had to work. After reaching their level of landing, they emptied out of the cage and walked to the pit face. Even though they were down the mine they were not paid until they reached the face, a journey that could have taken up to 15 minutes.

As the bright lights of the landing area were left behind, the brass Davy lamps came into their own. On reaching the face, the lamps were hung up as high as possible and the light was directed on the area that was to be worked.

The work done was mainly 'stall and heading' work, with extra payment being made for heading work since it was so specialized. A new heading was cut along the length of the face at intervals of 15 yards and at the same time the waste created by the earlier work was taken out and loaded into the trams. The exposed ceiling was then arched to secure the heading and make sure that the rock above did not fall. This was done by putting up posts which were held by wedges or 'chokes' at the head and feet of the post and hit home by a sledgehammer.

This was measured to fit exactly between the floor and ceiling to take up the pressure. This measurement was made by the miner himself with the use of a shovel, then his arm and even his fingers for the fine distances. It was then marked by spit, so that he knew exactly the correct position for the pit prop to be cut and hammered home. The pit props were then placed at 4 foot intervals to support the roof. Once these were in place it was safe to remove the fresh coal. The use of a shovel to load the coal was frowned upon because it might have caused sparks, so much of this work had to be done by hand. In stalls where there was little distance between the floor and ceiling, the man would work either on his knees or on his stomach to get at the coal.

"When I was working in a low seam I used to work on my knees and tuck my legs under me and sit on my heels, then with my head bent forward I would 'pick' at the under part of the seam and then allow it to fall out and down. I would be working all day to fill three trams."

In such places, the coal was removed using a 'curling box' which was a flat box with an open front, sloping back and handles on either side. The box would be filled with coal and dragged along the floor until the coal could be loaded into the waiting tram.

Once the trams had been filled they were dragged to the cage by the horses, then sent to the surface, with the whole process being the responsibility of the Haulier. There was usually one horse to a tram, but in areas where the gradient was steep, two horses would often have to be hitched up. The Haulier shouted instructions to the horse, this, together with the use of the rein, made the horse move left, right, forward and stop. At the 'Bala' the stables were situated on top, near Nanthir Road and from the door of the stables there was a cat walk, three planks wide and eight feet high, from which the horse manure was carted away. This was then sold to local gardeners as fertilizer.

Conveyers were later installed which ran along the whole face, tipping to the low belt and manual fitting. The actual coal-cutting was then done by a process of undercutting which developed into power-loading, with steel chains and chocks moving on etc. As a result of such innovations, the old horses were eventually no longer required.

A miner was paid 1/- a day for carrying a first aid box or chest, but the collier concerned would lose out since, whilst he tended to the needs of an injured man he would be unable to cut his own coal and he could have lost up to half a shift. There was a first aider for every district so that the whole mine was covered and in the event of an accident, the first aider would be sent for. Minor accidents occurred every day with small cuts, bruises etc. but the more serious accident victims were taken to either Bridgend or Cardiff with, fatalities being rare.

"If there was a colliery accident in the small hours you could hear the tread of men walking home. If the party stopped at the 'Llan' and the men had a brandy, you knew the person on the stretcher was just injured, but if the party did not stop you knew the man was dead."

The pay of the miner was worked out by the company, based on the amount of tonnage cut. The coal would be checked on the surface by two check-weighers, one company man and one 'Fed' man ensured that the men were not cheated by the company in any way. All the small coal went to the company and was left in the 'gob' and if the tram contained a large amount of stone the miner would have his pay docked, with the weight of the stone being deducted from the final assessment. Each man had his own mark which he would chalk on the side of the tram so that at the end of a shift, the amount of coal he had loaded could be worked out and the men paid accordingly.

If a 'shot' was fired in a heading, it was checked by a fireman and a mark was made against the number of the miner so that it could be deducted from his pay as were the wages of a boy, if one had worked with him. There were also deductions of 3d in the pound for the doctor and Id in the pound for welfare, but there were no pension or sick pay funds. The two doctors, Dr. Rees and Dr. Mac, held their surgery in the Nanthir Hotel and you could either go privately or with the medical aid, the choice was yours.

The rubbing out or changing of a man's mark was regarded as serious theft, as was the stealing of another man's tools. On one occasion a miner who stole his workmate's shovel which cost just 1/6d to buy, was sentenced by a local court to 6 months imprisonment, whilst a person who had embezzled £3,000 was earlier sent down for just 3 months.

At the end of a shift the miners would return to the surface where they handed in their lamps and collected their 'chits'. The chits contained the name of the colliery and a number so that the management could know how many miners were down the pit at one given time. In those days there were no pit-head baths, the miners had to wash in front of the fire in their own homes using galvanized iron baths with the hot water being provided by the coal fire. After having a meal, the young miner would usually go along to the institute where he could play billiards or use the reading rooms etc., the institute itself being funded by the miners as a place of recreation.

# STRIKES

Strikes were part and parcel of the coal industry, with differences between management and workers often evolving into bitter conflicts in which the whole community suffered.

"During the 1921 strike, I had been in the Garw for one year, I was six years old. I remember the fine, beautiful weather and for twelve months we had no work, no money, no dole and only 7/6d a .week from the 'Fed' as the union was called then.

There was no social benefits and if you had any furniture it had to be sold to get some cash on which to live for another week. Then, when you had nothing else you went 'on the parish' if you were so inclined. It was surprising the number who would starve rather than go on the parish, such was the experience of being asked humiliating questions which should never have been spoken in the first place. The poor were treated like criminals.

The 1921 strike to a youngster of my age and background was a time of great excitement. There were a few buses and almost no cars about, apart from the two or three taxis operating between Pontycymmer and Blaengarw and the bus service ran by 'DiCk the Devil' and his fellow driver, Martin. A bus driver in those days had a similar status to an airline pilot of today, they were all held in great respect.

The strike was an adventure for us all, the collieries were closed and we youngsters could roam at will, exploring places that we were not normally able to do. The miracle is that so many of us lived long enough to grow up, the risks we took then makes my hair stand on end now.

Another thing I remember were the number of police in the valley, from Swansea mainly, all strangers from outside the valley. The miners were well behaved and it was heartbreaking to see men with families having no fires, with coal on the tips, coal in the sidings and tons in the tracks of the various collieries going for the asking but for the line of policemen. There were also scuffles and fights between desperate men who were only thinking of their families. It was hard enough to be short of food, but in the evening when the sun went down the houses

became chilly, with no heat nor warmth the misery increased. Not so with the children, it is surprising what children can put up with. When the strike ended we were worse off than when it started."

During the six month strike, the horses were brought to the surface, where they were exercised by the Hauliers who used to ride them across the mountains. At the Ocean and Carn Collieries these horses usually lived out their lives underground, but during the strike they were allowed to wander freely in the fields and as a result, when it was time to start work again it took a whole week to catch one particular horse. The horses were also used in the construction of the 'New Road' and the backfiring of 'Dick the Devil's ' charabang as it passed used to cause them to play up somewhat.

The General Strike of 1926 lasted only a few weeks, but the miners continued the struggle for a further 5 or 6 months, which brought further suffering to such mining communities as the Garw where many had not really recovered from the hardships of 1921. In the early stages of the strike the weather was glorious and the strikers occupied themselves with sports competitions. There were such things as road races down to the Black Bridge and back, with a pint of beer for the winner and cattie and dog tournaments.

To help families survive, soup kitchens were established throughout the valley, with one such kitchen being run from the vestry of Neobb Chapel, Blaengarw.

"Here the teachers would register their classes, then take it in turns to look after the kitchen. Three meals were provided during the day, with porridge, weak soup, vegetables and bread. There was real hardship in the community, but the children were well behaved and well mannered in spite of their poverty. The staff also provided the children with shoes and clothing, stockings and jumpers. Bridgend Road School teachers did a great deal for their particular area, on one occasion they donated a weeks wages to the kitchens and on another day they provided new clothes for an expected baby. Also in Bridgend Road, when a man died, the street would club together to make sure that the mourners were attired in decent black garb. Times were hard, but there seemed to be more respect for people then."

No cutlery, plates or bowls were provided at these soup kitchens, the people attending were always obliged to bring their own.

"One man used tin cans with soldered handles for tea cups because the children, or rather their parents couldn't afford the breakages. I lost so many spoons that eventually I had one tied to my belt and the solution to broken plates for me was an old enamel plate which one day I exuberantly bowled down the Ffaldau Hill. But I will always be grateful to the people who gave us children soup and the solid square of rice that we had for dessert."

The miners came out of the strike defeated and dispirited, having to work an extra hour a day for less pay. On Saturday, which became known as 'Cook's Day' (after miners leader A. J. Cook) they had to work for 7 hours and if they wanted to play rugby, they had to write a letter to the Manager for permission.

# UNEMPLOYMENT

There was a shortage of work at Garw Collieries throughout the 1930's and everyday groups of unemployed miners would wait on a street corner to see if there were a line of empty trucks coming up the valley. These trucks needed to be filled and it gave the out-of-work miner hope of a job for a day or possibly even a week. If there were no empty trucks, there was no work to be done. Because of such uncertainty, the life of a miner was unsettled, he could not make plans for the day just in case there was a knock on the door, telling him of the arrival of empty trucks.

There were a number of old levels scattered about the valley and some still contained coal that could be worked to an advantage when there was a shortage. Such practice was against the law but this did not stop many unemployed miners who were desperate for fuel for their fires.

"There were occasions when people were buried in the levels by a rock fall, but we always left one man outside to report if anything went wrong, or help us out if he could. There were one or two deaths that I knew of, but the benefit of having coal more than compensated for the risk."

# COKE OVENS

For many years, the coke ovens were hives of activity that seemed to dominate the scene in the valley. Coke was in great demand at this time and for this reason the coke ovens were kept working 24 hours a day, with 3 shifts of men being needed to keep them operating fully. These ovens also produced burning tar which had such a fierce heat that it used to melt the cast iron surrounds.

"At regular intervals, the coke ovens would fill the area with thick clouds of stinking steam which passed over packed houses and gardens, especially in Pontycymmer. A condition which, if repeated today, would produce 'Questions in Parliament', but in those early years were taken as the facts of life. The ovens were situated in an area that stretched from in front of the old police station in Victoria Street to just below the now Blaengarw Rugby Club. Apart from the dust, all the operations associated with the production of the coke uses to proceed comfortably until the final operation when the workmen poured water over the piles

of burnt coal as they came out of the ovens and onto the steel covered floor. The resulting clouds of steam, which used to smell like rotten eggs, poured over the valley, but were accepted by the public who were blissfully unaware of the danger that passed over them and into them. These clouds did their best to choke the inhabitants, but long usage made them apparently immune they just accepted what seemed to be inevitable. The obvious beneficiaries were the coke owners, they did not pay the miners for the small coal, all of which they changed into coke for profit."

# PIT HEAD

On the surface of the Ffaldau Colliery was situated a large engine house which contained the winding engine. The inside of this engine house was dominated by a large drum, over which were coiled two thick wires, running over the wheel and down the pit.

"Seated above the engine to the right hand side and partly surrounded by a railed barrier, stood the winding engineer and on the wheel to his right was a handle with a wlre attached to it, which lead outside to a steam pipe surmounted by a ship's siren. It was always a thrill for me to see Mr. Davies, a rotund gentleman, sitting in his seat at the levers and to watch the piston moving to and fro, winding up one rope and allowing the other to unwind. On the same circling drum there was a curious piece of apparatus whlch I came to know as a 'govenor'. This was constructed from two iron spheres which chased each other until the master braked them to a stop."

Whenever there was a fire anywhere in the valley, the first person sighting it would run 'hell for leather' to the engine house, up the two steps, open the door and shout 'Mr. Davies' or Mr. Bisset', depending on who was on duty, 'there's a fire! Give us the key'. Davies or Bisset would then give him the key and pull the handle on his right and out of the siren would come a howling wave of noise.

The fire-fighting apparatus was kept in a special large hut built about 50 yards from the engine house. The equipment consisted of a small hand cart, something like a scout's trek cart, which was filled with a mixture of stand-pipes, hoses, rolled and unrolled, two ropes for attaching to the hubs and iron keys for turning on the water. These keys fitted various hydrants which were to be found throughout the valley.

"The man with the key would rush to the shed, open the door and wait until three or four stalwarts who had been awakened or had heard the howl in their homes to arrive. These would rush up to the shed to the waiting early runner, there would be shouts of "where's the bloody fire?", "Come on, let's go!" and "wait, we can't pull this thing ourselves." but nothing could be done until there was sufficient numbers. When these arrived the entire group would drag the cart and its apparatus to the fire and all the while the hooter continued its unearthly wailing."

"After arriving at the fire, there would be a long search for the hydrant since no-one seemed to know where it was, the hoses leaked and as always, the neighbours pitched in with buckets, bowls etc. and did their best. They were primitive methods to be sure, but over the years things improved. Part-time firemen were employed, trained personnel appeared, the hut was re-built and a tower was built to dry the hoses, there was even a fire engine albeit a small one. Now modern facilities insure that an engine is in the valley before one could ask Mr. Davies or Mr. Bisset for the key."

By the late 1930's conditions in the coal industry began to improve and during the war, work at all the valley pits started to pick-up, with mining becoming a reserved occupation. Then in 1947, there was nationalization and modernization and from that point everything seemed to change, there was not so much smoke and dust, the valley seemed a bit more quiet.

"You never used to need a clock to get ready for school in the morning, the Ffaldau hooter would provide the exact time. It was the most peculiar hooter you could imagine, with a high pitched scream every morning at 8.30 with the sound of the hooters from the other valleys in the background.

It boomed out when the cage was going down and when it came back up again, you didn't need to tell the time. There was also the chuff, chuff of the steam engine as it came up the valley to take the coal away and with the gradient you could hear the train puffing and straining to make the journey. Even with the diesels you could hear the same labouring effort to overcome the gradient.

In the old days the valley seemed to have more character, but now there is almost a dead silence."

# HEALTH

In such a growing, overpopulated community as the Garw at the turn of the century, the medical facilities provided were primitive to say the least. The local doctors were often called upon to perform miracles, there were no hospitals in easy reach, even the most serious of cases had to be treated in the home. On certain occasions, such as mining accidents, there was little that the doctor could do.

"It was in 1908 that I experienced my first mining tragedy, when they were driving a new drift mine on Bridgend Road. The drift had been driven in about one hundred yards when one of the men, William Davies (Essex) became trapped by his lower limbs. They had struck a stretch of sandy clay which kept on collapsing. He was trapped for three days in spite of the efforts of mining experts who had come from all over South Wales to assist in the rescue. The family doctor, Dr. Parry, remained on the scene for practically the whole time, they even tried to free him with a haulage rope to the winding engine, but without success. Unfortunately as they cleared the clay around the trapped man, more clay kept on falling.

Eventually a great roar was heard from the drift mouth when he was finally released, but unfortunately he died before they were able to get him home.

This clay fault that proved so fatal to William Davies (Essex) ran through parts of Bridgend Road, Green Hill and Mount Pleasant. Hence the destruction of a large part of the road, including Noddfa Manse, together with Green Hill, which was probably caused by subsidence."

Dr. Parry, who lived in a large house opposite the present Blaengarw Rugby Club, was the 'premier medico' of the valley during the early stages of this century. He was an invaluable member of the community and a very genial and benevolent person who used to visit the local schools each Easter Day to present every child with a new penny. "His name conjures up the vision of a fat, jovial character who at Christmas Time dished out oranges to the cadging kids in response to 'Merry Christmas Dr. Parry!'.

He pulled out teeth, mended bones, without anaesthetic and charged for each visit. He attended his surgery in Oxford Street every day, this small annex was part of the building which was later called Medical Aid. Patients climbed up the steps to a small out-room with red distempered walls heated by a tall tortoise stove and smelling of disinfectant. Here the genial doctor worked his magic and took his money.

I can still see this stout gentleman 'making an entrance' along Oxford Street, lifting his hat and responding to the 'Good Mornings' of his would-be patients and friends."

Eventually, medical treatment became organized under a Medical Aid Society which was one of the most important institutions in the valley. As with other institutions the cream of the community came to the top and were dynamic in their leadership.In the case of the Medical Aid Society, it was Llewellyn Jones who took on the British Medical Association with its closed shop and vested interests and won. The Garw was black balled by the B.M.A. with no accredited doctors being allowed to practice in the valley. The conflict was only resolved with compromise, with a B.M.A. doctor paying the appointed doctor, who was employed by the Medical Aid Society. The surgery was established underneath the institute in Meadow Street with dentists being held two afternoons a week in a first floor office at the bottom of Ivor Street. Some patients had to be held down in the seat when a tooth was being extracted since there was no anaesthetic being used. The 'Medical Aid' was financed out of miners contributions and family dues which were paid on a weekly or yearly basis. It was 25/- for a year's cover, this included medical treatment, medicine, bandages, dental treatment, a doctor on call and transport to Cardiff for treatment that could not be provided locally. On one occasion, a person from the valley who had clumsily stuffed a small bead into his ear had to be taken to Cardiff Infirmary, where an instrument resembling a mechanical claw was thrust into his ear to get it out.

As for infectious diseases, there were attacks of diptheria, scarlet fever, typhoid and even smallpox at various times. A family stricken down by say, scarlet fever would be isolated in their house with a red cord in the window to warn others. No-one dared enter a house where

a 'scarlet fever' notice was displayed, some even crossed the road to avoid contamination. To avoid catching the disease, young boys would spit on the pavement after they passed the infected house, so that the offending germs would be coughed back to where they belonged. This was usually accompanied by the chant of 'scarlet fever don't come to my house'.

Given the state of the drinking water during the early days, when the river was used as the source, the valley was fortunate not to suffer from a great many more outbreaks of disease .

As well as the doctors, there was eventually a mid-w working in the valley. For decades Nurse Cotterall of Blaengarw was the only resident mid-wife in the Garw and because of this she became one of the best known people in the valley.

"During the depressed days of the thirties with its widespread poverty, Nurse Cotterall often found herself delivering babies by candle-light and sometimes in total darkness. She experienced poverty at first hand, bedding and clothing were inadequate and she willingly gave out of her own resources. She helped many deprived families as best she could. A Christian lady, a native of the West Country, she made Blaengarw her home and served the village well."

# RELIGION

Religion played an important role in the life of the community with all denominations in direct competition with each other, all scrambling to get the largest congregation. In fact, the Baptist, Independent and Methodist preachers used to meet the train as it entered the station and tout for membership of their particular denomination with promises of clean lodgings etc. in order to get the new immigrants into the fold. As a result, everyone in the valley belonged to one chapel or other and this devotion was intensified with the religious revival movement of 1904, the affects of which remained with the devotees for most of their lives. Such devotion made the chapel the centre of both the religious and social life of the valley.

"As a cabinet maker by trade, my father spent most of his free time inside the church constructing the big seat, library cupboards and partitions etc. Even at 72 I held the ladder for him while he climbed around the roof of 'Zion' putting back loose slates. We walked from the top of the avenue down to Zion three times each Sunday and very often on Saturday night for special services. I always associated our small front room with a minister's retreat, because my parents often gave hospitality over the weekend to the visiting minister. After the meals they always used to retire to that room to prepare for the next service, but I always had the feeling that they slept most of the time.

I quite liked the Sunday with ministers, although it meant being on one's best behaviour, but it did mean that we moved into the middle room with the big table, best china and a decent

piece of meat. Weekdays usually meant sheep's head at 4d, pig's head at 6d and a skinned rabbit from Pugh's at

I often sit in the chapel at Zion and see again the people who took such pride in it. I can see Mr. John Edwards, the presenter, getting redder and redder in the face, William Joyce with his frightening white beard banging on the bell to bring us out of our classrooms in Sunday School. I remember the Sunday School outings, running races in a field above Pantygog, with the prize a bag of sweets and recitation Sundays with anxious parents mouthing the words to their offspring so that they didn't let the family down.

After the service on Sunday there was the walk down to the Black Bridge and back, it seemed that everyone came along.

I remember being warned that I should leave Bridgend Road for courting couples. Many romances started and often ended on those roads.

Sunday was also the day when one dressed up. Weekdays meant patched trousers and a jersey and I once was delighted when I grew one inch in a day whe~ my father repaired my shoes with an old piece of conveyor belt, but on Sunday the suit was taken down and you were warned that it had to be kept clean. I was always relieved when it was safely back on its hanger and it passed my mother's inspection.

Money was always in short supply and Thursdays seemed to be the saddest day of the week. Friday was pay-day and life seemed to be renewed. Friday was also shopping day, with 'Checks Own' and later, the 'Rainbow' comic at the bottom of my mother's basket. They appeared then to be quite difficult days, but looking back they had their compensations and I am quite happy to have been brought up in those surroundings."

Although a number of denominations established themselves in the valley, in the early days there was a concerted effort to prevent Roman Catholics from gaining a foothold. The rights of these Roman Catholics were upheld by priests but were dispelled by such religious stalwarts as Mr. W. Watkins who was Christodelphian and a great idealist. Nightly open air debates were held on such subjects at Gwaun Bant, where definite outcomes were hardly ever achieved, but where there were some spirited exchanges. For those denominations that thrived there were large, commodious, stone-built chapels, which were usually constructed by the congregations themselves. One exception to this was the 'Tin Church' in Pontycymmer.

"There was once and for many years, a building disguised as a church and covered with corrugated iron called zinc. This product has often been referred to as 'tin' and this 'joke' church was itself referred to as the 'Tin Church'. In addition to the usage as a holy building, it was also used for dances, concerts, etc., together with other unholy diversions, organized by the church authorities.

In the first instance it was also hoped that it would attract the worshippers who felt that it was too much of a strain on their resources and faith, to climb up the hills on the other side of the

valley and worship in the first St. David's memorial in Church Street. The site for the 'tin' brother was on a platform of earth, excavated below the road leading to Braichycymmer Farm, which was once called the funeral road. Strangely, over the years its usage petered out and the 'Tin Church' fell into dereliction, along with the decline in religious fervour in the valley.

Some 'Jeremiahs' thought at the erection of the 'tin cathedral' near to the edge of the mountain, that it would surely fall into Bridgend Road. Strangely enough, although it never did, the school below it and the large house on the opposite side of the road, together with several houses have all disappeared as a result of the widespread subsidence in the valley."

One feature of all the chapels was 'Y Set Fawr' or 'The Big Seat', which was situated at the front of the building. It was here that the Deacons sat, the chapel elders who were specially selected and who acted as a type of management committee with a secretary and treasurer etc.

"Owens the inspector used to fill one corner of the big seat of our chapel, with Griffiths Jones, another big man in more ways than one, occupying the other.

Nearly all around the seat were important men and if I dare say, some of them were very fiery and needed cooling down. The man who did this was invariably Owens the inspector, who would get up and talk for such a length of time that the hot-headed ones would cool down, look at each other and laugh because Owens, like the others, did go on a bit. As we say, he could talk about any subject under the sun. Yet, in the second meeting, when his time came, he would praise the minister and then clasp his hands together, rubbing them with delight and say, 'I want you to know that Alexander was a very great man'. Though I am over seventy I thought out of respect for Owens that I would have to look up Alexander, who was around a long time, in 365 B.C. Someone said the other day that Alexander was not a great man, I wonder what J. D. Owens would have said about that."

There also existed in the chapels what might be referred to now as 'cheer leaders' who would make cries of 'Ie Ie' (hear, hear) or 'Diolch Iddo' (thanks be to him). "They would cajole and encourage the preacher into a state of ecstasy and enthusiasm (which was known as 'hwyl'), so that he sometimes seemed to be in a state of collapse. This condition is not so prevalent in Wales now, but it is to be seen on television occasionally, especially from the deep south of America, where the negro congregations seem to be 'turned on' by the exhortation of the gesticulating enthusiastic negroid pastor."

At the time that Noddfa Baptist Chapel was being built, all the baptisms were performed in the river and during winter time, the minister would even have to break a hole in the ice for the ceremony to go ahead. Baptism meant total immersion in water, unlike christening, which is the sprinkling of water over the brow of a very young baby, so the baptized person must have emerged almost frozen from the icy waters. This ceremony became more agreeable following the opening of the chapel.

"Long before the event, the news had been spread about, not by notice but by word of mouth, which was no real problem in those days. 'They are going to baptize somebody in Noddfa week on Sunday Mary, are you coming?" "Aye, I'll be there, who are they dipping then?" "I don't know who yet, but it'll be a good night out anyway."

In such a manner the congregation is assured and by the time of the event, the chapel is packed and especially upstairs where one usually obtained a good view.

When the sermon had ended the minister came down from his pulpit and entered the back room. At the same time the potential baptists quietly slipped into the vestry, where they changed their clothes, the boys into shoes, trousers, shirts and belts and the girls into shoes, white dresses and belts. While this was going on the deacons removed the floor from the area below their seat which revealed a large tank already filled with water.

The would-be members had now returned to their reserved seats near the door, through which the minister had disappeared. He would then re-appear dressed in a rubber suit, not unlike the modern aquadivers' outfit, but without the head-gear.

After a few appropriate remarks, he gingerly entered the water and invited the first novitiate to join him. The young person, generally a boy, then stood quite near to the minister who would grasp the about-to-be baptist by the collar and belt whilst at the same time calling out in Welsh "I Baptize you, in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit." When he said 'Spirit' with a practiced movement he immersed the upright figure below the surface of the water. On hearing the word 'Spirit' the whole congregation with a sureness based on practice, burst out singing 'Praise the Lord, Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Hallelujah'. The Hallelujah was repeated with increasing volume and was completed with a long drawn out 'Amen'. A short phrase, but the repetition of the word 'Hallelujah' allowed the newly born baptist to recover his feet and composure and to wade out of the tank, into the vestry and to change back into his best clothes. The process was then repeated with the remainder of the young people.

Unlike the boys, the girls were fitted with a strong elastic band around their waists and before they entered the water this was drawn to the bottom of the skirt by an attendant matron, so that dignity was preserved.

I have always wondered at the use of that sudden burst of music at the point of immersion, was it a burst of enthusiasm at the birth of a baptist, a play to divert attention from a possible accident, or was it to allow the patient time to recover his or composure. Cynical? I don't think so. "

The chapels in those days were also places of social gatherings and it was here that friendships could be made which would last a lifetime.

## STUART HUBBARD

"Did you know that in the 'Cong' in Meadow Street, which is now called the United Reform Church, that there is a brass plate which catches my eye, for the name on it is that of Stuart Hubbard. The hardest thing in life for Stuart was to stop laughing, he would brush the tears from his eyes with the back of his hand and if he should catch me doing the same thing, this would cause a further burst of laughter. It could be said of us that all too often 'our sides would be cracking'. Mind you, Stuart was brought up well, for his father once said to him, 'Never spit, because you can never make it up again. (Don't parents say some strange things?). I can imagine us both standing by the brass plate that bears his name and I would say to him, 'You are the most regular member of this church for you are here both day and night' at which we would both collapse on the floor with laughter.

During the last war he was an engine fitter or air frame fitter with the R.A.F. and his parents used to comfort themselves that since he was not flying he would be safe. As the war was just ending he went out on what was meant to be a safe joy-flight to Malta, but the plane was unfortunately shot down and his tragic death was therefore a greater shock to his parents. It is said that Mrs. Hubbard never laughed again and I can understand why.

I met Stuart once by the bus stop shelter on the Square as he was going back off leave and I teased him about all the beautiful girls in his life, for he was handsome as well as being full of life. He told me that he would swap them all if he could go back to the time when as boys we played rugby on top of-Braichycymmer mountain, for they were the happiest days of his life."

## GAE TY CWRDD

It was so easy years ago to get a nickname and I suppose it was because Gae Ty Cwrdd went so often to prayer meetings that he was known as 'Gae of the Meeting House'. Gae looked after a plot of ground near to his church and though he was thin and old, there was nothing wrong with his digestive system. Early training possibly stood him in good stead. One night when he was feeling peckish he went down to the pantry where he knew there was a chicken. On the way back to bed he met his brother who was also on the way to the pantry and said 'You're too late Tom, I've eaten it'.

I know of two jobs he performed. One was that he helped to carry the wooden bier that the coffin of someone departed might rest upon. I was rather embarrassed one day when he asked me as a young lad to give him a hand to carry it from the cemetery to a nearby house and fortunately for me this was a distance of only about 100 yards. As he knocked on the door he advised me that if anyone offered any food that

I was to put my feet under the table and not insult the people, by refusing to eat all that was set before me. Before anyone answered the door, I was off like a flash.

His other job (and it's only just dawned on me) was also related to food and was at our yearly chapel social where, of course, the tables would be laden. Gae, possibly self appointed, was in charge of boiling the water in a free standing boiler of quite some size. As he was so old and feeling somewhat cold, I've seen him happily sitting on the boiler top to get warm with his legs dangling over the sides. Let us give him marks for ingenuity for he appeared to be quite at ease and on top of his job."

# SUNDAY LIFE

On Sundays, no work was done, there was no travelling and even no washing, the plates, knives and forks were left until Monday morning to clean. Racing papers were disliked because they encouraged gambling and there no Sunday papers except the 'Christian Herald' and 'Christian Companion.' Sunday trading was frowned upon by the Deacons and there was no train on Sunday, the last train being on late Saturday night and was called the 'Rodney'. As for the children, Sundays were devoted to the chapel and especially to the Sunday School.

"At Noddfa Baptist Chapel where both my brothers and I were taken by our mother when we were very young, we used to sit in the same family pew each and every Sunday morning and evening, while the afternoon session was devoted to attending Sunday School. At each service I was uptight, not turning my uncomprehending head for fear of receiving a sly pinch from an outraged matriarch. After the service we used to return home from for Sunday dinner which was prepared the day before and then back for Sunday School plus the evening service.

The Sunday School was a 'school' in the true meaning of the word. There were classes for children, young ones, older ones and even adults. All were arranged around the floor of the chapel and up in the gallery, the whole building buzzing with teaching, talking and discussion bordering on arguments. Groups of children from eight years old to elders of eighty years were all tutored by seniors, some of whom were 'real teachers' in the local schools, with being the deacons, all experts on the bible. At the same time, out in the vestry were to be found about a hundred or so younger children, all engaged in singing and reciting. Here again, the older group were divided into classes, in preparation for entry into the 'big chapel'.

This style of Sunday School was to be found in every other chapel, of whatever denomination throughout the valley. Many successful future local politicians must have taken their first steps in the direction of public service, right there in the Sunday School."

One of the most memorable events of theeat anticipation and excitement.

"On the day we first assembled in our respective vestries, there to receive free meal vouchers and have ribbons pinned to our lapels which identified the chapel to which we belonged. Then we marched in procession to the railway station .

Most chapels in the district simplified the travel arrangements by choosing the same venue and my most vivid memory is of long processions of children from all the chapels around, converging on the waiting train from a dozen different directions all at the same time. Our usual destination was Barry Island, which given our restricted circumstances during the depression was all we were likely to see of the sea, even though it was a merP fifteen miles away and we could see it on a clear day from the mountains above our homes."

Attached to every chapel was the 'Band of Hope' and although the title suggested music and expectation, there appeared to be much music, but very little hope. These 'Bands of Hope' were a feature of the youth work, an early form of the modern Youth Club.

"In our Band of Hope in Noddfa, we were a mixed group in age and sex, aged from about eight or nine to about fourteen years old. We met every Tuesday night in the vestry where we were controlled by various leaders, one of whom I remember well, in the person of Sal Thomas (Sal Penclawdd) a school mistress and a relation of the greengrocer, 'Dai Penclawdd'. She ruled this unruly mob and she was a great teacher. I remember her very well indeed, perhaps the remembrance is made much keener because I cast an appraising eye over the person of her daughter, Dilys, who was another member of the 'mob'.

Here we were taught to sing in 'cantatas' (what a funny word!) which were miniature oratorios and we learned little plays and recitations in preparation for the climax, for our effort before our elders in the chapel. Part of the work in the Band of Hope was preparation for the quarterly meetings as they were called. These also took place in the chapel, a Sunday session being set apart from them. Here individuals, mainly children, sang solos, duets etc. recited in groups or singly, all performing before their parents and friends seated in front of them. One of the funnier sides to these occasions was to watch how some anxious mothers or grannies, in the congregations would silently mouth the words of the faltering performer. Here again, looking back over eight decades, one can remember many of these shy, reluctant artistes who have 'made it' and have gone to the top from the Band of Hope, possibly the 'Hope' had been vindicated."

Also in the chapel there were many 'penny readings' where the best recitation or singer would receive a small prize. "The title 'penny readings' is really a misnomer for they were miniature Eisteddfodau, which were chapel sponsored and held with unfailing regularity in a myriad of vestries. People with an aptitude for singing and reciting found themselves leading hectic lives, which led to some unpopularity as they usually made the rounds in all the 'penny readings' and made off with all the prizes. 'Penny readings' proved useful training grounds and a number of early competitors went on to become well-known artistes."

# WAR

Whenever the nation became involved in a war, the patriotic fervour of the people of the valley came to the fore, with many unhesitatingly volunteering to fight, a commitment that lost many their lives. The first such conflict involving people from the Garw was the Boer War, when a number of men enlisted to fight in~South Africa. These volunteers were enlisted at the barber's shop of C. F. Hills and often large crowds were seen queuing outside. News of the war was a source of keen interest and discussion and letters from men serving there were eagerly awaited.

"Private William Hodge of Blaengarw , South Africa, May 10, 1901 - On December 6th, I was ordered on outpost duty (the day of my birthday), guarding a bridge. There were two of us. We were 100 yards apart. Here we had our first encounter with the enemy.

I happened to hear their horses stepping on the rails , I called my pal and gave the order 'hold! Who goes there?' For answer we had a few bullets fired at us, but we had sandbag protection and we started firing at them and kept it up for ten minutes. Then we retired and ran to our comrades, but they were on us, we had to run from one kopje to another to save our lives. They stole all our belongings at the bridge and kept us on the kopjes for three weeks. We had to live on one biscuit a day and the water was not fit for a cat to drink, but we had to drink it to keep alive. At the end we had to fight them. They wrecked a train, tied the guard to the engine and riddled him with bullets. At the same time we started firing on them, killed five and injured eleven and took two prisoners. Then we broke camp and marched 3.5 miles, when a Kaffir came up to us and informed us that there were 4,000 Boers coming towards us. We thanked him, entrenched ourselves, but we saw nothing of the enemy. I am having a very rough time of it out here. We are treated like dogs, driven almost to death and starved. There is nothing to be seen here but wild animals, hundreds of monkeys, some as big as men. We get about five hours sleep at night, being drenched with the rain. We have been now three weeks in wet clothes."

Interest in the war was such that whenever news of an uplifting nature reached the valley, there was always colourful and noisy celebrations.

"The news of the relief of Ladysmith raised the Garwites to a high pitch of enthusiasm and the streets were paraded with brass bands playing 'Soldier of the Queen' and flags were extended across the thoroughfares, whilst on the adjacent hills a patriotic number of reservists were expressing their joy in utilizing ammunition. The streets were lined with people and a troop of little boys arrayed in red coats etc., caused great merriment.

"When the news of the relief of Mafeking was received at Pontycymmer, the people once again gave themselves up to the wild expressions of delight. Guns, rockets and fog signals were heard in all directions, bunting being hung out in all the principal streets."

'Blaengarw was astir when it heard the good news. The streets were crowded as if by magic and amid the din of hooters, firing guns, crowds paraded the streets.' (Glamorgan Gazette)

In January 1917, almost 3,000 had already left the valley to fight in the Great War, all of whom were given a rousing send off, with the platforms of the railway stations groaning under the weight of the crowds of well-wishers. There was certainly a hawkish tendency in the attitude of the valley people at this time, with any talk against the War being almost regarded as treasonous.

"We regret to find we have some peace cranks in the Garw Valley. A resolution was proposed at a certain place of worship to end the war at any price. Nothing could be more disastrous to the country at this time than the passing of unpatriotic resolutions.' (Glamorgan Gazette)

As with the Boer War previously, letters from the Garw men serving abroad kept the valley informed of the hardships they were enduring in the struggle against the enemy. Life in the trenches was certainly not what they had expected when they enlisted and there were no signs of it ending by Christmas like they had originally been promised.

"Garw Officer, 13th Battalion, Welsh Regiment - Christmas Eve and we are in the trenches. We came in last night and we will be here for some time. It is fearfully wet here. Last night I got simply soaked from head to foot, it was awful and the rats were mighty. I am about 100 yards behind the front trenches and the noise is fearful. Our battalion may be out on Monday, then four days in rest billets, about ........miles behind and then in again for eight days, I think. I nearly got hit as we went out of the trenches on Wednesday night. I was with the Commanding Officer and another Colonel. Going out we had to dip and jump into a dug-out, as there was a sniper on. We lost a captain on our first day, killed by shrapnel. I hope you will have a happy Christmas. I wish I was with you, but this is my place and I hope we shall be all right."

In the valley at this time there were fund raising activities organized to help finance the war effort and on one occasion, as a bit of a gimmick, a tank was parked on Pontycymmer Square.

"This was not a real tank, but a mock-up of one of the tanks being introduced on the battlefields of France. The tank nearly filled the Square and it certainly was an object of interest for a short time.

It had been brought to the area to encourage the 'natives' to buy war bonds and so assist the war effort. I did not understand the objective of the visit, but together with other boys and girls from Pontycymmer and Blaengarw, we sang a patriotic tune, composed by a teacher from Blaengarw School, which was to encourage the public to, this is the only line I remember, "put your money in the tank." The word being synonymous 'bank' might have deluded some."

Many people cultivated small areas of land on which they grew their own food to help them through the crisis of the war, some even kept their own chickens.

"During the war my father took over an allotment on what is now called Blandy Park, no park then, but an old tip reaching down almost to the river. There we planted mainly potatoes and we boys would assist in all the work related to this project."

## FIRST AIRPLANE

Following the end of the war, a small bi-plane appeared in the skies above the Garw and the people poured from their houses with their eyes aloft to witness the spectacle. This was really the first time an aeroplane had been seen over the valley, although previously a man by the name of Mr. Carlyon from Victoria Street had constructed his own and was reported to have flown it a small distance from its aerodrome on the mountain top above the 'huts'.

The Bristol bi-plane was flown by Stan Thomas of Gwaun Bant, who brought the plane over to salute the valley and his old school, the Ffaldau Boys' School. The event was of particular interest because it was widely believed at the time that the swirls of air over and around the mountains would not allow an aeroplane to land, but after flying up and down the valley several times and performing various manoeuvres, land he did. Prior to this, the plane had swooped down low in the direction of Pontycymmer cemetery and over his father's house in fact, it then shot up into the sky again and after a few more stunts, it made for the top of Braichycymmer mountain, landing some distance north of Tudor's Farm.

By this time William Pennant, the headmaster of Ffaldau Boys' School had rushed out into the streets followed by all his pupils, with 'His Greatness' himself shouting and cheering, being glad to see one of his former pupils return to the valley in such style. In Nanthir Boys' School (now the Junior School) between two and three hundred pupils were out at afternoon play and they were all held spellbound, gazing skywards at this flying object which seemed to have come from nowhere.

The pilot managed to expertly land his machine on the rugby field, but when he scrambled out to examine the machine he found that the undercarriage had been badly damaged. The police soon arrived and workmen from the neighbouring Ffaldau Colliery were eventually recruited to set up a fence around the plane to hold back the sightseers who had flocked up to the mountain in such numbers that the path had been worn smooth. During the period that the plane remained on the mountain, it was guarded both by day and night by the local scouts under the supervision of the Scout Master, Fred White. Ultimately, a group of RAF fitters were billeted in the Ffaldau Hotel, where they were feted nightly by the locals until their departure. When the plane took off on its journey back to its base, peace and quiet returned to the Garw. Stan Thomas had given the whole valley a thrilling experience, but he himself, was severely reprimanded by the RAF for his impulsive action.

When War was declared in September 1939, there was a common feeling in the valley that it would last a year at the most. Because of this attitude, the valley was hardly affected by the outbreak of hostilities in Europe, although a number of people had been previously trained as air raid wardens in anticipation of such events.

Eventually, an 'ack-ack' battery was established on Darren Park, with searchlight equipment to track the German bomber flights as they headed for the South Wales ports. As well as this, a Dad's Army brigade was established which used to march through the streets with their wooden rifles, since they only had one real gun and five bullets between them. Rationing was introduced, with the people who had overindulged with their household spending having to wait for the next issue of ration books before they could buy anymore goods. As a result, a 'Black Market' was created, with 'spivs' trading surplus points for items people wanted. Petrol was also rationed and a dye was added to commercial petrol. One man from Blaengarw had jars of illegal petrol and he used lime to ferment out the dye. If you were caught with the incorrect petrol there was a £50 - £100 fine on the spot. The police would administer a litmus test, but this clever individual from Blaengarw got through every time.

"Early on during the 'Black Outs' and 'Air Raid Precaution' years, an ambulance was delivered for the use of the fire watchers who were accommodated in the Ffaldau Boys' School. This machine, it could not be described otherwise, was kept during the day at a stable which had been converted into a garage and owned by Mr. Gwilym Davies, a shop owner in Bridgend Road.

When the 'alarm' sounded, all the personnel who were on duty at the time, hurried to Mr. Davies' shop where they obtained the key and with luck, managed to start the cumbersome van. Sometimes they succeeded, but more often than not they had to obtain a helpful push from passers-by. The vehicle would then proceed on its uncertain way to the school.

It was only used twice during the whole of the war, as far as I recall, once in an abortive exercise and once on an unofficial 'real accident'.

The real incident occurred in the school yard where a boy had broken his leg. The head teacher, Mr. E. J. Evans, who had some standing in the fire watching hierarchy, immediately requisitioned the ambulance and ordered one of his staff to drive it. The boy was taken at once to the Bridgend Hospital, using up Government petrol in the process, a commodity that was strictly rationed. When the escapade was discovered and that Government petrol was used for an accident not associated with the war, there was an immediate and searching inquiry. Mr. Evans was made to feel like a traitor, he almost expected to be taken to the Tower of London, but he rode this difficulty with the usual equanimity.

The second time was an official usage. It went like this, someone in the higher-ups devised an incident for the whole of the fire-fighters to be involved. The main theme of the exercise was that a bomb had fallen in Oxford Street, near the old Salvation Army Hall and when the alarm was given, warden, police, fire watchers, St. John's Ambulance people all sprang into action, sorry that is the wrong phrase, went to their places.

In the meantime, all the traffic coming up Oxford Street was diverted to Penclawdd, along High Streets, down through Nantyrychain Terrace , it was passable in those days, out at the bottom of Oxford Street, the up coming traffic taking the return route.

The fire fighters came with their cart and made an abortive search for the fire hydrants, while in Bridgend Road the ambulance was pushed out of its stable, with the assistance of Mr. Davies. The driver then clambered in, dressed in an overall coat of some kind of plastic, a gas mask, heavy gas proof gloves, together with heavy wellington boots and set off for the 'drop'. He shot past the diverting policeman, right over the cart and down towards the hall. By this time his driving had become erratic and the ambulance was weaving to and fro. Fortunately he was able to stop and was rescued by some nearby spectators, who, when they opened the door, found that the elderly gentleman who was driving, was almost in a state of collapse, having been almost suffocated by the heavy equipment he was wearing.

What the result of the exercise was, nobody really knew, but it must have had a certain effect somewhere, in that it was never tried in the Garw again."

# EVACUEES

As London suffered from the devastation of the Blitz, the children of the capital were evacuated to the country areas for safety and a number of these were consigned to the Garw.

"I remember the arrival of the first batch of evacuees. The town band greeted them at the station, but as they got off the train the organizers discovered that they were the wrong children and they were swiftly sent on to Aberdare."

Other evacuees soon arrived, they came from the Willesden area of London and were allocated to families of the Alexandria Road and Albany Road areas of Pontycymmer.

One of the two teachers who accompanied the children wanted to stay in the 'better part' of the village and was surprised to find that there was no 'better part'. The children were well behaved and settled in well with the local community. The local children soon took on the accents of the cockneys and the evacuees for their part, took on a very broad version of valley English.
In the war years, a number of people were designated positions that involved a certain authority, this seemed to go to the heads of some, who took on a totally different character when in the role of official.

"During the early period of the war all persons were obliged to carry an identity card and were expected to produce it when called upon by any official authorized to see it. One of these was a certain gentleman who shall remain nameless, but was nevertheless very

officious in his approach to duty. During the arrival of the evacuees, one group was diverted to the Garw Higher Elementary School when they should have been sent to the Ffaldau Boys. They were accompanied by this officious gentleman who had met them at the station and directed them top the 'Top' school, marching alongside the crocodile, complete with tin hat, gas mask and whistle. He led them up to the steps and just going to lead them up the second flight when he was approached by a teacher who he knew quite well, who stopped him and told him that the children had been taken to the wrong school and that they were supposed to go down into the lower school. "Who are you then?" he barked out, "You know quite well who I am" replied the astonished teacher, "I don't care " he shouted "where is your identity card?" "I don't have it" came the reply "well you should have it, now get out of this yard before I charge you."

Together with the identity cards, it was also necessary to carry your gas mask with you at all times. In fact, the Government issued a picture and film of Winston Churchill so as to encourage people to carry the ridiculous cardboard box on the end of a string. By the time that the masks arrived in the Garw all danger had seemingly passed by and no-one ever carried one, not in the Garw anyway. There was also another instruction that ordered all children to rush home from wherever they were to take refuge, apparently under the bed or table. The idea of rushing home from school was a good thing from the children's point of view, but they were all expected to return following the 'all clear' signal. This third regulation fell by the wayside and in time the children were kept in school.

# ENTERTAINMENT

In spite of the poverty, the physical hardship and the isolated and cramped environment of the valley, cultural activities flourished and there was a great variety of live entertainment.

"The public hall was the first place for large scale entertainment in the valley. 'Rep' companies such as the 'Inez' Howard company would put on contemporary melodramas such as the 'Sign of the Cross', 'East Lyn' and Maria Martin's 'Red Barn'. I remember seeing these productions as a ten year old on Saturday night at the Llanharan Hotel. I was there to give company to the landlord's daughter and I would look through a pantry window into the hall to see classic Victorian melodramas.

There were also performing acts such as 'Doc Bodie M.D.' who performed tricks with electricity. There was a lame girl from Pontycymmer whom he cured, the cure was not permanent, but she did leave the hall without a limp. He also put a woman in a trance on Friday night and brought her out of the trance in the first house on Saturday night, coming out of a lined coffin. Later he was charged with misrepresentation for using 'M.D' but he claimed it stood for 'Merry Devil' and it was the public who had it wrong.

Also in the public hall, the Cymrodorian Society performed plays every Good Friday and the first silent pictures were held there by 'Will Stones Pictures' with a small orchestra to provide

the music. The public hall caught fire and was later replaced by a larger building on the same site."

As well as the public hall, there also existed a theatre in Pontycymmer, on a site in Prospect Place now occupied by the Ambulance Hall. It was more popularly known as the 'Rink' and there are few people today who can remember it in its heyday.

"The theatre was run, with most success, by a theatrical family from London called the 'Andersons' who came to run the theatre but stayed to end their days in the valley even when the Hippodrome was no more. They were originally a touring group, but before forming as a group, they were all well known performers in their own right. Harry Anderson was an acrobat, starting with the 'Four Flying Almars' of circus fame, Amy Anderson was an attractive actress, Harriet Anderson was a comedienne and male impersonator who was billed as 'the Female Chevalier' after Albert Chevalier (not Maurice) and Victor Anderson was a fine musician and comic straight man. It was Victor who invented and taught Charlie Chaplin the famous fancy walk which became Chaplin's trade mark in the silent era. This happened when Victor and Chaplin were travelling by sea together to the U.S.A. Maisie Anderson, who came to Pontycymmer at the age of eight, joined the act as a pianist, violinist and ballet dancer and she recalled playing in performances at both Windsor Castle and Crystal Palace. Maisie played the piano and violin in the orchestra pit for many Hippodrome shows and during the war she toured North Africa entertaining the troops in E.N.S.A.

After a car crash in London, the family moved to run the Hippodrome Theatre and under their astute management the theatre took on a new lease of life. Although arguably designed for skating, the Andersons converted it into a theatre cum cinema, with acts such as 'Fred Karnos Humming Birds' performing there, a company that included Stan Laurel, of Laurel and Hardy fame, years before he moved to America. Opera, ballet, variety, plays and films were all held at the Hippodrome at this time. A high spot was when the Andersons staged the Welsh Opera 'Blodwin' with Pontycymmer's own international singers Lewis James and Jennie Ellis in the leading roles.

Being well connected with the show business world of London, their friends called to see them in the Garw, Vesta Tilley, Lupina Lane, George Robey, Gertie Gitana and Lillie Langtry all visited the valley, but whether they played to any local audiences I cannot remember.

During colliery strikes, patrons of the Hippodrome were treated to a show plus a bowl of soup for a penny and no child who was without the price of admission was ever turned away from the Hippodrome's doors."

At the Hippodrome, skateboarding was introduced 70 years before it took America by storm. Competitions even took place in this sport, propulsion was by means of a broom handle, as feet touching the floor meant instant disqualification . Wrestling also went on at the rink, with the instructor in attendance being former world champion, Hacken Schmitt.

The theatre itself was a large corrugated iron building and it was capable of holding between 1,000 and 2,000 people. On the evening of Sunday, November 25th 1922, the theatre was

completely destroyed by fire. The fire broke out at 8:00 p.m. and tremendous flames appeared above the building. Both the Pontycymmer and Blaengarw fire brigades were called out but they had great difficulty in getting the blaze under control since the flames were so fierce and the building was quickly enveloped. The heat of the fire could be felt across the valley in Victoria Street. There was little chance of saving the building and instead attention was turned to saving Prospect Place and Railway Terrace. The flames shot up from 50 to 100 feet in sudden bursts and the whole scene was a magnificent one to the people who had congregated on the mountains.

In spite of this set-back, the Anderson family tradition continued, with the redoubtable Harriet at the helm. They organized fetes, galas, carnivals and sporting events galore and continued to do so long after their theatre had been lost to them. They continued to accomplish a great deal of charity work throughout the 1930's, putting on pantomimes such as Cinderella, in the Memorial Hall, work for which they were never officially honoured.

Although there was no shortage of venues for artistes to perform, the cost of hiring such places to rehearse often put small choirs at a disadvantage.

"Will Roberts, who was the founder and conductor of the 'Streets Bluebell Children's Choir' was too poor to pay for the hire of a hall, so he held the rehearsals in his own home and since there were nearly one hundred choristers, this was no small problem. But Will, with some ingenuity, overcame this problem by placing choristers in bedrooms, along the landing, in the passage and anywhere else they could be crammed. He and his accompanist, Mrs. Mavis Roberts were in the middle kitchen. You could not see Will, but you could hear his bellowed instructions and his stamping feet beating the time.

It was a good choir and much in demand for concerts etc., but the problem was that of a uniform. Cloth was out of the question in those days of depression, so they were made up of crepe paper at ld per large roll. It rustled when we moved and we had to tread warily for fear of tearing our precious regalia. We were at least dressed alike and that made Will happy."

With a number of such choirs in the valley, it was no great surprise that many talented people were discovered. These people had ordinary jobs during the day, but they could take on a totally new character during the evenings and hold large audiences spellbound by their talent.

"Apart from his fame as a 'bus stop', Dai Thomas Penclawdd, a greengrocer by trade, was magnificent tenor soloist. He was well known throughout South Wales for his performances in oratorio and to my certain knowledge had performed 56 concerts singing 'The Elijah' only, by 1940. Writing of David Thomas reminds me of the other performers in the valley such as Tom Williams, baritone, from Blaengarw, his daughter Megan, Madame Perkins, Jennie Ellis and many more. Then there was Christie Harris, a short little thespian who was a product of the early Cymrodorian, the Welsh Dramatic Society, who performed most of their dramas in, of all places, the top room of the Ffaldau Institute, their stage being the platform at the end of the room. There were no dressing rooms, just a curtain, tracked by hand at the beginning

and end of each scene. All spectators climbed the iron stairs outside the building to come in and out.

Later on Christie Harris formed his own company and very successful it was. Then followed the Blaengarw Dramatic Society, led and activated by the incomparable Miss Hills (one must not forget the 's') who, in addition to her undoubted qualities as a headmistress, was a remarkable musician, a pianist, an organist and conductor of choral music. She conducted both the production of 'Oratorio' and at one time the Garw Valley Operatic Society. While all this was going on, she found time to initiate and direct the activities of the Blaengarw Dramatic Society, doubtless the most successful episode in the whole of her astonishing career.

Even now, in her retirement she finds time to speak and lecture, if you will, at associations, churches, societies etc. and is welcomed and appreciated wherever she goes. She is doubtless one of the persons who have laid the foundations of any 'culture' that has existed in the Garw valley."

The popularity of live entertainment eventually became matched by the attraction of cinemas, with films being shown at the Blaengarw Hall, the Blaengarw Cinema, the Memorial Hall and Pontycymmer Hall. The latter was, at one time, known as Will Stones Hall, it was burnt down in 1937, but was re-opened the following year.

"With the films, they would arrive six months to a year after being shown in Hollywood and newsreels were often shown two weeks after the event had happened.

It was quite funny watching Test Matches and Grand Nationals long after you already knew the results."

The cinema was the most popular source of public entertainment for a majority of the adult population, but it was the children and youths of the valley who were totally besotted by the dream world of the films.

"Everybody in our class knew Len Aston. He lived in King Edward Street, directly opposite the cinema. There was nothing remarkable in that, apart from the fact perhaps that he hadn't far to walk when he went to the pictures. We were all cinema in those days. One thing I can remember about Len, he used to go shopping with his mother to Maesteg every Saturday on the old P.T.R. (Port Talbot Railway) train and after finishing their shopping, mother and son would go to Donners. This was one of the last travelling cinemas that used to move from town to town like a circus. It had finally come to rest on a piece of waste ground behind the Maesteg Town Hall, where it drew crowded houses week after week.

Now, in our little cinema in Blaengarw, there was showing at this time a weekly serial called 'The House of Hate' and stalking around this crumbling old mansion at the dead of night was a mysterious character named by those who caught glimpse of him as the Hooded Terror. He completely concealed his features. He was reported to have committed several ghastly murders, but episode after episode, he succeeded in eluding his pursuers by disappearing

into some secret passages with which the house was riddled. Each week, when we thought we had got him, the secret door would open and he would be gone. Then up on the screen would appear the caption "Who is the Hooded Terror? Don't miss next week’s exciting episode." It so happened that this serial was also running in Maesteg ahead of us in Blaengarw.

Can you imagine our breathtaking excitement as we waited for Len to
bring us the very latest report of the Hooded Terror from Maesteg every Monday morning.

In these days of sophisticated entertainment of all kinds, how thrilling and exciting it is to recall the pleasure we got from the silent films of long ago."

Another major source of recreation were the public houses which were usually crowded every evening, in spite of the influence of the chapels and the frequent campaigns of the Temperance movements. Public houses at this time were the sole domain of the men, the presence of women in public bars was certainly frowned upon.

"In the Llanharan Hotel, women were barred, it was only after the Second World War that women went on their own into public bars. Some, though, would use a side door that led into the 'Jug and Bottle' bar, such as Mrs. Williams 'Protem' who would go into the Llanharan Hotel every Monday morning with her clean apron concealing a bottle which she would pop in and exchange after looking both ways to see if the road was clear."

There was also the miners institute, where during the winter, lectures were arranged with prominent figures such as Daniel Jones, the Astronomer Royal, giving news of the latest discoveries, or the novelist, Jack Jones, giving a talk at the price of 3d a ticket.

# HOLIDAYS

As for holidays, most people from the valley either did not have the time, or more precisely, the money, to take regular vacations, but most made an effort to get to the seaside at least once or twice during the Summer months, travelling there either by horse and cart or by train.

"On holidays we would go to Llandridnod Wells to take the water rich in iron. There was no question of going abroad, the closest thing to that was the P&O line from Porthcawl to Ilfracombe. The most popular method of travelling was to hire a 'brake' from Mr. Stinchcombe, which you had to book weeks in advance. For a holiday in a trap, mother would boil the ham and get the tea ready and the boys would gather sticks for the picnic under Dunraven Castle at Southerndown. One summer, my mother cured a seagull with a broken wing, which would attack you whenever you returned to the taibach."

Many could not afford to hire a trap, but some improvised.

"My father, who was known as Jim the Haulier, used to scrub clean his coal cart every summer and take the family to Barry Island and back."

# SPORT

Sport in the valley was very popular and always well-organized, with a number of people either participating in or spectating in a variety of different sports, some of which involved gambling.

"When I was very young, there was 'Tommy Gray', no bearded old codger this, but a smart spanking racehorse. He and his owner lived in Blaengarw and was paraded throughout the valley as part of his training, gathering admiring glances as he pranced up and down the main roads followed by his trainer walking at the end of a pair of long reins.

I was too young to know why this parade took place, but later experience has taught me that this was a means of attracting the attention of would-be punters. I am sure they must have been successful.

Wally Carpenter also owned a racehorse, maybe two, but he was not content to parade it along the street. He had to ride it at a trot since no horse could gallop with Wally on his back because he was not really the jockey type. On one occasion, Wally was seen to come from his home near the cinema towards his stable near the bridge, which led from the Ocean to the railway sidings. As he came towards the bridge at a sharp trot, he was heard to shout, "Not under this time lass, over you go!"

Boxing became a very popular sport during the era of the 'hungry boxer' and the Garw valley itself itself produced several top class boxers. Every event was well organized and well supported. The great Tommy Farr fought in Blaengarw on three occasions and on the night he fought Joe Louis in 1937, the whole valley was up listening to their crystal sets on the outcome of the contest.

Tommy Farr walked over the mountain from Tonypandy to fight in Blaengarw at the age of 17, he had been fighting since he was 15 when he was known as 'Kid Farr'. Tommy also fought in the travelling fairs, with their boxing booths, such as 'Scarats', 'Joe Guests' and 'Taylor's Boxing Fair' with bouts lasting 3 rounds. The locals from the audience tried their skill as boxers and the prize money was either 2/6d or 5/-, a large sum in those days, with the entrance fee being 3d or 6d.

Tommy also fought Bunny Eddington three times, but never in the valley itself. Bunny was a very well known figure in the Garw, he was a short, ginger haired, square block of a man, who was not only a boxer but a very good rugby player. "On a Saturday he would do a days work in the colliery, go home, have a bath and change then play a game of rugby, change, walk over to Maesteg, fight and walk back home again. In those days, most fighters worked

in the collieries and on Saturday they would earn £5 a fight, with a slice being taken out for their managers."

"As a boy, Bunny suffered from asthma, which kept him home from school, but strangely enough this did not restrict his ultimate development into a boxer with a local widespread reputation. He also became a rugby forward of some experience, but in spite of his reputation as a boxer, which was appreciated by all, he never allowed his boxing talents to intrude themselves into his play on the rugby field.

One Garw boxing incident of his career remains in the memory. A South African boxer called Keiwetter, or something like that, was touring South Wales and was matched to fight Bunny in Pontycymmer. The fight was fixed, which is perhaps the right word and scheduled to take place in a garage now owned by Roy Kerton, behind Alexandria Road, which is a little bigger than the present but with the same headroom.

Imagine if you can the scene, in the centre a full-sized ring, chairs, a few benches, planks to stand on, not much light, referee, timekeeper, seconds, buckets of water and a motley crowd of spectators, some sitting on chairs, others sitting on planks, most standing on boxes, all eager and excited, waiting for the start. Keiwetter, unaccustomed to these primitive conditions, showed his class and managed to avert any trouble until near the end of the round, when he walked into one of Bunny's 'haymakers', incidentally these were a feature of his style, down went the South African, accompanied by a loud roar of cheers.

The referee started to count, one, two, three . . . . . .up to nine, the bell clanged instead of ten, cheers nearly raised the roof. The referee then allowed the fallen boxer to regain his seat and pandemonium ensued. It took several minutes before the fight restarted, Keiwetter had learned his lesson and in the words of an onlooker "in the remaining rounds Bunny never saw him". Good old Bunny, may his memory remain as red as his hair."

There was also Gwyn Williams, the Welsh welterweight champion who lost to Ernie Roderick of Liverpool in a British title fight and Evan and Gwyn Morris, Evan winning the welterweight title in 1930's. The valley provided some good fighters, although some were indifferent, but all were eager to fight and make a few bob regardless.

A soccer team existed in the Garw many years ago, they tried to cut out a field from the mountainside behind Gwaun Bant but failed. The present rugby field has, in fact, been constructed over their efforts. "Soccer eventually became well supported with such teams as the Carn Rovers, Blaengarw A.F.C., the All-Blacks, the Alexander Juniors, who used Darren Park, the Garw Corries, shortened from the Corinthians and the Garw Stars whose secretary, the late Will Plumber, did a great deal for soccer in the valley. The Blandy Park was the site where the travelling shows would come. The old ash tip was transformed by the unemployed into a soccer field after two years work. Garw exiles Watford and Bristol would return on Saturdays to play Garw Stars in their black and amber colours. In the old days they would change in the Llanharan Hotel to walk up to the pitch which was on the opposite side to the 'huts'. The 'Robins' would play in front of the 'Rocks'. One fine player was Billy Rees, who was capped for Wales and played for Cardiff City after his time with the Garw Bluebirds.

He later joined Spurs and Eddington Town, which became Oxford City in the golden age of Stanley Matthews. In those days, 40,000 spectators used to watch Cardiff City on a Saturday afternoon and a number of trains left the Garw to be in Cardiff in time for the 'Big Match'.
Angling was a difficult sport to perfect in the Garw during the old days since there were only two ponds and hardly any fish in the polluted river. The 'Fishing Pond' and the 'Brick Pond' were odd names to say the least, for there were no fish in the 'Fishing Pond' and possibly only a few in the 'Brick Pond'. Both these ponds served as a water supply for the boilers in the Ffaldau Colliery and the pipes carrying the water served as hazards for any adventurous youngsters to test.

A tennis team existed in the Garw as early as 1902, but generally tennis was played in Llangeinor, near the New Inn public house.

The earlier rugby teams in Blaengarw played their home games on a field that was known as the 'Cow's Back'. To get to the field, the rugby players were obliged to struggle up a mountainside, just like their fellow players from Pontycymmer and pass the farm now occupied by Dai Hughes. The field, in fact took its name from its shape, which was curved and similar to a cow's back.

"During that period, there existed a Saturday night publication called the 'Football Echo' which contained all the rugby and football results etc. One of its writers and cartoonists was a man who called himself 'Old Stager' and some of his main features was a character who carried the name of 'Dai Lossin' who was generally seen in the cartoon as being a follower of rugby. The drawing of the field by the cartoonist, in all his efforts, showed the players (in a field which, as far as I was concerned, was similar to Cow's Back) all charging up a field and I mean 'up'. They charged toward the goal posts set at different angles and only the tops of the said posts could be seen by the front of the charging pack."

A popular game in the Garw during the depression was 'Cattie and Dog', a game which cost next to nothing to play, which given the time was practical.

"The 'dog' was an old piece of wood four foot long and the 'cattie' was another piece nine inches long and tapered to a point at both ends, nothing else was required. The 'cattie' was pitched by an opponent towards a twelve inch diameter ring drawn on the ground. If it landed inside the ring without touching the edges, the 'batsman' was out without a stroke being played. If it landed along one edge of the ring the 'batsman' was allowed one stroke, but if it landed clear of the ring the 'batsman' had three strokes.

The idea of the game was to hit the 'cattie' with the 'dog' on one of its tapered edges so that it flew up into the air. While it was airborne the 'batsman' would give it an almighty swipe propelling it as far as he could. Upon completing his allocated stroke, the 'batsman' then estimated how many running strides (called 'calms') lay between the ring and the 'cattie' and the opposing team then had to stride the distance in that number or less.

If they succeeded the 'batsman' estimate was added to their own score, but if they failed then the batting team was credited.

Children played the game with implements fashioned out of old broom sticks, whiie adults, usually in club or colliery teams, preferred to use more manly, old mandrill shafts and as the opposing teams were allowed to field as in cricket, many a brave man came to grief trying to stop a 'cattie' in full flight.

There were leagues, championship tables and all the paraphernalia nowadays associated with football teams, but with the return of prosperity after the war, the game sadly died out."

# POSTCRIPT

"Looking down from the Garw mountains to Bridgend, the valley of today bears no resemblance to the valley of the past when there were collieries all the way down and not the empty landscape of today. What you could see was smoke, coal dust and activity and you always had to check before hanging out the washing because if the wind blew the wrong way the washing would be ruined. Then, all the surrounding fields were a mass of colours, everything seemed to grow better and wild flowers especially. The only flowers now are in private gardens, where the flowers have gone nobody knows and the ferns, the mountains were once covered with them.

I have come to the conclusion that the valley started to deteriorate when they began to pull down the public buildings after the war. The Memorial Hall, the Nanthir Hotel, the Llanharan Hotel were all pulled down and replaced by an empty space. The past was more interesting, there was no wireless, no TV. and only occasionally was a new gramophone bought, but we made our own enjoyment. There seemed to be more life in the valley itself, with taxis on the Square to take people up to Blaengarw, shops were open until ten at night, there were three fish and chip shops to serve cinema crowds alone, altogether there was more atmosphere. I can truly say I have seen the valley at its best and the present day valley has all the vitality of a Ghost Town, or a faded photograph."