

Notes from Local Interest Group Meeting 26th October 2017

Present: Maureen Lloyd (ML), Avryl Lloyd, Dainis and Wendy Ozols (WO), Edwina Griffiths (EG), Carol Gibbs, Sue Ievers, John and Margaret Price (Hay), Tim Francis (TF), Grace Davies and Tom Nicholls.

Apologies: Roy Lloyd, Evelyn Bally, Jenny Francis

ML welcomed everyone and introduced our guest for the evening, Tom Nicholls.

Tom lives at Rhydlydan; he was born and grew up on the family farm at Croesfeillog, on the Begwns. His parents were Alan and Hannah Nicholls and he was one of six children. In age order, they are: Arthur (b. 1925), Jenny (who sadly died when she was 21), Tom (b. 1932), Jack (b. about 1936), Avis (b. about 1938) and Ted (b. about 1939). (Ted was actually christened Winston, but has always been known as Ted. He was named after Winston Churchill. EG said that the schoolchildren always called him "Flat Cap"; he always wore a flat cap when he drove the school bus.) Tom and his siblings used to walk to school in Painscastle – 2 miles there and 2 miles back again every day.

Tom went on to talk about some of the families that lived in the village when he was a child. The Lloyd family lived in New House – 11 of them in all. One of them, Trevor, later moved to The Lundy. The Watkins family lived in 1 The Council Houses (now Brynhafryd) and the Morris family were in the Post Office (Dyffryn). The Morris family originally lived in the mill between Aberedw and Rhulen before moving to Painscastle. Betty Morris married Tom Lloyd and went to live in Castle Farm.

When Tom attended Painscastle school, there were 23 pupils on the school roll. He remembers walking to school with Tom, Margaret and Joan Edwards, whose family used to own the petrol station in Clyro. The children had an older brother called Fred. Tom recalled how Fred had been killed in a motor cycle accident on the road outside Croesfeillog. (At this point, TF said that his father had been friendly with Charlie Edwards.)

Tom continued by telling us some things about his time at school. During WW2, the school garden was part of the Dig for Victory programme. The school garden was actually at the other end of the village, behind the house known as Green Door, where the school teacher lived. They grew things like peas and potatoes, some of which went to the school canteen which had recently opened. Prior to having the canteen in the village, some of the children had gone over the road to the Old Shop for their lunch. This was prepared by the lady who lived there, Miss Gwyn Davies (who had actually been married twice, once to Mr Gwyn and once to Mr Davies!). He recalled two teachers, Miss Jones and Mr Gordon Taff. The latter came from Dol y Hir and he was the Headmaster. Strangely, Tom could still remember Mr Taff's car registration number – DUY 345!! Tom told us about some of the mischief he and his friends got up to and how it got them into trouble. Mr Taff would give them 6d to pump up his tyres when he got a puncture. One day, the boys decided to deliberately cause a puncture in order to earn some pennies and so they hid some small nails in a heap of manure on the road. When the teacher drove over them, his tyres were obviously damaged. What the boys did not know was that Mr Taff had seen them in his rear-view mirror watching him as he drove off and the next day they were called before him. The boys were: Tom Edwards, Tom Layton, John Powell, Reg Meredith, Eddie Pugh and Tom. They were caned for the incident and, sadly, they never earned 6d for mending a puncture again!!

The children were always up to pranks. The teacher who lived at Green Door usually had a big bowl of fruit in the window of her house. One day, the boys found a way of carefully opening the sash window so that they could pull the bowl over and steal the fruit. The teacher, thinking she had been

burgled, called the police, but they could find no evidence of what had happened. (The police had to come up from Clyro as there was no constable in the village at that time.) Another thing that they would do was to knock on the teacher's door and one of them would ask for a drink of water. Whilst she was distracted like this, another pupil would go into the garden and take some fruit or vegetables! Actually, Tom said that this was doubly naughty because she never gave them water, but always came back with some lemonade!

Tom could recall that he had been kept off school for a couple of days when the family had lost their water supply for their steam engine. He and his brother had spent two whole days carrying water, in buckets, up Croesfeillog pitch from the stream at the bottom of the slope so that the steam engine could be kept going. This was extremely hard and heavy work and to this day he doesn't know how they managed to keep going. He said that he would actually have preferred to have gone to school, which was quite something since he was always trying to find ways of avoiding attending classes!!

Tom went on to tell us that Tim Francis' Grandfather was the first in the valley to own a car. The second car in the valley belonged to the vicar; this was a Bullnose Morris. Castle Farm, Pendre and New House were the first in the village to have cars, but Tom could not remember what order they came in.

Tom also remembered the first tractors. The first was bought by the Dykes who lived in Upper House; they had an Allis Chalmers. Later, Castle Farm bought a Fordson and the Lloyds of New House had a David Brown. Tom remembers Bill Lloyd losing control of the tractor coming down into the village and he hit the garden wall at Pendre; the tractor's wheel came off and the tractor stopped opposite the Adullam Chapel.

Tom could remember there being a pond just to the west of Pendre farmhouse. This was the "village pond" and geese and carthorses used to drink there, in fact, the Lloyds of New House regularly used it for their carthorses. This would be roughly where Claremont was built (for Roy Lloyd's parents).

He recalled that Upper House, Whitehall and Castle Farm all had wells and water pumps; there was also one in the pub. This was in the days before piped water came to the village. There was also a well in the village centre and this still exists in the well garden.

As a child, Tom had been given a new coat and he was very sad when he lost it because he had had to wear a sack around his shoulders when going to school to keep the rain off. He had been too scared to tell his parents. However, unbeknown to him, Dai Lloyd had found the coat and given it to Tom's father who had decided not to tell his son in order to teach him a lesson. He did feel a great deal of embarrassment at having to wear the sack and so this ploy certainly worked.

Tom then went on to tell us how, in the 1940s, people were able to earn some extra cash by selling rabbits and he thought that many of these were taken to London. People would catch wild rabbits and bring them to the Morris family at the Post Office for sale. They would be paid 4 shillings per rabbit, which was a very good price. Apart from the potential earnings, catching rabbits meant a reduction in the damage to crops. One morning, Tom caught 63 rabbits at the Hondon, using three ferrets and 100 nets. His Uncle (Charles Nicholls) lived at the Hondon and Tom worked for him, earning £2 per week. At this point, TF said that his Aunt, who worked on the Maesllwch Estate, kept a diary and she had recorded that 1500 rabbits had been caught there in just one day. Tom continued by telling us that Mr Price, who lived at Llanbachowey, was also a rabbit dealer; Tom recalled that he had an artificial leg. Dealers would come up from South Wales to buy the rabbits, and also locally produced eggs. EG said that her Father also used to catch rabbits.

Tom told us that he left school in 1946, when he was 14. As well as working for his uncle, he was also employed by Ivy and Harold Lewis at Lower Pentre. Although he did not earn a great deal, he said that these were happy days and that it was a good way of life.

Tom went on to tell us more about local people. At the crossroads at the top of The Rhiw, there used to be a house called Whitehall (on the opposite side from where the bungalow of the same name is now located). This was divided into two, with Goodwin living on one side and Mrs Roberts on the other. Mrs Roberts was a very smart lady who had once been a dancer and Tom remembered that she used to work as a cleaner in the school. The Jones family from Gatehouse had owned Whitehall and they later sold it to a man who demolished it and made money from selling the stone. The Jones family also owned Llancae. Mr Jones was a carpenter and he had a workshop on the opposite side of the road. Their daughter, Anna, later lived there by herself after her parents died and she was a well-known local character. Tom remembers that there was a ford over the Bachowey before the bridge was built, near Llancae and on the east side of the current bridge.



Photo of the former Llancae kindly supplied by Roy and Avryl Lloyd

Another person Tom remembered who had been in WWI was Mr Jones at Perthy Farm; he had only one arm having lost the other in WW1. After living at Perthy Farm, the Jones family moved to Garth Farm.

Tom went on to tell us how some children from families who could not support them were “adopted” by other families. Ivor Lloyd, the uncle of Ken Lloyd from Lower Lundy, was adopted by Jack Haines. Jack had lost an arm in WW1 and lived at The Fferem. His brother, Jim, who lived at Upper Pengarth, adopted Marge Abberley (married name). Jack and Jim had a sister and she married Mr Bagley and they had a son, Ray (late of Llanbwchlllyn).

At this point, ML showed Tom a photo which Avryl Lloyd had found and asked him if he could recognise the lady. The picture had been taken on "The Square" outside the Old Post Office. Tom said that it was probably Mrs Edith Lloyd of New House; she would frequently sit outside milking her cow.



Photo kindly supplied by Roy and Avryl Lloyd

Tom now lives at Rhydlydan which he bought in 1977. Before this, he used to live in Top of Lane, to the north of The Roundabout. He decided to dig out his fishponds in 1979 and, during the excavations, he found some human bones. Word of these finds soon got around the village and the next day two police cars turned up. The police dug over much of the ground but they did not find any more bones. Then, in the early 1980s, when Tom was widening the road outside Rhydlydan, he found a headless skeleton (about 6ft long) and a skull; these were about 15ft deep and 15ft from the side of the road. The County archaeologists came and took the bones away, but Tom believes that they were not radiocarbon dated and he thinks they were disposed of, having been thought to be of no great significance. No other items were found during this dig, or the one when the ponds were created. However, Tom did say that he had noticed distinct layers in the deposits in the bank as he was widening the road, alternating bands of coarse and fine material. He believed that these might have been laid down in a lake. WO said that it was quite possible that a pro-glacial lake would have existed in the valley at the end of the last Ice Age and that the deposits might be varves formed over many years as material of different sizes was deposited in different seasons. This could only be confirmed by close inspection of the deposits.

ML asked Tom when the Rhiw had been widened. Tom said that he thought that it was the mid - 1980s, after the heavy snows of 1982. The widening had taken place in order to give space either side of the road for the ploughed snow, to maintain sufficient width for vehicles.

Tom was then asked about the origin of Bomb Hole beside the middle road across the Begwns; this is now one of the Begwns ponds. During WW2, there had been an ammunition storage unit at Gwernyfed. Surplus ammunition from this store had been taken to the Begwns post-War in order to be disposed of safely. In the case of Bomb Hole, many munitions had been exploded in one place and this is what had created the large crater, now filled with water. The explosion had caused some

damage to nearby buildings, including as the result of flying debris, for example at The Wern. At the time, Mr Breeze was living there and he had found a very large piece of shrapnel in his yard.

Mr Breeze had bought The Wern from Mrs Pugh. When he was a child, Tom had gone with his father to buy some pigs from the Pughs. Whilst his father went off to look at the animals with Mr Pugh, Tom had been given some refreshment by Mrs Pugh in the form of home-made wine; he was only 9 or 10 at the time and so he was quite inebriated when he left on his pony to go home. When his father eventually returned home, there was no sign of Tom, who was so drunk that he had gone off in the wrong direction. After some searching, he was eventually found over by Pentre Jack, about 4km west of his home.

Tom's younger brother Ted now farms Upper Pentre. This farm had been bought by their father just after WW2. The previous owner had been William Lloyd (of Pendre in Painscastle). Before that, Upper Pentre had been owned by Llewellyn Gore (later of The Bank). Croesfeillog is also still in the family; his brother Arthur is in his 90s and so the farming is now done by his daughter, Heather.

We all thoroughly enjoyed hearing Tom talk about his youth and what had gone on in the village. We found the tales of his childhood pranks particularly amusing. ML thanked him for giving up his evening to come to share his memories with us.

ML ended the meeting by saying that she had arranged a trip to Powys Archives for the morning of Monday, 4th December (arrival at the Archives at 10am). There are only 20 places available and so, if you would like to come, please let her know as soon as possible to ensure that you get a place on this trip. We can discuss travel arrangements at a later date.

The evening ended with our usual refreshments, kindly made by Avryl and Edwina, and the inevitable chat and reminiscences.