

Memories of Cowbridge by Mrs. Elgeva Thomas (from St Hilary)

John Williams the draper (where the Betting Shop is, 91 Eastgate). He was great-uncle to Elgeva and his sister was the grandmother of Selwyn Davies. His father was a William from St Hilary, not 'Williams'. The shop was an emporium of drapery which operated a scheme for people who could not pay (e.g. a Christmas Club). A concert was held in St Hilary to raise funds for this club. John Williams owned cottages on Primrose Hill, now demolished.

His sister-in-law was Mary Williams who kept a baker's shop in 31 High Street where Sanders shoe shop is now. There was the story of Bostock and Wombwell's menagerie parading through the town in about 1850 or 60, and Mary feeding the elephant with a loaf of bread. Ten years' later, when its visit was repeated, the elephant stopped and tried to push its way into the shop (which is currently called 'The Elephant & Bun' delicatessen).

Mrs Timms kept the shop where Annie Webb later moved (Ogmore Vale bakery, 30 High Street).

The Ralls family lived on Primrose Hill where Rodney Bird lives now. They were railway people. The son, Tom Ralls, became clerk to Gaskell and Walker solicitors. He married a Pickard (the grocers). Another son, Jack Ralls, moved to Bitterne, Southampton. Arthur and Percy, the sons of Ernest or Tom, married into the Whone family (sanitary inspector) and Collings family (clockmaker).

Mr Griffiths, the grocer in 45 High Street, had two daughters; one was 'Miss Louisa'. They came in a horse and trap to St Hilary, getting orders to be delivered two weeks later. Every Christmas, Mr Griffiths came himself, and presented each customer with quarter of a pound of Indian tea.

Mr Rousell also delivered tea round the villages, on his bike. He had a trilby hat tied down on his head. His daughter Olive married into the Morgan farmers' family (St Hilary).

Glyn Roberts' delicatessen (40 High Street) – his mother was a Pickard. Before he set up his shop in the early 1960s, there was Campbell's tearoom there – very basic and tiny at the front, before you get to the pillar. Mrs Campbell then divorced her husband and married Glyn Roberts, who set up the first real supermarket there (with baskets). Mrs Campbell's sister lived in Bonvilston.

Railway families lodged at Gigman (where Sylvia Williams lived), whilst building the railway.

Reynolds the fishmonger had a three-wheeled truck delivering stinking fish.

In Church Street, there was Solomon Andrews, the cobbler, on the corner just round from 50 High Street. He was a tiny man, like Rumpelstiltskin. Ryan the saddler, Irish, had the shop where Trustmark is now (25 High Street), next to the Villises. He made anything in leather – saddles, briefcases, horse collars. Alan Thomas (Elgeva's husband) still has one of his briefcases. For a time he lived in a shed in Peterston Super Ely, walking into Cowbridge to work. He had no own water supply, but was always very neatly turned out.

Bill Thomas - thought to have had a draper's shop where Mrs Tilley later went (57 High Street), and also a shop in Llantwit Major.

Llandough Castle – Russian Jews thought to have stayed there. Mr Ebsworth was thought to have been a Russian who changed his name, and that he lost his money in the Bolshevik revolution and the war.

Crossways – Owen Williams the ship owner lived there in the early 20th century. He had a very young wife whom he adored and on whom he lavished all his money. She ran off with an Indian who was staying there. He later dumped her and she ended as a 'down and out' in London. She had a massive collection of shoes in cupboards lined with sandalwood.

The O'Connors of Pentremeyrick – they had a house called Crossroads or Pinklands. Mr O'Connor was a 6ft 6inch Irishman with a long red beard. When he rode his horse his legs touched the ground. He married a relative of Alan's (Elgeva Thomas's husband) from Wolfe House, Llysworney. She was 5 feet tall. They had 14 children (two daughters – one Blanche had triplets). Always hanging round the markets and pubs 'doing deals'. Son Sidney went to Australia to look after sheep. He returned and used to sit in Campbell's tea room in a big hat and cape. The police station in Pentremeyrick was across the road from the O'Connors (Tarr was the policeman).

Interview ca 2000 by Jeff Alden; typed by B Alden 2016